

# ***Analyze Supernatural Factors' Actual Value in Macbeth and The Injustice to Dou E from Brecht's Drama Theory***

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**Abstract:** In the respective drama history of Chinese and British, Guan Hanqing's *The Injustice to Dou E* and Shakespeare's *Macbeth* are both significant tragedies. *The Injustice to Dou E* implies Guan Hanqing's pursuit of fairness, and *Macbeth* reflects Shakespeare's study of ambition. At the end of the two plays, justice has been upheld finally. This result comes from the process of exposing the darkness: for example, in *The Injustice to Dou E*, Dou E's three-year drought and other predictions, and the dialogue between her ghost and her father; in *Macbeth*, the witches' prophecies that Macbeth was the future king and no one could beat him, and the ghost's reappearances of Banco. They are important supernatural factors that face the character's heart directly, expose social reality, and trigger readers' thinking. Using Brecht's famous Epic Drama theory in the 20th century to analyze them, people can more clearly find out the actual value of the supernatural factors and give rationality of social reality and human nature to phenomena that cannot be explained by natural laws.

**Keywords:** *The Injustice to Dou E*, *Macbeth*, Brecht, the actual value of the supernatural factors

## **1. Introduction**

In the history of Chinese and English literature, Guan Hanqing and Shakespeare are both playwrights who have made great contributions to respective countries. *The Injustice to Dou E* is Guan Hanqing's masterpiece, and *Macbeth* is one of Shakespeare's Four Great Tragedies.

*The Injustice to Dou E* recounts that Dou E was wronged, made three predictions, turned into a ghost, and finally proved her innocence. *Macbeth* narrates that Macbeth was blinded by ambition, listened to the witches' prophecies, entangled by the ghost of Banco, and finally went to destruction. The two dramas all use supernatural factors - prophecies and ghosts. Analyzing the similarities and differences between the prophecies and the ghosts in the two dramas can pave the way for understanding their practical value.

The theory of Epic Drama advocated by Brecht, a master of drama in the 20th century, coincides undesignedly with the social function pointed jointly by the supernatural factors in the two plays. He advocates educational drama, hoping that drama can let the audience understand the causality of social events by keeping them sober thinking. Using Brecht's theory to analyze, what is the actual value of the supernatural factors in the two plays?

## 2. Brecht's Epic Drama theory

Brecht was a crucial German playwright in the 20th century. Influenced by Marxism, he began to create "Educational Drama" in an attempt to analyze the society with revolutionary thought and educate the people, such as *Threepenny Opera* and *The Good Person of Szechwan*. For the characteristics of the art form of the "Educational Drama", Brecht used "Epic Drama" to summarize [1]. His exposition on how Epic Drama realizes the social value in its stage experiment is the research target of this section.

Brecht used *Street Scene* as a basic model for the dramatic scenes of Epic Drama to illustrate his point of view. Brecht compares narrative drama with the street scene of a passer-by describing a car accident. The passer-by is like a performer. He talked about the car accident in a third-party tone. While describing the matter, he analyzed and commented on it. He just said that there was such a thing clearly, which aroused the listener's comments. Brecht advocated breaking the strict requirements of character portrayal, "Within a certain limit, the character of a figure displayed can be this kind or that kind, which counts for little. The performer should be most concerned about the figure's characteristics which are vulnerable to misfortune and which are free from misfortune." [2], so as to guide the audience to pay attention to the social attitude of the people in the play.

The listener of the car accident is like an audience. Brecht hopes that the audience will not experience the inner emotions of the driver or the injured with great devotion. The important means to achieve this effect is "Alienation": making the things to be expressed shocking, appealing for the explanation, not taken for granted, and not simple and natural. [3] Therefore, let the audience make judgments in listening to the narration and analysis of the accident. "Performance has practical social significance." For example, street performers want to explain that pedestrians or drivers do this at that time, so accidents are inevitable. But it can be avoided in another case. [4] In this way, the emotional involvement of the audience could be rejected, the audience's sober thinking could be maintained.

