A Comparative Study of the Underworld: Mythological Human Art in the Game 'Hades' and AI Interpretations

--- Final Report Paper for CLCV115: Mythology of Greece and Rome

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Fig1: *Tartarus*, HADES game(right), AI painting(left)

1. Introduction

In this exploratory study, we delve into the rich tapestry of Greek and Roman mythology as it is reimagined in the contemporary video game 'Hades.' Our focus is the game's digital reconstruction of the Underworld, particularly the Tartarus area and the palace of Hades. Then, we redraw the Underworld, together with the gods and hero, using DALLE-3, a state-of-the-art AI painting software. Through a comparative analysis, we align these digital landscapes with traditional mythological narratives, seeking to unravel the aesthetic nuances and mythological congruencies embedded within this virtual representation.

2. The Underworld in Greek and Roman Mythology

Left: the blood pool, where the Zagreus and other souls 'return'
Right: Hades, God of the Dead in the Game

The Underworld, in ancient Greek and Roman lore, is more than a mere repository for souls post-mortem; it is a complex, multifaceted realm rich with symbolism and hierarchy. At the helm is Hades, the often-misunderstood deity, ruling with stern justice over the shades of the departed. Tartarus, the abyssal pit beneath even Hades' dominion, is reserved for the punishment of the wicked and is contrasted by the *Elysium*, a haven for the heroic and virtuous.

Left: Orpheus, he is trapped in the Palace as a court musician
Right: Achilles, He is the warrior of Hades now, in charge of training the prince Zagreus

The Underworld's geography reflects the Greco-Roman ethos surrounding death, virtue, and retribution. The River Styx forms its boundary, with Charon ferrying souls across its dark waters. Countless immortals reside in it: the Erinyes enacts punishment, and the epic heroes Orpheus and Achilles travel through its depths.

This mythology is much more than a catalog of tales; it reveals the ancients' beliefs about morality, destiny, and the gods. In studying 'Hades,' we're not just looking at myths retold; we're connecting age-old philosophy with modern digital artistry. Our analysis focus on how 'Hades' remains true to the original myths while also making its own artistic mark. We looked closely at the game's depiction of Tartarus and the Palace of Hades, comparing them to their classical descriptions to understand how ancient worldviews are represented in today's media.

Furthermore, we used the modern AI painting tool to demonstrate the crazy, fantastic idea of how Greek mythology is interpreted by artificial intelligence, connecting the past and future digital world.

3. The Game "Hades" and Its Mythological Foundation

"Hades" is not merely a video game; it is a digital canvas where mythology breathes anew in the 21st century.
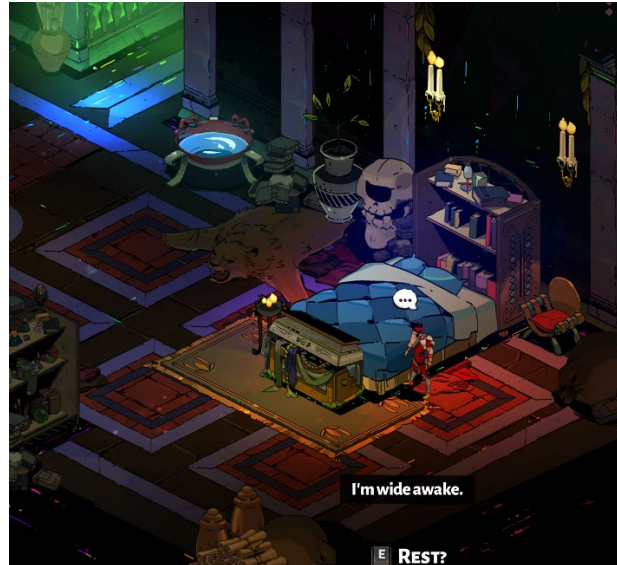
Left: Mirror of Night ; Right: Zagreus's Bedroom, where he never sleeps

"Hades" is a roguelike game from Supergiant Games, creators of Bastion, Transistor, and Pyre. The gamer play as Zagreus, immortal son of Hades, on his quest to escape from the underworld, fighting through many angry lost souls along the way. Death is a mere inconvenience for Zagreus, returning to Hades' palace each time to reflect in the Mirror of Night and try again. Receive Boons from the other gods of Olympus and find treasures to aid in each escape.

The foundation of "Hades" rests on the rich loam of classical mythology, retelling the stories of gods, demigods, and heroes with a modern twist. As players navigate Zagreus through the ever-shifting chambers of the Underworld, they encounter figures straight from the pages of Homer and Hesiod, each character and setting drawn with meticulous attention to mythical detail.

Yet, "Hades" is more than a pastiche of ancient myths; it is a reinterpretation that reflects contemporary sensibilities.

The game's developers have taken creative liberties, fashioning a version of the Underworld that resonates with a modern audience while preserving the thematic essence of its classical antecedents. This blend of old and new allows "Hades" to serve as a unique cultural artifact, a testament to the timelessness of these stories and their capacity to evolve.

(Right: Zagreus, Prince of the Underworld)

The mythical foundation of "Hades" is thus a dual construct: it is anchored in the traditional narratives of gods and heroes, and yet it is buoyant with the creativity and innovation of modern storytelling. As the game unfolds, so too does the tapestry of the Underworld, revealing new facets of ancient deities and providing fresh contexts for age-old tales.

