

On the Influence of Greek Mythology on British and American Literature

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Abstract: Greek civilization is the main source of European and American civilization, and Greek mythology has important influences on British and American culture. It is the highest spiritual achievement of ancient Greeks, showing their thinking activities and cognitive patterns. Greek mythology provides materials for literary creators around the world and serves as an important cornerstone and source of the development of Western culture. This article focuses on the profound influence of the Greek mythology story on British and American culture, hoping to inspire readers.

1. Introduction

Greek mythology expresses the thinking activities and daily life styles of ancient Greeks in a profound way, reflecting the rich content of ancient marine civilization and humanism. The narrative of Greek mythology belongs to a literary form that serves as the main source of Western culture and has a huge impact on the development of British and American culture after the Renaissance. Therefore, it is of positive practical significance to explore the influence of Greek mythology narrative on the development of British and American culture.

2. Ancient Greek Mythology

Greek mythology occupies an important place in the mythological system of Western Europe. It is the main spiritual representative of the primitive clan in Europe, depicting the most primitive cultural image of Europeans. In the eighth century BC, with its widespread dissemination among the aborigines, Greek mythology integrated mythological content from other countries during its development, leading to the growth of its dissemination scale. In the literary works represented by "Homer's Epics", Greek mythology has been passed down more comprehensively and more persistently. Moreover, this kind of works will continue to be passed down in future poetry and drama works, and it has also left a deep mark in the development of the times.

"Iliad" and "Odyssey" mainly focus on the struggle between the Greeks and the Trojans and what would happen if the Greeks returned to their hometowns after the war. In the process of portraying and shaping the heroes, these novels break through the ancient Greek system of systematic theology and especially highlight the scenes and processes of heroes sparing no effort to fight divine power, thus fully reflecting the paleness and insignificance of people when they facing divine power at that time. In Greek mythology, gods have always been superior to humans, but at the same time, they have the same image and spiritual core as humans and also possess human emotions and desires. With the participation of theocracy, the spiritual connotation of mythological stories is even more attractive, because it directly reveals the spiritual world of the Greeks at that time -- it reflects the humanistic thoughts of the creator at that time while affirming the effects of divine power. This coincides with the essence of ancient Greek civilization, namely, expressing human thinking with stories.

3. The Literary Characteristics of Greek Mythology

The development of British and American literary works is also related to Greek mythology, with prominent cultural characteristics. And it is hard for later generations to imitate the rich story lines and peculiar writing methods applied in Greek mythology. Marx affirmed the positive influence of

Greek mythology on cultural development. According to his viewpoints, on the one hand, Greek mythology is a treasure of ancient Greek art; on the other hand, it not only lays a solid foundation for the development of ancient Greek art and enriches the rich cultural imagination of the people at that time, but also provides subjects for the creation of modern art works.

3.1 Unique Artistic Expression Technique

In the creation of Greek mythology, romanticism has a wide range of influence, which is basically reflected in various Greek mythology allegories. For example, in the Olympus mythology, every god has his own distinctive personal characteristics, which are also possessed by ordinary people. Like human beings, gods also have feelings, emotions and basic needs and desires. What's more, they also show various attitudes to humans, such as hatred, resentment, kindness, or friendship. Although gods yearn for world peace, they fight for power relentlessly. The above-mentioned characteristics all show the background and people's lives in the ancient society, as well as the natural environment at that time.

Romanticism and exaggeration are used in the process of depicting gods. All images of gods have the same characteristics as humans, but their appearance is also different from that of humans. For examples, Zeus is a cruel king, Prometheus is a hero who resists tyranny, and Athena is a beautiful and intelligent woman. In the Greek culture, gods are very close to humans in spirit, although they are different in terms of beliefs. And the main difference between the gods in Buddhism and those in Greek mythology is that the former ones have got rid of the secular existence, while the latter ones have merged with the secular life.

3.2 Philosophical Storylines

The plot described in Greek mythology contains profound life philosophy. Among them, the combination of gods and humans is the most common plot, reflecting the creation of gods, the emergence and development of mankind, and the emotional activities of mankind, thereby producing rich content. Mythology reflects the tolerance, integrity, and kindness of people in real life, while at the same time are full of hatred and violence. Moreover, the love stories in the mythology do not all go smoothly, sometimes tainted with blood and intrigue. The stories in Greek mythology also reflect gods' change of emotions. On the one hand, readers can enjoy vivid stories, and on the other hand, they can feel the truth of individuals and life which is hidden in the twists and turns of the plots. In the Greek mythology, romantic elements are used to express people's pursuit of nature and harmony, highlighting their yearning for truth, goodness and beauty.

