

The role of Hero mythology in computer game illustration, A case study of games God of war and Hellblade: Senua`s sacrifice

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Abstract

Beliefs have always been an integral part of human life and have persisted through artworks and manuscripts across the ages. In the modern era, myths have synchronized with new technologies. The computer game industry, as one of the most popular entertainment industries in the world, reaches a vast global audience. Game developers often incorporate myths and legendary characters, providing players with rich visual and narrative experiences. In this process, game illustrators play a crucial role in creating visual appeal and imaginative compositions for the audience. By adapting mythological elements, a new visual interpretation of ancient traditions emerges in the minds of players. This study seeks to address two primary research questions: What is the relationship between imagery and myth in computer games? Do game illustrators employ mythological visual and literary resources in their creative processes?

Computer games are produced in various genres, and character design depends largely on the type of game. One of the fascinating aspects of video games is that they add a third and even fourth dimension to character depiction—something less commonly seen in illustrated books. The imaginative and visual possibilities of games, such as the creation of multidimensional spaces and diverse textures, grant illustrators greater freedom to interpret concepts and depict volume.

This paper aims to explore the relationship between ancient mythology and its influence on contemporary digital technologies, focusing on the role of myth in computer game imagery. Computer games can be regarded as an interdisciplinary art form that combines visualization with electronic media, attracting massive audiences worldwide. Greek and Norse myths, due to their extensive pantheons and archetypal characters, are particularly suited for adaptation into game narratives. Myth-based computer games can be viewed as comprehensive reinterpretations of mythology within a modern digital framework. The research methodology relies on fieldwork and game analysis, emphasizing the scarcity of Persian-language sources and the novelty of this research topic.

Keywords: illustration, myth, computer games, imagination, God of war and Hellblade: Senua`s sacrifice.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the concept and function of illustration have evolved significantly, extending into fields such as graphic design, advertising, and computer game art. Computer games, emerging as a new form of entertainment since the 1970s, have rapidly expanded to encompass much of the global entertainment and virtual competition market. Games are produced in diverse genres and styles, with character design tailored to each type. A distinctive feature of modern games is the addition of third and fourth dimensions to visual storytelling—a concept rarely encountered in traditional illustration. The capacity for imagination and space creation, enhanced by textures and dynamic environments, enables illustrators to align their technical and artistic abilities with the conceptual essence of the game. Leading game studios that produce highly rated games prioritize not only technical excellence and visual effects but also narrative depth and character development. Popular narratives often center around exploration, adventure, revenge, or the pursuit of supernatural power. Among the most acclaimed productions are those grounded in mythological themes, as myths offer a flexible foundation for narrative and artistic creativity. This study analyzes top-rated games listed on the Video Gamer website, focusing on two exemplary titles from the mythological genre: *God of War* and *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice*.

2. Literature Review

To date, few academic studies in Iran have examined computer games, and most have focused on social skills development, rehabilitation, or the effects of games on children. Rafizadeh, Manavi Rad, and colleagues (2019), in their article “An Analysis of the Role of Avatars in the Interactive Imaginary World in Video Games Using the Theory of Dual Vision,” emphasize the significance of avatars, interactivity, and the player's relationship with the virtual world. Their findings reveal that the success of each

avatar depends on the interaction between artistic style and visual design. Similarly, Jalalzadeh and Doran (2009), in “Decoding Computer Games: Case Studies of the Game Operation 85,” analyzed both explicit and implicit messages, focusing on cultural and ideological representations in the game's narrative. Most prior research has concentrated on narrative structure, interactivity, or pedagogical implications, leaving the relationship between mythological imagery and digital design largely unexplored. The present study fills this gap by analyzing the visual and symbolic dimensions of mythological representation through digital data and spatial examination of selected games.

3. Research Methodology

This research aims to introduce and analyze the imaginary and fantastical dimensions of the hero myth and explore how these elements are represented in computer games. Mythological, historical, and adventure genres have consistently been among the most popular categories in gaming. In earlier decades, gameplay revolved primarily around simple mechanics such as jumping, collecting objects, and defeating enemies. In contrast, contemporary game development places greater emphasis on immersive storytelling, emotional engagement, and narrative continuity. Among thousands of titles produced within these genres, a select few stand out for their extraordinary storytelling, memorable characters, and artistic sophistication. Mythological narratives—rich in gods, heroes, and dark worlds—provide fertile ground for exploring the archetypal journey of the hero, who overcomes trials, defeats demons, and moves from darkness toward enlightenment.

