

“Metamorphosis” of The Miser

A Brief Analysis on the Richness Development of the Play "The Miser" for "The Pot of Gold"

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Abstract—Moliere is the representative playwright of the famous French classic comedy in the 17th century. His work “The Miser” is a classic that cannot be surpassed in the history of drama. “The Miser” is based on the comedy “The Pot of Gold” by the ancient Roman dramatist Plautus. The common protagonist “The Miser” and their stories are constantly developing under Moliere's pen and realizing “Metamorphosis”. This article analyzes the richness development of Moliere's “The Miser” for Plautus’ “The Pot of Gold” in the three aspects of plot setting, character image and social background.

Keywords—“The Miser”; “The Pot of Gold”; miser

I. INTRODUCTION

The famous comedy “The Miser” wrote by the famous French playwright Moliere is a classic of comedy works in the history of drama. “The Miser” has truly fulfilled the responsibility of the comedy “presenting the shortcomings of the people in this century” by shaping the classic miser image Harpagon, and played the role of “change existing habits and customs” pursued by his whole life. Moliere’s “The Miser” is based on the comedy work “The Pot of Gold” wrote by the ancient Roman dramatist Plautus, but he made processing and development on the basis of the ancient Roman “The Pot of Gold”. The image of miser and the plot of the story have undergone a “Metamorphosis”. The different social backgrounds of Moliere's “The Miser” and Plautus’ “The Pot of Gold” have a huge impact on the structure of the script.

This article will analyze the richness development of “The miser” for “The Pot of Gold” through the three aspects such as fullness of the characters, the perfection of the plot and the highlight of the social background.

II. FULLNESS OF THE CHARACTER IMAGE

The most important role in Moliere's “The Miser” is undoubtedly the Harpagon which has become synonymous with miser in French today. The character of Harpagon is actually based on the actor Euclio in Plautus’ “The Pot of Gold”, but his character and rhetoric have both undergone “Metamorphosis” and development.

First of all, miser this core character is deepened. Euclio and Harpagon are both characters with miser as the core character. However, in “The Miser”, Moliere has further

exaggerated this feature of Harpagon, especially expressed the miser nature of Harpagon through his personal language and behavior, so that everyone can feel his extreme misery every minute when Harpagon was on the stage.

In the opening of the ancient Roman drama “The Pot of Gold”, Plautus set up a role of Household deity to tell the audience the background of the story. The gold that Euclio discovered was actually hidden by his misery grandfather who had very similar personality with him. It seems that the following series of plots which he insisted to marry his daughter to the rich but old Megadorus, and brought nothing for his daughter’s wedding, the most prominent features for Euclio this figure is the care and greed of the wealth represented by “The Pot of Gold”, and the display of the suspicion caused by “The Pot of Gold”. Although he also satisfied some of the characteristics of jealousy, it is obvious that he cannot be synonymous with his character, and his main status has not been well highlighted.

In the dictionary, misery generally refers to the meaning of stingy, and its synonym is stingy, cold and alone. In his “The Miser”, Moliere through a series of characterizations of Harpagon, it can be said to embody the word “misery” in every aspect. In the first appearance of Harpagon, compared with the Euclio’s dialogue design in “The Pot of Gold”, it was greatly upgraded and “transformed”. In “The Pot of Gold”, a line that highlights the characteristics of Euclio is like this:

Euclio (narrator) let the old git to mutter himself. (To Staphyla) Hey, bastard, I really want to dig up your eyes so that you can no longer peek at what I am doing. You go away, go, move forward, forward — right. Just stand there. Be careful, as long as you dare to move one step from where you are now, even if you only move one finger, just move a nail tip, or if you look back without my permission, I will let you taste the cross. (Narrator) I have never seen a woman who is worse than this woman. I am not at ease with her, don't let her test me with words when I am not prepared, I can't let her see where the gold is buried. This bad woman has eyes even on the back of her head. Now I am going to see if the gold is still there. It really makes me feel uneasy. (Enter the house)

It can be seen that most of the content that can better highlight the character image is expressed in narrator, and the

character of Euclio's personality is also characterized by harshness, sensitivity and suspiciousness.

In Moliere's "The Miser", he reworked a paragraph of lines like this:

Harpagon What are you muttering in your mouth?

La Familiaris Why are you taking me out?

Harpagon Damn things, how dare of you to ask me why! Get out quickly, or I will beat you up.

La Familiaris How do I offend you?

Harpagon Don't ask, I just want you to get out.

La Familiaris My master, your son, told me to wait for him.

Harpagon Get down to the street and waiting, you are not allowed to stand in my house like a wooden pile, you noticed everything and profited everything from it. I don't want to have a spy, a mole in the front of my eyes to watch my action; a pair of bad eyes staring at my every move, looking straight into my property, searching every corners to see if there is anything to be stolen.

