

Hamlet and Xiang Yu 哈姆雷特与项羽

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摘要: 中西方文学作品中的文学性都体现了各自民族的特点, 本文以中西方两大著名悲剧——司马迁的《项羽列传》和莎士比亚的《哈姆雷特》为例, 从时代背景、人物性格等方面分析了造成两场悲剧的原因, 并借此对比了两者的相同与不同。

Abstract: The literariness in both Chinese and Western literature reflects the characteristics of their nationalities. Taking the two famous tragedies in China and the West – Sima Qian's The Legend of Xiang Yu and Shakespeare's Hamlet – as examples, this article analyses the causes of the two tragedies in terms of the background of the times and the characters' personalities, and uses them to compare the similarities and differences between them.

关键词: 文学; 哈姆雷特; 项羽; 延宕; 悲剧; 中西对比

Key words: literature; Hamlet; Xiang Yu; delay; tragedy; comparison between the east and west

All literature has its literariness and the characters are inevitably imprinted with that nation. Both Hamlet and Xiang Yu's tragedies belong to themselves, and both Shakespeare and Sima Qian are unique in their portrayals.

Although there are socio-historical reasons for their tragedies, but in general, it seems to be mainly due to their personalities. Hamlet's repeated delays led to him missing numerous opportunities for revenge and the ultimate breakup of his family. Eventually he died with his foe. This is similar with Xiang Yu—an individual hero who also delayed repeatedly at the Hongmen Banquet, missing the perfect time to kill Liu Bang and causing a tragic end in which he slaughtered himself by Wujiang River.

The most striking manifestation of Hamlet's character is undoubtedly his indecisiveness. Goethe said that the tragedy of Hamlet was that a great career was placed in the hands of an incapable man. When his father was murdered, Hamlet was no one but a "happy prince". He gradually recognised the world wasn't the same as what he thought when he studied in German, especially the filthy enemy he once trusted. However, with millions of reasons to kill his uncle, Hamlet still hesitated when coming across Claudius praying alone. In addition, his deferment also led to his passivity in revenge. In Hamlet's monologue, a plan of revenge is enacted as painful and tangled thought. It was this contradiction between ideal and reality that caused the delay in his journey to revenge. Meanwhile, he realised that his overly sacred religious thinking about life and death would stand in the way of his grand plans, and was disturbed by his own delay. "To be or not to be", he asked this very question as a fundamental proposition of philosophy. For what had just happened to him

had provoked him to think about the philosophy of life, that he would not have considered when things were going well in his life, when he saw only the bright side of life. But now the sudden tragedy forced him to confront the dark side of life and human nature. In the prime of his life, Hamlet, burdened with a heavy mission of revenge and filled with hatred, was plunged into an abyss of unrelenting misery.

Xiang Yu's character was multi-faceted and full of contradictions. Even though he was resourceful and courageous, he was dwarfed compared with Liu Bang, who had profound wisdom. Firstly, he carelessly exposed his informant. Secondly, at the banquet, he was so arrogant and gullible that he disregarded the suggestion of his advisers and was too womanly to decide to kill his enemy, thus sowing the seeds of his own destroying. But unlike Hamlet, the tragedy of Xiang Yu comes not only from his useless mercy, but his conceit as the Chu Overlord. Rather than slaughtering himself, Xiang Yu had a chance to stay alive and return in fully preparation. Normally, people would go for a second chance, whereas Xiang Yu, the so-called Overlord couldn't afford the insult and jeer from the crowd. This is the biggest difference between Hamlet's and Xiang Yu's tragedy.

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