

COMPARISON OF STYLISTIC ELEMENTS ACROSS DIFFERENT WORKS OF BERNARD SHAW

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Abstract

This study compares and contrasts Bernard Shaw's plays and prose in order to examine the stylistic features that set his writings apart. Shaw's work demonstrates his avant-garde approach to drama by fusing satire, wit, and comedy with insightful societal criticism. The recurrent themes of social reform, gender equality, and human advancement are highlighted as this research explores how Shaw's use of language, characterization, and dramatic structure changes over his various works. Shaw's creative variety and ideological consistency are highlighted by the research's identification of stylistic patterns and divergences through an analysis of famous texts such as *Pygmalion*, *Major Barbara*, and *Man and Superman*. By providing insights into how Shaw's writing adjusts to a variety of thematic themes while retaining its distinctive intellectual energy and rhetorical flare, the research seeks to advance our understanding of his distinctive literary style and its influence on contemporary theatre.

Keywords. Speech patterns, dialect and language, stylistic components, morality.

Introduction

The literary writings of George Bernard Shaw, who combined artistic genius with a strong commitment to tackling social issues, have had a lasting impact on contemporary drama. Shaw was a master of style as a dramatist, using witty banter, thought-provoking conversation, and inventive dramatic devices to subvert social mores and elicit critical thinking. His plays are timeless in their relevance and appeal because they frequently address difficult subjects like gender equality, class inequality, and the human condition. This article compares Shaw's approach in several plays and works while analyzing the stylistic components that characterize his body of work. Through an examination of the language choices, satirical usage, and character development, the essay demonstrates how Shaw's distinct style functions as a medium for his social and philosophical beliefs. "Pygmalion", "Major Barbara", and "Man and Superman" are just a few examples of his works that demonstrate how he can modify his artistic devices to fit a variety of themes while yet retaining a voice that appeals to audiences of all ages. As David Edgar observes: "Shaw's command of language and dialect not only adds depth to his characters but also enhances his ability to dissect and satirize the social, political, and philosophical issues of his time. His dialogue is not just for communication—it becomes a tool for humor, critique, and the exploration of human nature and societal structures." [1]



Shaw demonstrates his acute understanding of how speech patterns and dialects establish class, country, and moral standing in his investigation of language as a tool for defining identity and reflecting social structures. Shaw was well-versed in the connection between language and social status. He thought that people are frequently classified based on the words they use, which serves to uphold inflexible class hierarchies that may not accurately represent a person's actual value or aptitude. Shaw regularly employed language in his plays to highlight the performative aspect of social class and to imply that speech might be manipulated in order to achieve social mobility. His characters frequently move between various social circles, and their language changes to correspond with these transitions. Shaw's interest in phonetics is closely related to his linguistic sensitivity. He supported spelling reform in English because he thought that archaic spelling practices in the language unnecessarily impeded learning and good communication. His plays frequently reflected his interest in the relationship between spoken and written language, as he employed dialects, accents, and phonetic spelling to represent characters from various socioeconomic backgrounds. Shaw showed how language is shaped by and contributes to the shaping of the social environment, rather than being a neutral or static thing.

The speech of the English and Irish characters in Shaw's plays is frequently contrasted; the English characters are usually portrayed as formal, constrained, or extremely polished, while the Irish characters are given more lyrical, fluid, or hilarious conversation. Shaw uses language to challenge prejudices and provide a more nuanced representation of Irish identity, highlighting the cultural distinctions between the colonial Irish and the colonizing English. Shaw defends Irish intellectual and cultural autonomy while criticizing English cultural predominance through the manipulation of accent and speech patterns. As critic Christopher Innes explains: "In Shaw's work, the speech patterns of the English and Irish characters serve not only as markers of social class but also as a means of challenging prejudices. While the English are often portrayed as stiff and formal, the Irish characters speak with a fluidity and wit that reflects their cultural autonomy. Through these contrasts, Shaw critiques English cultural dominance and champions Irish intellectual and cultural identity." [2] Shaw examines the conflicts between Irish and English identities in *John Bull's Other Island*, highlighting the political and cultural differences between the two countries through dialect. Shaw, who is Irish himself, exposes national preconceptions and the intricacies of colonialism in this play by contrasting the linguistic patterns of Irish and English characters. The English character Broadbent, who represents the traditional Englishman with a sense of superiority in this drama, speaks in a polished and self-assured manner. The Irish characters, especially Larry Doyle, on the other hand, speak in a more flowing and poetic manner, which reflects the Irish heritage of wit and storytelling. Shaw makes subtle fun of English attitudes toward Ireland by pointing up this distinction. For example, we can look through:

