

# On the Image of Doctors in Shakespeare's Plays and the Ideological Evolution of Shakespeare

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**Abstract:** *Because the doctor profession has a special and important position in human society, the role of doctors has come into the field of literature from time to time as a unique image that bears special social significance and carries the writer's aesthetic ideal. With the development of society and the evolution of writers' thoughts, the image and connotation of doctors in literary works of the same writer in different periods are also changing. This paper intends to analyze the image of doctors in Shakespeare's early comedy *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, the mid-term tragedy *Macbeth* and the later legendary drama *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* focusing on the specific social and historical situation of drama creation, and points out that the image of the doctors in Shakespeare's plays is a kind of character carefully set by Shakespeare, carrying the author's own ideology. The image of doctors in the works of different periods reflects Shakespeare's own ideological development process.*

**Keywords:** *Shakespeare; The doctors' image; Ideological change*

## 1. Introduction

Shakespeare's drama is a perfect model of world literature and art. Countless distinctive characters in the drama have always been regarded as the soul of Shakespeare's drama. There have been many incisive discussions on the rich connotation and extensive extension of Shakespeare's characters in the past dynasties. However, for a long time, because medicine and literature belong to two different disciplinary systems, the image of doctors and medical theme in literary works have not received due attention. Compared with other character types, there is little research on the image of doctors in Shakespeare's plays. The author believes that the role of doctors in Shakespeare's plays is a kind of characters worthy of in-depth discussion. Although they seem inconspicuous, they play an indispensable role in the light of Shakespeare's plays. This paper intends to analyze the image of the doctors in Shakespeare's early comedy *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, the mid-term tragedy *Macbeth* and the later legendary drama *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, focusing on the specific social and historical situation of drama creation, and points out that the image of the doctors in Shakespeare's plays is a kind of character carefully set by Shakespeare, carrying the author's own ideology. The shaping of the image of doctors in different periods reflects Shakespeare's own ideological development process.

## 2. Early comedies: Doctors representing feudal power become the object of banter and satire

Shakespeare's early works coincided with the growing prosperity of Britain. On the one hand, Elizabethan central government was gradually consolidated, and the alliance between the royal family and businessmen and the new aristocracy was becoming more and more stable. After defeating the Spanish Invincible Fleet in 1588, Britain's national strength increased greatly, and people there were encouraged; On the other hand, in the field of ideology and culture, the Renaissance movement, which originated in Italy and swept Europe, set off a climax in Britain, and a large number of humanist writers such as Marlowe and Bacon emerged. They inherited the tradition of European humanism, carried forward the national spirit, held high the banner of anti-feudalism and anti-church, advocated individual freedom and individual liberation, advocated rationality, mercy and equality, and vigorously advocated to get rid of the shackles of feudal autocracy. Inspired and influenced by the times and society, Shakespeare was full of optimism about life and firmly believed in humanism. Therefore, Shakespeare's plays in this period were mainly comedies and historical plays. Comedy mainly advocates humanistic life ideals, such as personality liberation, love freedom, happiness and happiness, and strives to get rid of the shackles of religious asceticism and feudal ethics.