The traditional model of drama in the West has always been Aristotelian Drama. Aristotelian Drama is based on "dramatic" and takes imitation as a means to trigger the audience's resonance, make the audience immerse in drama practice, revel in religious purification, and forget to think about the causal relationship behind social events. Since the audience's acceptance is important evidence of the social value of drama, through the comparison of the response of the audience between Aristotle's drama and Brecht's Narrative Drama, we can more clearly feel the characteristics of socialist realism in Brecht's Narrative Drama —

Table 1: The Comparison of the Response of Audience between the Two Kinds of Drama. [5]

The audience in Brecht's Narrative Drama	The audience in traditional Aristotelian Drama
Ah, I never thought of it.	Yes, I have felt it
This is so strange. It must stop.	This is indeed natural, and it will always be.
This man's misfortune moved me. He obviously has a way out.	The man's misfortune moved me because he had no way out.
When the protagonist cries, I laugh. When the protagonist laughs, I cry.	When the protagonist cries, I cry. When the protagonist laughs, I laugh.

Brecht thinks the more audiences concentrate on the works and are intoxicated with the works, the more they fall into the trap that constructs the perfection of the world and covers up contradictions. Emotional involvement makes the audience lose the ability of sober thinking and judgment. However, to realize the disadvantages of the times, it is necessary to make the audience full of thinking about the real situation in the observation of the theater. In Brecht's *Messingkauf Dialogues*, his philosopher

regarded drama production as a laboratory for studying social interactions, planned to inspire millions of people in danger and suffering, and aimed to make enough people realize the need for change. It is the playwright who turns his thoughts into practice[6]. Such kind of drama makes the story in drama become the object of criticism by the audience, expresses social phenomena from causality, and arouses the action of reform by arousing the audience's thinking.

### 3. Comparison of supernatural factors in *Macbeth* and *The Injustice to Dou E*

Supernatural factors refer to strange things related to gods that cannot be explained by natural laws. *Macbeth* tells that general Macbeth, who defended Scotland, was induced by the witches' prophecies to kill Duncan and Banquo for the throne, and was finally killed. *The Injustice to Dou E* narrates that Zhang Lver colluded with the prefecture chief to make Dou E confess to false charges under torture. Dou E shouted injustice and predicted that three bizarre scenes would be realized. Then Dou E's ghost successfully washed away her grievances with the help of her father. Prophecies and ghosts are typical supernatural factors in both works. Analyzing and comparing them can help people get a clearer and comprehensive understanding of them and better find their value.

#### 3.1. The prophecies and the ghost in *Macbeth*

There are many supernatural factors embodied in *Macbeth*, among which the witch's prophecies and Banquo's ghost are two key factors that can not be ignored.

The witches' prophecies appeared in the wilderness for the first time. On Macbeth's triumphant return, two witches called him "thane of Cawdor" and "the future king" in prophetic names. The witch also predicted that although Banquo's status was below Macbeth's, Banquo's descendants would become the monarchs. The witches' second prophecies appeared in the cave. Macbeth was eager to know his fate. The witches drove three ghosts and comforted him to easily treat the power of human beings, because "nobody born from a woman." [7] could hurt him and encouraged his proud, fearless, cold-blooded, and ruthless psychology.

Banquo's ghost appeared in the hall of the palace for the first time. Macbeth invited guests to the banquet. Only he saw Banquo, who had already been killed by himself, sitting in his seat. Soon Banquo disappeared. Then Macbeth just pretended to be affectionate and said "drink this cup for our dear absent friend Banquo" [8], Banquo's ghost reappeared. The second time was in the cave. Macbeth was very concerned about the witch's words that predicted Banquo's descendants as kings at the first time, and asked the witch to solve his doubts. The witch shouted "come out" and Banquo's ghost came on. Macbeth saw the bloody Banquo smiling at him. Beside him were a group of descendants wearing the king's costume.