4. AI-Generated Imagery of the Underworld

Methodology

AI-generated imagery, particularly from models like DALL-E 3, is created through a technique process known as *prompt engineering* by providing the AI models with a text prompt that describes in detail of the desired image. The prompt must be carefully crafted to satisfy not only the visual elements but also the thematic and emotional tones required for the image. For example, to generate images of the *Tartarus*, prompts might include descriptors of its dark, hell-like landscape, mythological creatures, and specific prison blocks, balancing specificity with creative openness to allow the AI to generate unique interpretations.
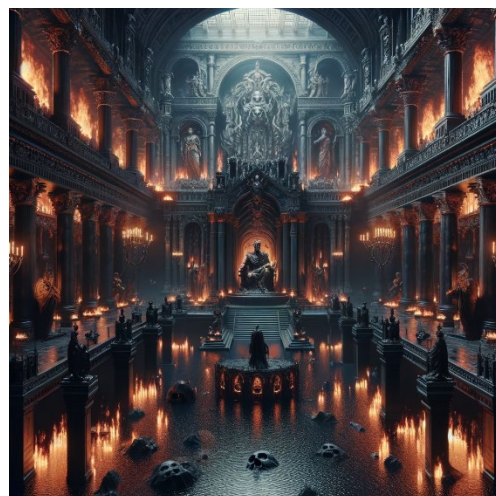

King Tantalus and his AI imagery prompt

The AI then processes this prompt using a vast neural network trained on a diverse dataset of images and associated text captions. It interprets the prompt and generates an image by predicting which pixels, colors, and textures will best represent the described scene.

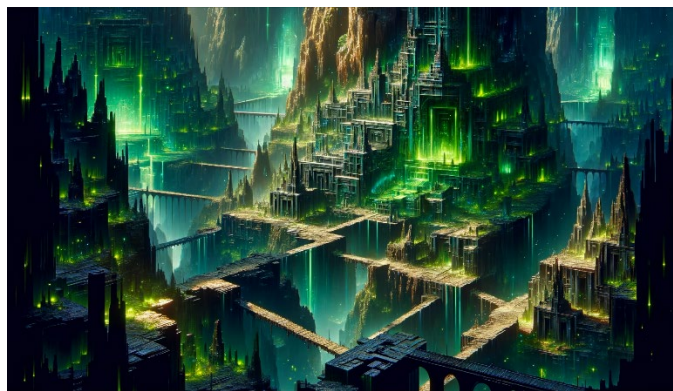*Digital God Hades and his Palace*

Result

Cerberus, the same prompt with very various outcome

Hero Achileos with his spear, AI can produce buggy image like left shows easily.

Tartarus, Dalle3, Inspired by Game 'Hades' (Image as prompt)

Left: Prince Zagreus; Right: Goddess Nyx

Left: King Sisyphus; Right: Warrior Patroclus

The features, themes, and elements in AI-generated images of the Underworld typically show a blend of the familiar and the fantastical. AI interpretations can range from eerily accurate recreations of Tartarus's dark pits and the Palace of Hades to more abstract representations. The themes often revolve around the classical elements of death, afterlife, and divine power but seen through a lens that can sometimes be anachronistic or incongruous, revealing the AI's unique "understanding" of mythology.

Current AI tools like Midjourney, Dalle-3 are impressive, but they are not accurate enough. For instance, the Patroclus should be copper-colored skin, while the AI misunderstood it as a statue. However, besides carefully testing and redesign the prompt, there is no much thing we can do to modify the image. And the tools runs pretty slow, which took 1 minutes to draw a good, complex oil painting. But I believe these drawbacks will be improved soon by future AI models and technique. However, the real artist and audience of image can still be and only be human ourselves. It is me utilizing these tools painting digitally, not AI itself justify the beauty and completeness of painting.

4. Conclusion

Left: Greek hero Orpheus; Right: Eurydice, the oak nymph

Summary

This comparative study has traversed the mythical landscapes of the Underworld as reimagined in the video game 'Hades' and through the lens of AI imagery. Through Greek and Roman mythology, we have explored the Underworld's digital reconstruction in 'Hades,' scrutinizing its visual fidelity to classical texts and its narrative alignment with ancient beliefs. Parallelly, we engaged with AI as an emerging artist, employing DALL-E 3 to recreate these mythological scenes, and in doing so, we witnessed the confluence of technology and human creativity. The AI's interpretations, while sometimes deviating from traditional depictions, offered a new dimension to the mythological narrative, illustrating both the limitations and the potential of artificial intelligence in artistic expression.

Implications:

Our findings underscore the enduring relevance of ancient myths in modern storytelling and art. The game 'Hades' exemplifies the timeless appeal of these narratives, while the AI-generated images reflect the evolving nature of artistic creation. The juxtaposition of human and AI artistry in interpreting mythology provides valuable insights into how technology can augment and, at times, challenge traditional forms of narrative and aesthetic representation. These insights speak to a broader discourse on the role of AI in the creative industries and its impact on cultural heritage and storytelling.

Future Research:

Looking ahead, there are many aspects deserving further research. An in-depth analysis of the narrative structures within 'Hades' could yield richer understandings of how video games function as contemporary myth-bearers. Additionally, as AI technology advances, its capability to interpret and create art that resonates with human emotions and cultural contexts should be closely monitored and studied. Further exploration could also involve the reception of AI art by different audiences, potentially leading to a broader discussion about the definition and ownership of creativity in the age of artificial intelligence. Lastly, the integration of AI into educational tools for teaching mythology could revolutionize how these ancient stories are conveyed to new generations, a topic ripe for academic inquiry.

In closing, our journey through the Underworld—both mythical and digital—reveals that the quest to understand our past and reinterpret it through various mediums is an unending odyssey, one that will continue to evolve as long as humanity seeks to express its cultural narratives.Suggest avenues for further research or study.

Reference

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Appendix

The Underworld whole picture in game 'Hades'.

From down to up: Tartarus, Asphodel, Elysium, Styx, Normal World