Broadbent: "A splendid lot of people, the Irish, but too damned inferior!" Larry Doyle: "I'm afraid, Broadbent, that the world is full of people whom you'll never understand" [3]. Shaw highlights Doyle's wit and depth by contrasting it with Broadbent's stiff, formal language, which stands for English colonial arrogance. Shaw does this by utilizing the natural cadence and rhythm of the Irish vernacular. The linguistic distinctions between England and Ireland are metaphorically represented by the disparities in speech patterns.



Shaw also depicts moral and ideological strife between characters through words. His plays frequently have individuals who stand in for opposing political or philosophical stances, and their conversations serve as a battlefield for these ideological conflicts. Shaw's plays usually develop through character disputes, with their speech representing their moral or intellectual viewpoints, rather than just action. Characters in these disputes frequently use language that is deliberately chosen to express their underlying values or worldviews.

Shaw's persistent thematic preoccupation with the struggle between realism and idealism, social class and identity, and the power of language is revealed by this comparative examination of his stylistic components throughout several works, including "Saint Joan", "Man and Superman", "Arms and the Man", and "Pygmalion". Shaw's plays are a prime example of a combination between intellectual rigor and dramatic creativity, from the comedy and sarcasm that question society ideals to the philosophical discourse that questions human existence. By looking at these stylistic components, we can learn more about Shaw's creative development as well as the continuing significance of his social and political criticisms.

Shaw challenges the idealized view of battle in "Arms and the Man" by using humor. Raina Petkoff, the play's protagonist, adores her fiancé Sergius and thinks him to be a brave military hero. Shaw, however, juxtaposes the romantic ideal with the harsh realities of combat when the unheroic and pragmatic Captain Bluntschli enters the picture. Bluntschli, who would rather carry chocolates than ammunition, personifies Shaw's criticism of the fictitious bravery that is sometimes associated with combat. "What use are cartridges in battle? I always carry chocolate instead".[4] Shaw's choice of words here emphasizes how ridiculous idealized views of war are. Shaw employs dialogue to make a sarcastic statement about the reality of battle and the perils of romanticizing violence by contrasting Raina's lyrical words with Bluntschli's direct practicality.

Shaw employs comedy in "Pygmalion" to question social mobility and class differences. The shallowness of class divisions is revealed by Eliza Doolittle's transition from flower girl to lady. Shaw's satirical humor is evident in the over-the-top speech lessons and the ridiculousness of raising someone's social standing by teaching them new speech patterns. "The moment I let you sit down in that chair and talk to me as if we were equals, you presume to give yourself airs." [5] Shaw's "Pygmalion" explores the inflexible social class divisions of Edwardian England through language. Eliza doesn't change morally or intellectually; rather, her training in speech leads to her metamorphosis. She is able to transition across social strata by just changing her accent, illustrating how flimsy linguistic divisions in society may be. Eliza uses a Cockney dialect when she initially interacts with Higgins: "I ain't done nothing wrong by speaking to you" [6]. The superficiality of class barriers is revealed by Eliza Doolittle's metamorphosis from a Cockney flower girl to a cultured lady by speech manipulation alone. Shaw parodies the way in which society questions the true meaning of identity and socioeconomic mobility by judging people based only on outward indicators such as manners and accent. "The difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she's treated" [7]. Shaw exposes the artificiality of class systems in this play, demonstrating the potency of language as an instrument of oppression and change. Shaw uses satire to question societal norms in both "Pygmalion" and "Arms and the Man", while "Pygmalion" focuses on social class and "Arms and the Man" challenges the ideas of war.