#### 3.2. The prophecies and the ghost in *The Injustice to Dou E*

Compared with *Macbeth*, *The Injustice to Dou E* has less use of supernatural factors. Prophecies and ghosts are the only as well as emphasized supernatural existence.

In the third chapter, Dou E was wronged and would be beheaded. Before her death, she asked the beheading officer for 6 meters of white cloth to hang up. She made the first prediction: "if I was wronged, when her head was cut off and fell to the ground, not a drop of hot blood was spilled on the ground, and all splashed upward on the white cloth." [9] Dou E also made the second prediction to the supervisor: "if I was wronged, 3 feet of snow from the sky in the hot summer would fall and bury her body." [10] Regardless of the refutation of the supervisor, Dou E continued to use the third prophecy to reiterate her grievances: "My death is really wronged. Chuzhou would suffer a severe drought for three years." [11] Dou E was beheaded and all three predictions were fulfilled.

In the fourth chapter, Dou E's father Dou Tianzhang became an important official of the imperial court who especially punished corrupt officials after his successful imperial examination. He came to Chuzhou and examined the case file. Dou E's case file was placed at the bottom by him but often appeared on the first tier, because Dou E's ghost dimmed the candle's flame aside and laid her file. Dou Tianzhang finally caught Dou E's ghost in the act. Dou E told him that she refused Zhang Lver's flirtation and was falsely accused of poisoning old man Zhang. She said that the drought for three years was also because she was unjustly wronged. Then in the court, Dou E's wronged ghost confronted Zhang Lver directly, exposed his lies, and proved her own innocence.

### 3.3. Similarities and differences of supernatural factors in *The Injustice to Dou E* and *Macbeth*

The typical representatives of supernatural factors in *Macbeth* and *The Injustice to Dou E* are the prophecies and the ghosts. Comparing the similarities and differences between them, people can not only find their different specific characteristics but also clarify their common essential features.

The witches' prophecies in *Macbeth* is different from Dou E's prophecies in *The Injustice to Dou E*. The content of the witches' prophecies are to whom the right of the crown belongs and whether the protagonist is invincible, which directly affects the human society full of secular desire and bloody struggle. Moreover, because the witch represents the evil force that instigates people to commit crimes and, to a certain extent, the concrete externalization of Macbeth's ambition, the nature of the prophecies is negative, which is not conducive to the hero's moral cultivation and induces him to fall into the abyss of immorality. The content of Dou E's prediction is abnormal human physical and climatic phenomena, which directly affect the changes of the natural environment, in which the severe drought indirectly affects the people's livelihood. However, the realization of the prophecies is to prove that Dou E has a real grievance, so the nature of the prophecies is positive and conducive to justice.

The witches' prophecies in *Macbeth* are the same as Dou E's prophecies in *The Injustice to Dou E*. They both promote the development of the story, help the protagonist's actions and deeply reveal the characters' thoughts. The witches' prophecies encouraged Macbeth's greed and ambition and made him ruthless, careless about human life, and comfortable with his crimes. Dou E's prophecies fully reflect Dou E's tenacity and stubbornness to fight against evil forces until the last moment, and her defense for integrity and innocence till death. At the same time, prophecies have different reactions to different subjects. For example, as for Dou E's prophecies, Dou E believes that it can be realized and welcomes its realization. The state officials believe that it can never be realized and reject its realization. For the witches' second prophecies, Macbeth thought he would not be defeated, so the throne was stable, but the army of Macduff and others used leaves as a cover, and Macduff was the child of caesarean section, so Macbeth was defeated. This double interpretation caused by the opposite position of the interpretation subject makes the falsification or authentication of the final prediction full of educational significance, which opens a space for the author to induce his readers to think.

There are also similarities and differences between Dou E's ghost and Banquo's ghost. Dou E's ghost is the ghost of the leading role. The sense of participation in the story is stronger than Banquo's ghost who only appears as a supporting role, but they all represent the intolerance of justice to evil and promote the exposure and punishment of evil. They all promote the development of the story plot, deeply reveal the characters' thoughts, and induce readers to think about the causes and results of the ghosts because they are highly unusual in a human material society, although with scientific general knowledge readers know they are not real.