3.3 Harmonious and Unified Artistic Features

The Greeks have been deeply influenced by Greek aesthetics for a long time. For the Greeks, beauty is not only an external aesthetic pursuit but also inner thought image of individuals. The ancient Greeks had fully internalized their requirements for beauty, and even formed a normalized aesthetic habit. Therefore, Greek mythology has had huge impacts on the Greeks and people all over the world. Greek aesthetics is derived not only from the persistent pursuit of beauty in Greek mythology, but also from people's strong desire and pursuit of a better life. Greek mythological literature contains noble moral thoughts and contempt for secular life. The stories are not only full of material satisfaction and mental poverty, but also skinny reality and illusory beauty. Greek mythology not only expresses the sin, tyranny and chaos of the gods, but also describe the flexibility, beauty and wonder of nature. Ancient Greeks tried to pursue freedom, justice, and democracy in turbulent times. It was these emotions that drove them to discover and create beauty. The Greeks believed that all "carved" gods were beautiful and had unique images, and that comparing people in the real world with the gods in the virtual world was to respect and affirm human beings. Today, Greek mythology has also become a precious world cultural heritage.

4. The Influence Stages of Greek Mythology on British and American Literature

During the Renaissance, the influence of Greek mythology on British and American culture can

be divided into two stages.

The first stage is the Renaissance era. At this stage, a large number of written records about Greek civilization became the focus of European scholars. They re-investigated ancient Greek culture, in order to gain an in-depth understanding of its ancient history and culture, but also for better literary creation. The focus at this stage was that Greek mythology promoted the humanistic spirit, affirmed people's innate abilities, and praised people's innovative and enterprising spirit in their lives. The Greek mythology stories during this period had profound impacts on British and American culture. Some classic characters from Greek mythology stories provide valuable writing materials for British and American literary creation. The typical deeds in Greek mythological stories can also fully reflect an era, including the corresponding changes in people's lives and values. In the Renaissance era, the rewriting of mythological stories in Europe is tainted with a humanistic touch, and the representatives included Shakespeare, Dunn, Milton, etc. From their novels, people can clearly feel the affirmation of personality and human value, the praise of people's emotional experience and rational thinking, and the catharsis of personal feelings.

The second stage focused on the influence of ancient Greek mythology stories on British and American society and culture after the Renaissance. The middle of the seventeenth century witnessed the rise of Neoclassicism, which lasted until the eighteenth century. Neoclassical literature emphasized rationality rather than perceptuality in the process of creation. In the late nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution brought great material gains to mankind, and economic prosperity also intensified social conflicts. At this stage, the British and American literary circles entered the era of critical realism. In the twentieth century, as the creative focus of British and American literature gradually shifted to people's inner world, some elements of traditional philosophical rationality gradually disappeared. Taking Thomas Stearns Eliot, the representative of British modernist poetry, for example, his poetry "The Waste Land" achieves high accomplishment in literature and art. It realizes the mutual conversion between legend and reality through clever nesting. Moreover, he creatively innovated the form of poetry by cleverly applying the means of interlacing the ancient and modern, thus enriching the content of the poetry. It also puts forward an ingenious technique for the creation of English and American culture to find the tacit understanding between mythology and the real world, thus creating more metaphorical meaning.

5. The Influence of Greek Mythology on British and American Literature

As the source and cradle of Western civilization, ancient Greek civilization has exerted great impact on its language forms, lifestyles, and methods of thinking. Ancient Greek civilization itself originated from Greek mythology. Therefore, Greek mythology has always been a content that cannot be ignored in the development of the history of Western Europe, and it also has very significant influences on the vigorous development of British and American history and culture.

5.1 Promoting the Development of British and American Literature

Greek mythology promotes the formation and development of British and American culture. The works of historian Homer and writer Simonides are all derived from Greek mythology. During its development, Greek theologians and artists also deeply influenced the cultural characteristics and literary styles of British and American countries. Most of the British writers who appeared after the Renaissance created their works based on Greek mythology. For example, "La Divina Commedia" by Dante Alighieri had significant influences on post-Renaissance literature. The characters in "La Divina Commedia" borrowed the description of gods in Greek mythology in terms of the thought development and emotional change process, mixed with the author's reflection and discussion of the social development. Many modern British and American writers also use the depiction and description of those stories for reference in their works. Both Marx and Engels spoke highly of Greek mythology. Marx held that Greek mythology is the most beautiful childhood poem, and it also profoundly influenced Engels' literary creation.

