

## The Study of Allusion and Its Translation in Shakespeare's Play

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### Abstract

The study of allusions and tropes is an important aspect of Shakespearean rhetoric. Research on allusions and tropes is of great significance for the translation of Shakespeare's plays. By combining the current status and achievements of domestic and foreign research on allusions and tropes, this paper analyzes the allusions in two major tragedies by Shakespeare, "Hamlet" and "King Lear," and conducts a comparative study with translations by four major translators.

**Key words:** Allusion; Shakespeare's play; *Hamlet*; *King Lear*

### Introduction

Abroad, there has been abundant research on Shakespearean rhetoric. Since the 20th century, numerous scholars such as Sister Miriam Joseph (1962), Karl F. Thompson (1971), A. Robin Bowers (1981), Trousdale & Marion (1982), Desmet & Christy (1992), and Marjorie Donker (1992) have conducted research on Shakespearean rhetoric from various perspectives. Allusions themselves are deeply cultural and represent a comprehensive embodiment of human cultural development and inheritance. As a type of rhetorical trope, their study has garnered significant attention. Between the 1960s and 1970s, there were as many as ten foreign works on the study of allusions, including *Dramatic Uses of Biblical Allusions in Marlowe and Shakespeare*, jointly authored by Sims & James H (1966), *Hidden allusions in Shakespeare's plays: a study of the early court revels and personalities of the times* compiled by Ruth Loyd Miller (1974), and *Shakespeare Allusion Books, 1592-1598*, among others. These are crucial resources for Shakespearean scholars and hold great significance in understanding and appreciating Shakespeare's works.

In China, discussions on allusion rhetoric have also received considerable attention. Authors such as Chen Wangdao (2008), Li Yadang and Li Dingkun (2005), Li Shude (2006), and Xu Peng (2001) have dedicated chapters in their works to introduce the concept of allusions, but there are few studies that combine Shakespearean drama with allusion rhetoric. From the literature listed in Meng Xianqiang's (1994) "A Brief History of Chinese Shakespearean Studies," Guo Fuhao (1964) explored the connections between Shakespeare and Greco-Latin literature, Wu Defeng (1981) compared Shakespeare with ancient Chinese legends, and Li Weitong (1990) discussed the relationship between "Hamlet" and the Bible. Therefore, strengthening the study of allusion rhetoric in Shakespearean drama is even more important. Additionally, the close relationship between allusions and culture, history not only helps in understanding British culture but also proves beneficial for English translation.

This paper will mainly focus on Shakespearean tragedies "Hamlet" and "King Lear," categorizing the allusions, exploring different types of allusions, and then contrasting the approaches of four major translators in handling allusions, thereby uncovering the role of allusion rhetoric in translation.

### Theoretical Framework

Li Jihong (1952) believes that allusions "essentially refer to the use of allusive words drawn from myths, fairy tales, legends, fables, and literary masterpieces in oral or written expressions, integrating them with one's own narrative or argument to demonstrate authority and authenticity, making the expression concise, condensed, incisive, and vivid, thus enhancing persuasiveness and emotional appeal." From this definition, we can see that the use of allusive words is a hallmark characteristic of allusions. However, does the mere use of allusive words constitute an allusion? The answer is negative. According to Li Yadang's "A Study of Comparative Rhetoric Between English and Chinese," allusions can be divided into two main types based on their form: explicit allusions and implicit allusions. Explicit allusions, also known as explicit references, are similar to explicit references in Chinese. They may directly quote or paraphrase the original text, either with quotation marks or without, but they clearly indicate the source and origin of the reference within the text. The purpose of explicit allusions is primarily to enhance the authority and persuasiveness of the text or speech. Implicit allusions, also known as implicit references, are similar to implicit references in Chinese. They do not specify the source of the reference and often integrate the gist, keywords, or phrases into the author's or speaker's own discourse. While complete sentences may be quoted, implicit allusions typically involve short, concise sentences that may or may not be enclosed in quotation marks. This type of referencing is much more common in English than explicit allusions. The English term "allusion" is very similar to the Chinese concept of "引用" (yǐn yòng). In Chen Wangdao's "Introduction to Rhetoric," he discusses the insertion of idioms or stories into a text, which he refers to as "引用辞" (yǐn yòng cí). Quoting stories or idioms can be done in two ways: first, by explicitly stating the origin of the story or idiom, which is akin to explicit allusions; second, by incorporating the story or idiom into one's own text without specifying its origin, which is akin to implicit allusions. The relationship between these two types of referencing is similar to that between explicit and implicit metaphors: one explicitly indicates which part is the quoted language, while the other uses the quoted language to represent the original text. Both types can be further categorized into abbreviated meaning and dual meaning. From this, we can understand that allusions are not limited to the appearance of allusive words; their significance is much broader.