#### 4. Comparison of supernatural factors in *Macbeth* and *The Injustice to Dou E*

Through the discussion of the third part, a sufficient understanding of the supernatural factors in *Macbeth* and *The Injustice to Dou E* has been obtained. Reviewing the second part, it concludes that for Epic Drama to realize social value, there are three main points: first, get rid of the strict requirements of character description and guide the audience to pay attention to the social attitude of the roles in the play. Second, taking the reader as an observer, surprise him and let him seek an explanation. Third, let the audience understand the causality of social events and believe that drama can stimulate action to change reality by triggering thinking. Brecht's theory mainly focuses on the performance method of stage actors, but it is still applicable and effective to study drama scripts and analyze their practical value with the same theory. This is also the innovation of this paper.

##### 4.1. Paying attention to the social attitude of roles

The first point is to break away from the strict requirements of character portrayal and guide the audience to pay attention to the social attitude of the people in the play.

When Dou E's ghost came out, she first dimmed the dark lights to attract Dou Tianzhang to see the first volume - Dou E poisoned her father-in-law and then told him his grievances one by one after being found. The focus of the whole description is not to finely shape Dou E's character through language, facial expression, and psychological activities, but to specifically describe her continuous attempts to make the file be read and describe in detail the causes and consequences of Zhang Lver's framing her. It is not only telling Dou Tianzhang but also combing the whole plot for the audience. Through Dou E's actor's lines "Zhang Lver has molested your daughter several times, and I insist not to obey", "A chaste woman will not change her husband, and I will not be your wife until I die", "They subjected me to severe torture, but even beating to death won't let me plead the guilty", deepen the atmosphere, and emphasize Dou E's attitude of adhering to her chastity. Although she is in a disadvantaged position, she will never give in to evil forces. However, then the plot changes, Dou E finally gives in, intending to protect her mother-in-law. She is a virtuous and caring person from beginning to end. She is innocent and framed by Zhang Lver to death. Contrary to normal moral cognition, good people are rewarded and bad people are punished, which strengthens the tragic effect. Dou E represents the kind and ordinary women and the weak group ruled in the society of paternal authority, while the prefecture chief represents the ruling class of officials who bend the law for selfish ends, while Zhang Lver represents the group of morally corrupt people in the civilian class, clinging to dignitaries and offering bribes to do evil.

Banquo's ghost appeared when Macbeth held a feast for the guests. Shakespeare didn't let him say a word, but only let him appear in the image of "his eyes staring and his hair dyed with blood". Through Macbeth's reaction and words to Banquo's ghost, he showed Macbeth's heart distorted by strong selfish desires. The characters of Macbeth and Banquo are not very obvious, but their attitudes are deeply portrayed. Banquo's blood-stained hair and staring eyes can show his anger at the murder of innocent people in the power struggle, and Macbeth's response to the ghost like "you can't say it's me", "Go! Get out of my sight! Let the land hide you" and "my firm nerves will never tremble", richly and three-dimensionally show the readers that Macbeth, driven by the desire and ambition for power, plays a false benevolent monarch and the same time in his essence a lunatic and bloody executioner without conscience, expose the terrible consequences of his unrestrained selfish desire to break through the shackles of morality - not only his heart is extremely distorted, but also innocent people die one after another. Focus the reader's attention on the confrontation between a king who illegally seizes power - the ruler and an innocent minister who is conspired to kill - the ruled.



#### 4.2. A reader as an observer to seek an explanation

Take the reader as an observer and keep his sober thinking. Surprise him and let him seek an explanation.

Brecht advocates that the things in the play make themselves strange to the readers, which makes the readers surprised and stunned. The realization of supernatural factors such as ghosts and predictions against common sense makes the usual life unusual, which leads to thinking and further understanding.