Compare these two paragraphs with almost identical lines we can clearly reveal the difference between the two. Although Harpagon is as harsh and mean as ever, his lines are not only suspicious, but also add a lot of misery elements. The use of words such as "family property", "profiting" and "stealing" has strengthened the color of gold worshipping, change the narration into the line of a figure has become more vivid, and also made Harpagon's "miser" image more vivid, the characteristics of "misery" are more prominent.

Second, the character is more diverse. In the character list of "The Pot of Gold", the identity of Euclio is only an old man; he appeared only with the image of the father of his daughter during the development of the plot. He arranged a marriage which earn without loss for his daughter seems also a consideration of a misery father. In "The Pot of Gold", there is no emotional line related to him at all, it can't see that he has a character other than greed, suspiciousness and misery as mentioned above, the image is relatively thin. The introduction of Harpagon in the character list of "The Miser" is "The father of Cleante and Elise, who loves Mariane". From the introduction of the characters, we can see that the image of the miser Harpagon has been "transformed" more diverse. Moliere added a lot of lines to him, and even added the absurd plot of falling in love with the same beauty with his son. In addition, Harpagon is an extremely conceited person; he often stands on the commanding height of morality and publishes his "true saying" based on his ambiguity. He said such things like "Master Simon, when we can help others, we should help, it is what we good people should do" after he set up a very harsh contract. In "The Miser", Harpagon is more than just an old man; he is also the father who has her daughter married to the old rich Sir. Anselme for his money, and let his son married a widow he never met before. He is not just a father, he is also a man who loves the beautiful woman and competes a girl with his son, and he evaluates young people like "To tell the truth, if I am a woman, I don't like young man. Listen to their female

voices and see their three short cat beards that are cocked like a cockroach, their wigs made of numbness, their draped lantern shorts, and their bulging chest!" However, when the beauty and the money are contending, the winner is of course money, because after all, Harpagon is a completely miser who only care about "where is the money?"

From the deepening of misery this core character and the diversification of character, it is clear to see the "Metamorphosis" and development of Moliere's "The Miser" on Plautus's "The Pot of Gold" in the portrayal of characters, the characters in the "The Miser" represented by Harpagon are more full and with more flesh and blood.

III. THE PERFECTION OF PLOT SETTING

The story told by Plautus's "The Pot of Gold" is very simple. In fact, the old man Euclio inadvertently discovered a pot of gold, He defended the gold every day, but the gold was stolen after all. Finally, it was stolen by Lyconides' slave Strobilus, after Euclio recovered the gold; he agreed to take the gold as the dowry and married his daughter to Lyconides, the story ended in a festive wedding scene. From this story, we can clearly see that the plot of the whole script is actually written around the "The pot of Gold", the most important content is the process of the gold from discovery to protection to loss and then the recovery. It can be said that without this pot of gold, there is no such story. Plautus strengthens the comedy effect through exaggeration, misunderstanding, coincidence and other means to achieve the organizational structure of the plot.

Moliere is obviously not satisfied with completing a drama around "The pot of gold", he re-selected the narrative focus, took the miser Harpagon as the center of all plots, just as the difference between their drama titles, it changed from "The Pot of Gold" to "The Miser". This conception mode has greatly broadened the time, space and range of characters in the drama. The main plot also changed into that Harpagon buried 10,000 gold coins in the garden because he always worried others stole his wealthy. He wanted to marry Mariane, the lover of his son Cleante, but the gold in the garden was stolen. Cleante promised he would find the gold as long as his father agreed him to marry Mariane. Harpagon agreed this proposal, finally it was found that Cleante's servant La Fleche, and Cleante married with Marianne. It can be seen that the miser Harpagon was not only the line that connect the story, and was also the pearl of the line. The pot of gold that he hid in the garden is at best a fuse or a catalyst, adding some burdens and jokes to the plot, but the miser Harpagon is the most important part of the plot.

Besides to the "The Pot of Gold" which is similar with Plautus' "The Pot of Gold", Moliere also carried out a lot of "Metamorphosis" and innovation to the plot of "The Pot of Gold". Different with "The Pot of Gold" only has several major characters including Euclio, Euclio's neighbor Megadorus, Megadorus' sister Eunomia's son Lyconides, Euclio's daughter Phaedria and Lyconides' slavery Strobilus, in order to cope with the rich plot, Moliere reorganized the original character in "The Miser" and added several important character. In "The Miser", Harpagon has a son and a daughter, Harpagon's household Valere has been in love secretly with

Elise, the daughter of Harpagon, many years ago. The ideal husband that Harpagon choose for his daughter is Sir. Anselme, but Sir. Anselme is the father of Mariane who was admired by both Valere, Harpagon and his son but lost in touch for many years. The reason for the loss can be traced back to a shipwreck 16 years ago, the Anselme family separated from each other at that shipwreck. Sir. Anselme thought that his wife had died in that shipwreck so he emerged the idea to marry another wife, thus related to the Harpagon family, and finally got a family reunion. From the above complex and closely related characters, we can see the skill of the comedy master Moliere, he stretched the story of "The Pot of Gold" which spans less than a year, into sixteen years. Also he hid many foreshadowing to link with each other; this kind of plot control is really amazing.