Due to the numerous allusions in Shakespearean plays, they can be categorized. In "Hamlet" and "King Lear," after careful analysis, the types of allusions can be classified according to their sources: (1) Biblical and Greco-Roman mythological stories, (2) proverbs, (3) literary works, and (4) historical events and figures. Classic examples can be selected from these categories, and a comparison can be made among the translations by Bian Zhilin (short for Bian), Liang Shiqiu (short for Liang), Zhu Shenghao (short for Zhu), and Sun Dayu (short for Sun), observing the differences and characteristics in the translation of allusions from different sources by these four translation experts.

### Methodology

The methodology for this study would entail a rigorous and systematic approach that integrates various research methods to investigate the role of allusions and tropes in Shakespearean rhetoric and their translation.

It would commence with a comprehensive literature review, synthesizing existing research on allusions, tropes, and Shakespearean rhetoric from both domestic and international sources to establish a foundational understanding and identify research gaps. Subsequently, a close textual analysis of Shakespeare's plays "Hamlet" and "King Lear" would be conducted, examining the context,

themes, characters, and narrative structure to identify instances of allusions and tropes and understand their rhetorical functions. This would be followed by a comparative study of translations of the plays by four major translators, assessing how different translators handle the allusions and tropes, considering fidelity to the original meaning, cultural adaptation, stylistic choices, and effectiveness in conveying rhetorical devices. Additionally, in-depth case studies would be employed to examine specific examples of allusions and tropes in the plays and their translations, providing detailed insights into the translation strategies employed and their impact on the rhetorical effectiveness of the texts. By employing these methodologies, this study aims to offer a comprehensive analysis of allusions and tropes in Shakespearean rhetoric and their translation.

## Results

### *Biblical and Greco-Roman Mythological Stories*

The Bible and Greco-Roman mythological stories are one of the main sources of Shakespearean allusions. They occupy a prominent position in the statistics of allusions. Victor Hugo once made a thought-provoking statement: "Of all the books circulating among people, there are only two he needs to study, which are the Homeric epics and the Bible." From Hugo's conclusion, we can see the tremendous influence of the Bible, which can be said to be an indispensable part of daily life. Shakespeare was also greatly influenced by the Bible. Many of the allusions in Shakespeare's plays are derived from biblical stories, used to portray characters' personalities and express their emotions. Greco-Roman mythology draws from the great epics of Homer, Virgil, Ovid, and other classical works. It narrates in prose form the most famous, excellent, and poetic stories from Greek and Roman mythology. As Bullfinch (2009) once said, it "is both a source of entertainment and a means of imparting knowledge about mythology." Like classic Chinese works such as the Book of Songs and the Book of Changes, it serves as a source of many English idioms and stories.