This study focuses on two of the most acclaimed myth-based games, both ranked highly on Video Gamer's 2018 chart: *God of War* and *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice*. *God of War* is an action-adventure series developed

by Sony Interactive Entertainment, comprising eight titles released up to 2018 (four main installments and four spin-offs). Its protagonist, Kratos, rebels against his father, Zeus. Initially portrayed as a vengeful and impulsive warrior, Kratos gradually evolves into a more complex and emotionally nuanced character. The series' strength lies in its reinterpretation of classical mythology, challenging predetermined archetypes. *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice*, developed by the British studio Ninja Theory, is a dark fantasy game rooted in Celtic and Norse mythology. The protagonist, Senua—a Pictish warrior—embarks on a perilous journey to Helheim to rescue her lover's soul from the goddess Hel. Set in the 8th century AD, the game's design integrates elements of Norse cosmology. The pervasive motifs of fire and darkness reflect Senua's psychological struggles and the mythic atmosphere of her quest.

4. Findings

God of War (Versions 1-4)

Version 1 (2005): Minimal texture, reflective surfaces, limited movement angles, basic compositional structures, symmetrical framing, dominant red and purple color palette, and three-way camera perspectives.

Version 2 (2007): Enhanced character and armor design, improved texturing, multidimensional landscapes, gold and transparent effects, surreal spatial design, dynamic viewpoints, and the introduction of mythical creatures.

Version 3 (2008): Complex hybrid monsters, battles with Titans, atmospheric fog, detailed architectural backdrops inspired by Roman design, multiple color schemes, and variable camera perspectives.

Version 4 (2018): Advanced rendering techniques, refined character development, emotional depth, realistic landscapes, open-world design, lifelike lighting, and natural environmental textures such as rocks, foliage, and water.

The transformation across these versions demonstrates significant technical and artistic evolution. The 2018 version, in particular, showcases exceptional attention to detail in armor design, lighting, and emotional realism. The textures of natural landscapes and lifelike animations blur the boundary between virtual and real. *God of War* received a Metacritic score of 99/100, along with numerous awards and international acclaim.

Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice

Key visual features include: Exceptional graphical fidelity and textural realism Fully three-dimensional models with authentic materials Immersive mythological narrative Epic battles and psychological depth Dynamic camera perspectives and spatial design Integration of magic, myth, and symbolic motifs Atmospheric effects such as fog and chiaroscuro lighting Use of the golden ratio in composition

The design team drew inspiration from Viking artifacts in the Roskilde Museum. Their meticulous attention to Norse motifs is evident in details such as hairstyles, sacred trees, and Odin's ravens. Dominant frame colors—purple and brown—shift toward brighter tones only when Senua transcends the underworld. The game's haunting aesthetics reflect the emotional and spiritual weight of Senua's journey.

Critically acclaimed, *Hellblade* holds a Metacritic average score of 96/100. Its illustrators and designers leveraged cutting-edge digital tools to express creativity while maintaining historical and mythological authenticity.

5. Conclusion

Greek and Norse mythologies, with their vast pantheons and dramatic narratives, provide ideal material for interactive storytelling. Game illustrators, far from being mere visual designers, are researchers of mythic symbolism who reinterpret ancient archetypes through digital imagery. Myth-based

games can thus be seen as comprehensive reinterpretations of mythological traditions in a modern medium. Their visuals transcend aesthetic conventions by integrating volumetric design, lighting, and semiotic detail. The meticulous attention to historical and symbolic accuracy, as demonstrated in *God of War* and *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice*, highlights the capacity of digital illustration to blend ancient mythology with contemporary technology. Both games exemplify how mythological storytelling and visual artistry converge to evoke timeless themes of heroism, transformation, and the human struggle between light and darkness.

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Author's Contribution

This research was conducted solely by the author.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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