Under the guidance of this comic spirit, the image of doctors does not fall into the stereotype of tradition, praise or criticism, but has a strong comic color. Dr. Kaus in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, who is known as the masterpiece of farce and has a strong sense of reality and life, is an example. In order to reflect the theme of belittling the old and praising the new, Shakespeare set up a plot in the play in which three men representing different identities proposed to Miss Ann Peggy at the same time: Mr. Peggy was bent on marrying his daughter to the half fool, a descendant of the feudal landlord, who wanted to have a lot of fields and a rich family background; Mrs. Peiqi chose Dr. Kaus, a high-ranking doctor, as her son-in-law, in order that the rich doctor often went to the court and made friends with dignitaries; Miss Peiqi defied her parents' wishes and secretly married young talent Fanton. In the conflict between these two diametrically opposed views of love and marriage: the new atmosphere of free love and independent marriage has defeated the old custom of parents' taking charge of money, and all those who seek money and power have been teased. In the play, Dr. Caius, a French doctor, speaks impure English, often mixed with some French. As so on as he came out, he wore a sword and shouted with confidence that he would go to the court. In addition to treating princes and nobles, he also treated those rich and senior officials, which shows his prominent status. But such a high-ranking doctor has become the object of abuse from time to time because of his character. He was sometimes ridiculed as Roman god of medicine and Greek doctor, and sometimes ridiculed as Mr. Urine because he always checked patients' urine first when treating diseases; But he didn't know the sarcasm of others, and mistakenly thought that urine meant courage. When he learned that the priest was going to propose a marriage with Miss Peggy, he immediately challenged the priest, threatening to "cut his throat in the garden" and even "cut off his two testicles together, not even one left", shouting "if I don't kill the dog priest, I'm not human".<sup>[1]102</sup> Without knowing Miss Peiqi's wishes at all, he vowed that "if I don't marry Ann Peiqi, I'm not human". As a result, in the scene of bride kidnapping in the park, he was cheated by a boy disguised as a woman. It is no wonder that Judge Xialu sighed, "I have lived for more than 80 years, and I have never heard that a person with status, knowledge and style like him will often forget his identity".<sup>[1]126</sup> His rashness, rashness and arrogance often make him look ridiculous.

Although at that time, people's criticism of doctors mainly focused on two aspects: first, ignorance, which meant that doctors' medical skills and treatment ability were poor; The second was greed, implying that doctors tried to use clever words to collect a lot of money. *The Merry Wives of Windsor* does not pay attention to medical ethics and skills, nor does it explain the details of Dr. Kaus' practice of medicine, nor does it describe the scene of doctor-patient communication. Shakespeare incisively and vividly depicts the image of the doctor by means of satire and contrast, and portrays Dr. Kaus as a role with elegance and comedy in an optimistic and cheerful tone, laughing and scolding but happy, reflecting Shakespeare's optimism of early humanists.

### **3. Tragedy in the middle period: The doctors bear more social and political metaphorical functions**

By the middle of Shakespeare's creation, Elizabethan rule was coming to an end, and the social and political life of Britain had changed sharply and contradictions had intensified. On the one hand, the alliance between the royal power and the bourgeoisie began to break. On the other hand, the primitive accumulation of capital led to the increasing poverty of people's lives and the continuous occurrence of peasant uprisings. All this shocked Shakespeare. The darkness of reality gave him a blow in the head, and his humanistic ideal was seriously out of touch with reality. He gradually realized that under the rule of the Tudor and Stuart dynasties, social contradictions were not alleviated but deepened, social morality was not improved but generally declined, and various tragedies such as power tragedy, love tragedy, family tragedy, money tragedy and so on followed in social life. The heavy shadow of social evil made Shakespeare have to face the reality, rethink the humanistic ideal and the possibility of using this ideal to save society. During this period, Shakespeare's realistic drama view of reflecting life, making drama a microcosm of the times and showing the true nature of good and evil has formed and become an important driving force to guide Shakespeare's drama creation.

Compared with the early dramas, the critical power and style of Shakespeare's mid-term works have changed greatly, and the mood has also become gloomy, pathetic and indignant. During this period, the doctor in Shakespeare's plays often had a strong political metaphor, and the doctor always appeared at the critical moment of the drama. The curative effect of doctors is not only related to the physical disease itself, but also to the common people of the country and the future of the nation. The special identity of doctors enables them to grasp the specific environment and the specific situation of the characters at that time, so as to convey many messages that other characters cannot convey. To some extent, they are the embodiment of rationality and science. Their diagnosis of diseases is often the analysis of contradictions and the judgment of the situation. During this period, the role of doctors in Shakespeare's plays became

a well constructed commentator on current affairs by Shakespeare.