In Shakespeare's plays, biblical and Greco-Roman mythological allusions are extensively utilized. According to statistics, "Hamlet" references biblical stories 9 times, including Jephthah's daughter, Abel, Cain, Adam, the creation of woman from man's rib, the unity of husband and wife, and the sounding of the last trumpet, among others. Additionally, "Hamlet" contains 16 references to Greco-Roman mythological figures such as the sun god Apollo, Hyperion, Niobe who turned to stone due to the grief of losing her children, the hero Hercules, Vulcan, Caesar, Jove, Mars, and Mercury. In "King Lear," biblical allusions occur 12 times, including references to "nothing will come of nothing," Hecate, the snake symbolizing evil, the judge, sea monsters, the fall of Adam and Eve, and Psalms. Furthermore, Greco-Roman mythological stories are referenced 12 times, mentioning Jupiter, Juno, Prometheus, Apollo, Jove, Flibbertigibbet, and Cupid. The proportion of biblical and Greco-Roman mythological references in "Hamlet" and "King Lear" exceeds that of other sources, highlighting the profound and significant influence of these sources on Shakespeare's works.

Selected classic examples will be compared among translations by Bian Zhilin (short for Bian), Liang Shiqiu (short for Liang), Zhu Shenghao (short for Zhu), and Sun Dayu (short for Sun), three renowned translation experts, to observe their handling of biblical and Greco-Roman mythological allusions. Following the categorization of allusion translation methods by Lei Kunhua and Guo Min (1998), which include literal translation, free translation, explanatory translation, and annotation, the translations will be analyzed in conjunction with the translation methods. Example sentences will be analyzed.

(1) Hamlet : O Jephthah, judge of Israel, what a treasure

hadst thou?

Polonius: what a treasure had he, my lord?

Hamlet : why,

One fair daughter and no more,

The which he loved passing well.

(hamlet 2.2.339-343)

This passage is from the Book of Judges, depicting the recurring apostasy of the Israelites, who worship false gods and idols, provoking the anger of the Lord once again. The people suffer oppression and harassment from the Ammonites and Philistines. The Israelites summon back Jephthah, who had been banished, to lead them in battle. In this dispute, the question of who is the true judge becomes the focal point. Jephthah says, "May the Lord, the Judge, decide the dispute between the Israelites and the Ammonites today." The Spirit of the Lord comes upon Jephthah, and he makes a vow to the Lord, promising that if he returns safely from the Ammonites, he will dedicate to the Lord whoever comes out of his house first to greet him. Jephthah overwhelmingly defeats the Ammonites. Upon his return to Mizpah and his home, his daughter comes out first, joyfully welcoming him for the victory granted by the Lord. Jephthah resolutely fulfills his vow, not by following the rituals of Baal, which involve human sacrifice, but by dedicating his only daughter to serve and praise the Lord in the house of the Lord.

Bian:

哈: 噢, 耶弗他, 以色列的士师, 你有一件多好的宝贝啊!

波: 他有什么宝贝呀, 殿下?

哈: 啊,

只有个美丽的女娃,

宠爱她可真是到家。

Liang:

哈: 啊耶夫他, 以色列的士师啊, 你有这样的宝藏!

普: 他有什么宝物呀, 殿下?

哈: 怎么,

“他仅有一个美貌的女儿,

他爱她如掌上的明珠。”

Zhu:

哈: 以色列的士师耶弗他啊, 你有一件怎样的宝贝!

波: 他有什么宝贝, 殿下?

哈: 嗨,

他有一个独生娇女,

爱她胜过掌上明珠。

Sun:

哈:

啊, 耶弗他, 以色列的士师, 你有多么好一件宝贝哟!

朴：他有什么样的宝贝，殿下？

哈：哎也，

“只一个绝色的闺女，  
他爱她可真了不得。”

Firstly, all four translators directly translated the biblical story's name "Jephthah" as it is. Bian and Liang used a footnote to provide an explanation below the text. Zhu, on the other hand, slightly deviated from the approach of the former two by integrating the sentence into a noun phrase. Meanwhile, Liang, Bian, and Sun translated the sentences directly from the original text. The translations by the former two translators highlight Jephthah, with a more casual tone and a sense of mockery, whereas Zhu's translation appears more solemn. Through the biblical story of Jephthah, Shakespeare succinctly expresses Hamlet's contemptuous attitude towards Polonius's obsequiousness to the king's minions. From this, it can be inferred: firstly, Polonius has a deeply beloved daughter, but due to his ambition and eagerness to please the king, he is willing to sacrifice his most precious daughter, akin to Jephthah, revealing Jephthah's repugnant willingness to sacrifice familial bonds for his goals; secondly, it implies the tragic fate awaiting his daughter Ophelia.