In addition, while Moliere developed the "Metamorphosis" of "The Pot of Gold", he also inherited the delicate application of Plautus on coincidence and discovery. This is especially prominent in this episode of "The Miser":

La Fleche (to Cleante): What is going on? Our Master Simon is talking to your father there.

Cleante: Is anyone telling him who I am? You also sold me out?

Simon: Ah! Ah! (To Cleante and La Fleche) You are really anxious! Who told you to meet here? (To Harpagon), Sir, I did not tell them your name and address; but in my opinion, this does not have much harm. They are not the persons who talk too much, you can discuss it together here.

Harpagon: What happened?

Simon: This gentleman is the one I told you to borrow the 15,000 francs from you.

Harpagon: What? You damn thing! It is you who are willing to take this evil road.

Cleante: Father! It's you who do this shameful thing.

[Master Simon escaped].

Harpagon: Is it you who borrow this illegal debt to destroy your family?

Cleante: Is it you who want to use this sinful loan shark make a fortune?

Harpagon: How dare you to still stand in front of me after you have done this thing?

Cleante: How could you have the gut to see anyone after you have done this?

Similar to the "discovery" plot in the drama, it greatly enhances the tension of the drama, making Moliere's "The Miser" more successful in the development of "Metamorphosis" on the plot of Plautus's "The Pot of Gold", compared with "The Pot of Gold", the plot setting is more perfect.

IV. THE SOCIAL BACKGROUND IS HIGHLIGHTED

From the 5th century BC to the beginning of the 3rd century, the struggle between civilians and nobles came to an end. The Italian peninsula was basically unified, and ancient Rome entered the Republican period. Plautus was the first comedy writer in Rome to have a complete work, who happened to live at the Roman Republic period which enacted the Law of Twelve Tables. During this period, the economy developed rapidly, and the Roman law also paid great attention to the protection of private property. In the ancient Roman period, the image of "Pappus" (stingy and lustful old man) in the "Sitola Opera" is very similar to Euclio in "The Pot of Gold", showing the characteristics of the era when the private ownership was just established.

The 17th century drama master Moliere lived during the reign of Louis XIV of French Bourbon Dynasty. Louis XIV strengthened the feudal centralization, vigorously weakened the power of local aristocracy, and economically promoted the development of capitalist industry and commerce. At the same time, the core idea is the Enlightenment Movement of "rational worship", which also began in the 17th century. This Movement strongly criticized feudal autocracy, religious ignorance and privilege, promoted the ideas of freedom, democracy and equality, prepared for the European bourgeois revolution and publicity. Under the historical and spatial space which the bourgeoisie has been growing and capitalist ideology has been developing, the image of Harpagon created by Moliere in "The Miser" also has bourgeois color.

In the "The Pot of Gold", Euclio is only an old man who lived in ancient Roman slave society, accidentally discover huge wealth, so he can't eat at day, can't sleep at night, only care about his pot of gold, such a simple image, the influence of society background is mostly the ideological transformation of family concept and private ownership under slavery. The Harpagon in "The Miser" is an image of capitalist who makes money with loan sharks. For Moliere, who "takes the subject from real life," the social background brand of him is deeply imprinted.

La Fleche (continued to read the contract) "The money lender wants to have no burden on the conscience, so he is willing to take only five percent of interest to lend his money."

Cleante: More than five percent? Really! This is fair and reasonable, and there is nothing to complain about.

La Fleche: This is true. (Continue to read the contract) "But since the money lender does not have this payment at hand, in order to satisfy the request of the borrower, it must be borrowed from other person and borrowed with two percent of interest. Therefore, the interest should be borne by the borrower and must not be affected other matters, because the money is purely borrowed to help the borrowers."

Cleante: Bloody hell! Where did you find this Jew, Arab! This is higher than 20 percent of interest.

At this time, Harpagon has become an "upgraded version" of Shakespeare's classic sinister image of Sherlock. The atmosphere of his time is straightforward and reflects the times.

Compared with Plautus' "The Pot of Gold" in ancient Rome, Moliere spent a lot of ink in "The Miser", reflecting the style and social background of the 17th century in France from the positive and side angles. It can be said as the "Metamorphosis" and development of "The Pot of Gold".

V. CONCLUSION

Throughout the three aspects of plot setting, character image and social background, the "The Miser" based on the comedy "The Pot of Gold" by the ancient Roman dramatist Plautus has been continuously developed under Moliere's writing and achieved "Metamorphosis". His superb artistic technique has made "The Miser", which has revived the "The Pot of Gold" of the Roman period; he devoted him to the richness of the drama, giving it a different artistic charm.

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