One of Shaw's most conceptually complex writings, "Man and Superman", incorporates a discussion of morality, evolution, and the "Life Force." In the notorious "Don Juan in Hell" scene of the play, Don Juan and the Devil engage in a protracted discussion about the nature of good and evil, human purpose, and social constructs. Shaw explores his philosophical view of creative evolution in this dialogue-heavy scenario. According to Shaw, humans are changing not just biologically but also spiritually and intellectually. Shaw frequently prioritizes philosophical concepts over conventional dramatic action in his plays, and this one is a prime example of how he uses theater as a forum for intellectual discussion. "The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man." [8]

A more nuanced interaction between realism and idealism is presented by Shaw's portrayal of "Joan of Arc" as both an idealist and a pragmatic. Although Joan's idealistic goal conflicts with the established political and religious structures of the day, Shaw's nuanced portrayal of her character is evident in her tactical acumen. In Shaw's interpretation of the character, Joan is shown as realistic rather than the idealized version of the historical Joan. "I hear voices telling me what to do. They come from God" [9]. The fight between idealism and realism is a theme explored by both "Candida" and "Saint Joan". However, "Candida" places this struggle within the narrower framework of interpersonal relationships, while "Saint Joan" puts it within the larger backdrop of historical and theological conflict.

Bernard Shaw paid more attention to language and dialect in his creative works. In addition to his comedic and philosophical plays, George Bernard Shaw is well known for his extraordinary ability to use dialect and language to explore intricate issues like identity, social class, and power relations. Shaw's command of speech, his ability to give each character a unique voice, and his use of phonetic spelling are all indications of his profound comprehension of the social roles that language plays. Shaw offers incisive social criticism through dialect and language, challenging the nature of communication and its function in upholding or challenging social systems.

Shaw emphasizes the phoniness of language-based social barriers by using phonetic spelling in the early scenes and exact diction later on. Because of his extensive knowledge of languages, he is able to create a character who perfectly captures the nuances of class mobility.

Bernard Shaw was good at phonetic spelling and he used the power of dialect very well. Shaw was a strong supporter of spelling reform and felt that the complexity of the English language and its uneven pronunciation hampered communication and reinforced social classes. Shaw was obsessed with language reform; he saw traditional spelling as an unnecessary obstacle to straightforward communication, as was demonstrated by his efforts to create phonetic alphabets and his role in supporting English spelling reforms.

Shaw explores the connection between language, morality, and power in "Major Barbara". While her father, Andrew Undershaft, an armaments trader, speaks in a practical, businesslike manner, Barbara, a major in the Salvation Army, speaks in idealistic, religious tones. The play examines the moral conflicts between idealism and pragmatism by contrasting their language approaches. Barbara's father communicates in a far more direct, matter-of-fact manner, while Barbara's moral convictions are clear in her high, even sermon-like speech: **Barbara:** "My soul is your soul, and my sin is your sin; for you are no longer mine but God's. I am the mouthpiece



of the Holy Spirit." **Undershaft:** "Poverty and slavery have stood up for centuries to your sermons and leading articles: they will not stand up to my machine guns." [10]

Shaw reflects the characters' worldviews through the use of diverse speech patterns. Undershaft's vocabulary, which contrasts with Barbara's idealistic tone, is sardonic and realistic, signifying the conflict between moral purity and the brutal reality of capitalism. Shaw's mastery at using language to dramatize philosophical arguments through dialogue is evident in this play.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that Shaw's creative decisions are as unique as they are varied; he incorporates intricate philosophical discussions into his plays and uses humor to subvert idealized ideas of class and conflict. His use of dialect, language manipulation, and disregard for conventional dramatic structures all point to a playwright who was continuously pushing the bounds of form and subject. George Bernard Shaw's mastery of language and dialect is a defining aspect of his plays, greatly influencing his capacity to comment on societal structures, human conduct, and political issues. His deft use of language serves as a medium for humor, social critique, and philosophical discourse in addition to being a means of communication. Shaw's adept use of language is integral to both his dramatic style and his social critique. George Bernard Shaw's approach to theater is distinctive and multifaceted, combining language, wit, satire, and social commentary to create drama that is both highly academic and approachable. This can be seen in the comparison of stylistic aspects across his works. Shaw is dedicated to questioning established conventions and confronting the complexity of human conduct, as seen by his constant investigation of moral and social concerns through philosophy, theater, and comedy.

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