(2) Hamlet: or ere those shoes were old

With which she followed my poor father's body,  
Like Niobe, all tears; why she, even she, —  
O God! a beast, that wants discourse of reason,

Would have mourn'd longer, --married with mine  
uncle...

(Hamlet 1.2.149-151)

According to the Arden edition of "Hamlet," Niobe is a female figure from Greek mythology who incessantly weeps for her dead children and eventually turns into a stone statue. The translator's translation:

梁：然而，在一个

月内，——我别想这件事了吧，——

脆弱，你的名字就叫做女人！——

不过一个月！她送我父亲的尸首入葬的时候，像是奈欧璧一般  
哭得成个泪人儿，她那天穿的鞋子现在还没有旧；——

何以她，竟至于，——

啊上帝呀！一只没有理性的畜类怕也要哀伤得久些，——  
她竟嫁给了我的叔父。

朱：短短的一个月以前，她哭得像个泪人儿似的，送我那可怜的父亲下葬；她在送葬的那双鞋子还没有破旧，她就，她就——  
上帝啊！一头没有理性的畜生也要悲伤得长久一些——  
她就嫁给了我的叔父。

卞：短短的一个月，她象泪人儿一样

给我父亲送葬去穿的鞋子

还一点都没有穿旧呢，哎呀，你看她，  
（无知的畜生也还会哀痛得久一点呢！）  
她居然就同我的叔父结婚了。

Only Liang translated the representative character Niobe from this mythological story, while the other two did not directly translate this allusion. Instead, they integrated it implicitly into the description of the character weeping like a "Niobe." Here, Hamlet expresses his mother's grief when his father has just passed away, similar to the grief of the mother who turned into stone. At the same time, it also sarcastically compares his own mother unfavorably to Niobe, who, unlike her, betrayed her husband and married her uncle within less than a month, causing Hamlet to feel heartbroken, resentful, and blaming his mother, while also keenly experiencing sadness and helplessness.

### *Proverbs and Sayings*

In "Hamlet" and "King Lear," the frequency of the use of proverbs and sayings ranks second only to biblical and Greek mythological stories, with "Hamlet" featuring 14 occurrences and "King Lear" featuring 27 occurrences, as per statistics. Prominent proverbs and sayings include "Misfortunes never come singly," "The blind leading the blind, both shall fall into the ditch," "Love is a lizard feeding on air," "A snail's pace can at least guard its corners," and "A poor dog barks no bread." Here, three examples are selected for analysis.

(3) King : How fares our cousin Hamlet?

Hamlet : Excellent, i' faith! Of the chameleon's dish-I eat  
the air,  
promise-crammed. You cannot feed capons so.  
( Hamlet 3.2.89-91)

According to the Arden edition of "Hamlet," the use of the phrase "love is a chameleon feeds on air" employs the proverbial allusion "love is a chameleon feeds on air," meaning love is like a chameleon that survives on air alone. The translator's translation.