In *Macbeth*, a world literary masterpiece, there are two doctors, one is an English doctor, and the other is a Scottish doctor beside Macbeth. The two doctors appeared at the critical moment of the development of the drama, with different missions. The English doctor came on in the fourth act. At that time, Prince Malcolm and the aristocrat McDuff, who fled to England to avoid death, met the English doctor in front of the English palace. Malcolm asked, "Has the king come out?", The doctor immediately replied, "Come out, your highness; there are a large group of unfortunate people waiting for him to heal. Their diseases make the best doctor helpless, but God has given him such a magical power. As long as his hand touches, they will recover immediately."<sup>[2]64</sup> The voice ended, and the doctor withdrew. Malcolm then explained to McDuff: "Since I came to England, I have often seen a kind king show his wonderful skills. No one except himself knows how he prays to heaven; but people with strange diseases are swollen and miserable, and all surgical operations can't cure them. As long as he prays in his mouth and hangs a gold medal on their neck, they will recover abruptly; it is said that he is such a healing God. It is said from generation to generation that it will never be replaced."<sup>[2]65</sup>

In Medieval England, it was indeed popular for a king to touch the patient's head with both hands, which was called touching. Christian "anointing coronation" made the king put on a holy coat. Since God could cure diseases, the king, as God's agent in the world, could certainly do so. Therefore, the king also became a doctor. Only a few people who had been touched by the king recovered, which showed that this kind of treatment did not work at all. It is not difficult to see that the short appearance of the English doctor in the play is just a dramatic strategy. The doctor is helpless in the face of disease, but he is amazed at the king's magic power. The doctor's inaction is just to foil the king's promising, which is linking healing with kingship, the role of doctor has a deep metaphorical function. Like the supreme doctor "God" in the Bible, the king of England has become the embodiment of God, who can use his divine power to eliminate diseases and disasters, eliminate the suffering of the people, and make the whole society harmonious and stable. The magical power of the king is the embodiment of the sanctity of kingship. For Shakespeare, who explored the way out to save the nation from extinction, affirming the divinity of kingship was his last choice when his humanistic ideal was frustrated.

As a foil for English doctors, Scottish doctors appear in the scene of Mrs Macbeth's night tour. Previously, Mrs. Macbeth was strong, strange and vicious, and excited Macbeth to kill the king and seize power, indicating that she was calm, but the deep pain and conflict hidden in her heart completely collapsed in the scene of sleepwalking. When observing Mrs. Macbeth walking by candle at night, the doctor sighed in vain that "abnormal behavior has caused abnormal disturbance; people with conscience often leak their secrets to silent pillows; she needs the instruction of a priest more than the diagnosis of a doctor". "I can't cure this disease."<sup>[2]71</sup> As a doctor who practices medicine and treats diseases, it seems to be a ridicule of medicine to be honest about his inability to cure his patients, but it actually contains profound implications. The deep sense of guilt and disaster made Mrs. Macbeth "because she thought too much, her continuous fantasy disturbed her nerves and made her unable to rest". In the third act, Macbeth asked the doctor, "can't you diagnose and treat a sick heart, pull out the deep-rooted sadness from her memory, wipe away the pain written on her brain, and use some sweet and forgetful antidotes to wash away the dangerous things trapped in her chest?" The doctor replied, "It still depends on the patient's own efforts."<sup>[2]74</sup> Mental illness needs to start with the spirit, and the redemption of the soul needs to repent from the heart in order to forgive. As for Macbeth, who was troubled and sinful, Shakespeare used the doctor's mouth to show him the way to atone for the sin of his soul, but Macbeth refused. He directly scolded the doctor "throw the medicine to the dog; I don't rely on it."<sup>[2]74</sup> Macbeth, who believed in nothingness, refused to heal, completely abandoned the treatment of faith and spirit, and finally embarked on an irreversible path of destruction.

Throughout Shakespeare's dramas, such metaphors of social chronic diseases as human physical and mental illness, eradication of social evil, reconstruction of harmony and restoration of order as the diagnosis and treatment of diseases are everywhere. The two doctors in *Macbeth's* are like the current affairs commentators preset by the writer. As doctors, they are right on the pulse of the current situation, but both are inferior healers. The appearance of the English doctor is just a foil. As a doctor, he is helpless to the patient's disease. But he is amazed at the magic power of the king of England. The healing ability of doctors is combined with the power of kings and gods, which makes the role of doctors have a deep metaphorical function. Similarly, the Scottish doctor's diagnosis and treatment of the Macbeth couple are to the point, but the Macbeth couple abandon the good prescription of doctors and spiritual healing and soul redemption shows the decline of Christian faith and soul redemption in front of the publicized human desire. Through the shaping of the images of the two doctors, it is not difficult for readers to see the frustration of Shakespeare's humanistic ideal and the return and dilemma of Christian thought and

feudal kingship thought.