Dou E predicted that the blood splashed white silk which really didn't fall on the ground. It was a hot summer, but there was real snow all over the sky. The drought for three years really reached three years. The sky didn't rain until Dou E got justice. This series of abnormal phenomena, one deeper than the other in degree, one longer than the other in time. The progressive degree of abnormality also deepens the readers' surprise level by level and directly mobilizes the readers' minds to find explanations. Why do the predictions come true? Because Dou E was wronged. Why three years of drought? Because God is punishing the local governor and Zhang Lver, but why innocent people have also been implicated in the drought? They are not really innocent, because they let Dou E be wronged by bad people and did not try to prevent it.

The witch predicted for the second time, "no man born in a woman's womb can kill Macbeth", "Macbeth will never be defeated until Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill shall come against him." But then Malcolm's army moved to Dunsinane under the cover of branches, and Macduff told Macbeth that he had been cut out of his mother's abdomen before he was full-term. The forest really moved, and Macbeth was not born naturally in a belly. Why did the witches' second prophecies have two interpretations, and Macbeth's final interpretation was wrong? Because Macbeth's ambition made him lose his mind. Further, why witches' prophecies corrupt Macbeth? Why did he choose to kill Duncan, Banquo and Macduff's wife and child by the trust of the prophecies rather than resist the temptation brought by them?

#### 4.3. Revealing causal relationship to arouse action

Further let the audience understand the causal relationship of social events, and believe that drama can arouse the action of changing reality by triggering thinking.

In *Macbeth*, the witches not only confirm Macbeth's inner desire as a physical externalization of his ambition, but also the dark social force that instigates the expansion of people's ambition. Through Banquo's comparative image, *Macbeth* further reveals that the most fundamental reason for Macbeth's degeneration is his own ambition, which embodies Shakespeare's reflection and criticism of rampant egoism and dark social politics due to the excessive promotion of self-centered consciousness in humanism in the middle and late Renaissance, so as to remind the ordinary people and the ruling class through Macbeth's tragic consequences to be on guard against ambition, treat desire rationally, cherish their own and other people's lives. In this way, a real humanism could be deepened.

In *The Injustice to Dou E*, first of all, Dou E's unremitting pursuit of fair treatment after turning into a ghost deeply stimulates readers and gives the same victims the motivation to adhere to justice. Secondly, prophecies and ghosts constantly emphasize her injustice, remind readers to think about how she was wronged, and awaken the reader's inner conscience.

For example, one of the supernatural factors — in the three years of the drought, the idea of "interaction between sky and mankind" in the official philosophy of the Chinese Han Dynasty is continued, and the human ethical rules are safeguarded through "Sky's change". The state officials could not pay the tribute, and the people had no water and food to quench their thirst and hunger. Everyone in *The Injustice to Dou E* was punished for violating or ignoring justice and kindness: warning the paternal authority their materialization of women and letting it respect women's equal

personality; warning the feudal administration of civil officials represented by the prefecture chief of Chu Zhou to govern honestly and uprightly, enforcing the law impartially; admonishing the Yuan Dynasty's Mongolian nomadic culture, represented by Zhang Lver, which was in a dominant position at that time that it could not arbitrarily trample on the value identity of the Han nationality in the Central Plains with Confucian benevolence and courtesy as the core, such as forcing women to remarry, desecrating chastity and morality, as well as rejecting the rules of propriety and righteousness on erotic feeling.[12]

## 5. Conclusion

This paper studies the three main points of Brecht's Epic Drama Theory on creating social value in a stage experiment, uses them to analyze the important supernatural factors - prophecies and ghosts in *The Injustice to Dou E* and *Macbeth*, and explores the actual value of supernatural factors. For example, they reveal the potential causal relationship and triggers readers to think and act - in *Macbeth*, they remind readers to treat their desires rationally and cherish their own and other people's lives. In *The Injustice to Dou E*, they warn evildoers who bully good underprivileged groups to restrain themselves with fair and kind moral principles.

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