卞：王：哈姆雷特贤侄，你过得好吗？

哈：挺有味道；一日三餐都是变色蜥蜴的饮食。我吃的是空气，给空话填满了肚子。要拿来喂蠢鸭子，可喂不肥。

梁：哈：很好，真的；吃的是蜥蜴的糖食；我吃的是空气，被空话塞饱了；你喂阉鸡也不能这样吧。

朱：很好，好极了；我过的是变色蜥蜴的生活，整天吃空气，肚子让甜言蜜语塞满了；这可不是你们填鸭子的办法。

孙：王：哈姆雷特贤侄，你这晌怎么样？

哈：绝好，当真：进些石龙子的或是：我吃的是空气，给空气塞饱了肚子：你也不能这样喂阉鸡吧。

In Hamlet's use of the chameleon allusion, it can be seen firstly that Hamlet is not doing

well, and then it expresses strong irony. His stomach is filled with empty words, lacking practical meaning, and those around him are hypocritical, with the most insincere being his uncle, who pretends to care about his well-being. All three translators used a literal translation method to handle the chameleon allusion in this passage. Upon analysis, this approach is likely chosen because later it is mentioned that the chameleon feeds on air, and Hamlet compares himself to a chameleon, consuming the empty words of those around him. Readers would not have difficulty understanding this, so using this method of translation is appropriate.

(4) Gloucester: 'Tis the time's plague when madmen lead the blind.

Do as I bid thee, or rather do thy pleasure...  
(King Lear 4.1.49-50)

According to the Arden edition of "King Lear," this phrase originates from the proverb "The blind leading the blind, both shall fall into the ditch," indicating that the combination of two negative elements will inevitably lead to a disastrous outcome.

卜：遭殃的时世就兴疯子领瞎子啊。

你照我的吩咐办，或者随你自便。

梁：在这倒楣的年头，疯子真好引导瞎子。按照我说的去做，或是随你的便去做吧。

孙：疯子领着瞎子走，乃是这年头的灾殃。听从我的话，或随你去自便。

All three translators employed a literal translation method. Since the original text quoted a proverb, the translation choices are colloquial to reflect this. For instance, Bian translated "就兴" (jiù xìng), Liang used "年头" (niántóu), and Sun used "领着" (lǐngzhe), along with terms like "疯子" (fēngzi) and "瞎子" (xiāzi), expressing a sense of mockery or jest from the speaker.

### ***Literary Works***

The influence of contemporary or previous literary works is also evident in the allusions used. In these two major tragedies, "Hamlet" features 5 literary allusions, while "King Lear" includes 8. The referenced works include Thomas Kyd's "The Spanish Tragedy," Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," and John Gerard's "Herball." Examples will be analyzed below.

(5) Hamlet: Ah ha! Come, some music! Come, the recorders!

For if the King like not the comedy  
Why Then belike he likes it not, perdie.

(hamlet 3.2.285-286)

### Translation of Example Sentences

梁：啊，哈！来，弄点音乐！来，拿管箫！---

“国王若是不爱这出喜剧，那么也就是，----他不喜欢”

孙：啊哈！来，来点音乐！来，吹两支箏箏！

因为啊，要是君王不喜欢这喜剧，  
哎也，那么他，也许就，当真没兴趣。

卞：啊，哈！来一点音乐！来两管笛子！

如果说国王啊不喜欢这一出戏剧，  
当然了，他就是不喜欢它呀，真绝！

来啊，来一点音乐！

朱：啊哈！来，奏乐！来，那吹笛子的呢？

要是国王不爱这出戏剧，  
那么他多半是不能赏识。

According to the Arden edition of "Hamlet," this line is a reference to a passage spoken by the protagonist Hieronimo in Thomas Kyd's "The Spanish Tragedy" before he begins a play within the play: "And if the world like not this tragedy, hard is the hap of old Hieronimo." In the actual revenge and killing depicted in Hieronimo's play, since Hamlet is unaware of this fact, he changes "tragedy" to "comedy." Liang's translation uses double quotation marks to indicate that this line is quoted from a dramatic work, while the other translators did not employ this approach.

(6)Lear:...O well flown, bird, i'the clout, i'the clout! Hewgh!

Give me the word.