#### 4. Later legendary dramas: Constructing the image of doctors of the author's Utopian idealism

Shakespeare's late creation is a legendary drama period. At this time, social contradictions intensified, and the oppressed farmers rose one after another. Facing the resistance of the people, James I suppressed brutally on the one hand, and strengthened the control of public opinion on the other hand. The dramatic world thus formed a countercurrent of legendary dramas with bizarre plots that cater to the interests of the court. In the sharp contradiction between ideal and reality, due to the limitations of times, classes and world outlook, Shakespeare placed his hope on Utopian fantasy, hoping to solve social problems with a supernatural force. The legendary plays of Shakespeare in the late period provide religious answers to social contradictions in the spirit of love, forgiveness and understanding. His works have changed from the sunny and clear laughter in the early romantic trial stage to the return and compromise in the later stage, and the harmony between heaven and earth. The plot of the story is absurd, and the dramatic contradictions are reconciled through conscience and forgiveness. The plot is full of a strong tragic atmosphere in the development, but after the climax, the mood suddenly turns, covering a happy reunion atmosphere. In addition, in the later period, natural science gradually rose, medicine was separated from the Christian theological system, and gradually became a scientific discipline based on the development of anatomy and physical chemistry. The sacred salvation of history is no longer the core of history; On the contrary, human's ability to use and control nature has become the core.

In this context, the doctors in Shakespeare's plays have become the incarnation of God on earth, with the virtue of healing and universal love. Salomon, the noble doctor in *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, is an ideal doctor with divinity and humanity. Doctor Salimon was born noble, cherished virtue and medical skills, and was regarded as a great philanthropist. He "is not only skillful in medicine, tireless in practice, but also generous"; His reputation is "well-known, and time will not obliterate it".<sup>[3][339]</sup> and he also has in-depth philosophical views on morality and talent.

Shakespeare often expresses his guiding ideology of shaping characters through the mouth of the characters in the play. Under the guidance of such thoughts, the characters in Shakespeare's plays rarely have a single character, but often have an elusive complexity and are profound. Doctor Salimon was shaped into a God with both benevolence and divine power. The difference is that compared with God's great grace, Salomon cherishes the moral restraint force in this world. Medical skill is no longer a kind of divine power, but can be practiced through hard study and practice of medical knowledge. Doctors must pay attention to the improvement of morality and talent. Shakespeare created the image of a doctor with virtue and art in people's minds with a stroke of genius, which is also one of the examples of Shakespeare's eternal charm. Literary works are a symbolic treatment of real-life contradictions. Doctor Salimon is a successful doctor model created by Shakespeare. Although in the dual situation of desire and material at that time, Doctor Salimon was only a fictional literary image, Shakespeare used this literary image to successfully and symbolically solve the binary opposition between ideal and reality. Shakespeare's unique dramatic expressiveness has reserved the audience and readers the space of Utopian ideal and the non-material appeal of humanistic spirit.

#### 5. Conclusion

As a representative figure of the Renaissance, Shakespeare's profound social insight, skillfully applied medical knowledge to drama creation, and infiltrated the image of doctor into specific drama situations to achieve specific drama functions. Many of the doctors in Shakespeare's early plays are just topics or reasons, which are otherwise referred to by the identity and image of doctors. The doctors in the tragic period embodied Shakespeare's reflection and doubt on society and human nature. The ideal doctor in the later legendary plays reposed Shakespeare's Utopian ideal. In the 18th century, British critic Pope once praised that "every character in Shakespeare's works is as vivid as living in reality, and no two of them are the same. After comparison, the most similar characters because of their close relationship will also be found to be significantly different".<sup>[4]</sup> There are more than ten kinds of doctor roles in Shakespeare's plays, but each role serves different drama characteristics and themes. Even in the same play, the characteristics and functions of the doctor role are different. Therefore, exploring the role of doctors in Shakespeare's plays is conducive to an in-depth understanding of Shakespeare's plays and Shakespeare's own dramatic creation and Ideological evolution process.

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