5.2 Bringing Forth the Unique Thinking and Writing Methods of British and American

Writers

There are fairy characters in Greek mythology who are heroic, self-disciplined, and selfless, but the true aesthetic value of it lies in their different personalities and strong literary characteristics. In *The Creation of Greek Culture*, the writer focused on characters and humanistic images, and the distinctive character portrayal also formed the main thinking methods and writing concepts for the later British and American literature creation. In addition, the deeds of gods and heroes in written historical materials also express the philosophy of life, which has very important educational significance for future generations. At the same time, the writing characteristics of Greek mythology also helped British and American literary creators develop their own writing styles, thereby affecting the artistic characteristics of British and American literature.

In British and American literature, many authors created distinctive and unique artistic images similar to Greek mythology in their works. In modern and contemporary British and American literature, many novels not only highlight the brilliance of human nature, but are also full of philosophical ideas and concepts. They pay more attention to the full integration of personal perceptual experience and rational thinking, and emphasize the free expression of human emotions, which are also affected by the characteristics of Greek mythology. In the British and American literature, writers often emphasize the shining points of human beings, expressing people's sincere emotions as well as rational and profound thinking, which is also the main writing feature of Greek mythology.

5.3 Providing Materials for the Creation of British and American Literature

Many figures in Greek mythology express various political ideas, and the richness of these ideas is the main factor affecting its spread among future generations. Greek mythology expresses the ancient Greeks' understanding of themselves and their vision for the future. It also attempts to explain how the world works, such as the creation of heaven and earth, the birth of Greek gods, the origin of people, and the operating mechanism of the sun, moon, and stars, etc. In addition, some Greek legends also include the genealogy of the gods and their reflections on historical events. At the same time, mythology also gives a more detailed description of the legends of heroes, illustrating people's deep reflection on historical events at that time and their reasonable expectations for future changes in the world. After the European Renaissance, British and American literature was particularly influenced by Greek mythology. Many writers introduced and deployed Greek mythology stories in their novels, and many poets also brought Greek mythology into their literary creation. A lot of famous poets and dramatists such as Shakespeare, Shelley, and Keats all regarded Greek mythology as the basis and premise of their literary creation. Shelley also expressed strong romantic colors in many of his works ("Apollo", "Adonais", etc.). Keats's classic works, such as "Ode to the Nightingale" and "Ode to Psyche", are also based on Greek mythology.

5.4 The Influence of the Humanistic Spirit in Ancient Greek Mythology on British and American Literature

In primitive times, many natural phenomena could not be reasonably interpreted. People then could touch their inner world, but could not reasonably interpret the outer world based on their own experience. Therefore, the ancient Greeks imagined various myths and legends to rationalize natural phenomena, which was also the original intention of creating gods. The relationship between gods and human beings was homogeneous, and the eternal life of gods was also what people desire. The ancient Greeks were very good at expressing themselves with the help of gods' stories. Gods are free, unconstrained, happy, powerful, and totally unlike humans. In those stories, there are many human heroes who can fight against the gods, and the description of them is also subjective to some extent. The simple "humanistic thoughts" expressed by this also has great influences on British and American studies, among which the shaping of gods is centered on the individual and has distinctive characteristics. Later, these "humanistic thoughts" gradually evolves into the core of Western aesthetics and historical literature, providing a large amount of material for later literary creation. All artistic works in the Renaissance era have the features of humanism. At that time,

human personality and value were fully interpreted and affirmed, and individual emotions and rational thinking were also highly regarded.

5.5 Generating Millions of Outstanding British and American Writers

The profound influence of Greek mythology on British and American culture is also reflected in the birth of a large number of outstanding British and American literary giants. After the European Renaissance, the role played by Greek mythology in the cultural field became increasingly strong, even indestructible. And poets and writers in increasing numbers, such as Shakespeare, Shelley, Pound, etc., also began to make artistic creations by taking examples from Greek mythology, adding fuel to the booming literary creation at that time. These literary masters were all inspired and influenced by Greek mythology.

6. Conclusion

Greek mythology has always been the researching focus of British and American literature. Characters in Greek mythology frequently appear in British and American literature, greatly enriching its subject and connotation, and bringing a wider range of writing inspiration to it. An excellent work of British and American literature often creates varying degrees of literary obstacles for non-English major readers because of its rich plot content, superb writing skills and profound ideological connotation. Therefore, for foreign readers, only when they have a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of Greek mythology and Greek literature can they be able to understand the spiritual core of foreign literary creation correctly and resonate with writers spiritually.

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