Edgar: Sweet marjoram. (King Lear 4.6.91-93)

朱：

李尔：啊！飞得好，鸟儿；刚刚中在靶子心里，咻！

口令！

爱德伽：茉芥兰。

卞：里：噢，飞得好快的鸟儿；正中靶心，正中靶心：咻！口令

。

加：香麦芥兰。

孙：李尔：啊，飞得好，鸟儿！恰在靶眼上！Hewgh!----

叫口令。

葛特加：香薄荷。

Edgar mentions this plant, which according to John Gerard's book "Herball," is said to cure the ailment of having a cold brain. Therefore, Edgar's mention of this plant is not without reason but rather expresses Lear's actions as bordering on madness, necessitating the use of this plant to treat his symptoms of insanity. Translators may differ in their handling of the name of this plant due to differences in naming conventions across different eras and regions.

### ***Historical Events and Figures***

Many famous historical events and figures often acquire a special significance in history, giving rise to allusions. In "Hamlet," there are 5 references, while in "King Lear," there are 4. Important



references include the Roman Emperor Nero, known for killing his own mother, Sir James Hales' famous suicide, and the renowned dancer of the court ministers' troupe, among others. Below are examples:

(7)Hamlet: O God, your only jig-maker! what should a man do  
but be merry, for look you how cheerfully my mother  
looks, and my father died within's two hours!  
( Hamlet 3.2.118-120)

卜：哈：我是你的独一无二的说笑专家。一个人除了说说笑笑，该做什么呢？你看我的母亲就多么高高兴兴，而我的父亲还只死了两个钟头哩。

梁：哈：啊上帝，我是最会作乐的人。一个人除了作乐还做什么呢？你看，我母亲多么高兴的样子，我父亲死了才不过两个钟头。

孙：啊，上帝在上，我只是个替你演唱滑稽舞曲的。一个人该做些什么，只除了寻欢作乐？你瞧，我母亲看来多高兴，我父亲死了还不到两个钟头呢？

The allusion used here is to Will Kempe, a renowned dancer who was part of the troupe of court ministers. In 1599, he left the troupe for a long tour, traveling from London all the way to Norwich. Bian and Liang employed a method of translation called "异译" (yì yì), translating the dancer directly as a person who makes merry and jests, in accordance with the content Hamlet intends to convey. Sun, on the other hand, used a literal translation method. Hamlet's self-mockery, self-derision, and self-debasement further intensify the tragic tone of the text.

### Conclusion

Allusions themselves are rhetorical devices imbued with profound cultural connotations, representing the accumulated and refined treasures of human civilization through the continuous accumulation of historical and cultural experiences. Shakespeare's adept use of allusions not only showcases his mastery of literary artistry but also reflects his profound insight into and grasp of culture. From mythological classics to literary works, from folk sayings to historical records, Shakespeare's broad knowledge encompasses it all. To navigate such a wide array of content is no easy feat, yet Shakespeare not only mastered it but also skillfully incorporated it into his works, enriching them with cultural depth and creating enduring classics that continue to inspire future generations, thus showcasing his outstanding talent.

Through analysis, it becomes evident that an allusion, with just a single word or phrase, conveys a wealth of information that the author intends to impart. Incorporating allusions into a text not only adds cultural flavor but also imbues it with profound meaning, leaving a lasting impression on readers. However, not every reader may grasp the significance of an allusion, as it often requires a certain level of background knowledge. Readers with the requisite knowledge can naturally understand and appreciate the allusion, experiencing a silent yet profound moment of enlightenment.

To address the challenge of understanding allusions, translators have made invaluable contributions. They employ various techniques to ensure readers' comprehension, including literal translation to preserve the authenticity of the English language and culture, adaptive translation to resonate more closely with the target audience, as well as explanatory and annotative methods, providing explanations or annotations of the allusions within or at the end of the text to offer a more comprehensive understanding of their origins.

The translation of allusions is a complex endeavor, and studying the use of allusions in Shakespearean works is highly meaningful. It allows for continuous exploration of the cultural treasures left behind by Shakespeare, providing insights into new content and fostering an appreciation for the cultural impact, thus offering endless joy and intellectual stimulation.

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