

Semantic analysis of George Bernard Shaw's *Candida*: A stylistic approach

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Abstract

G.B. Shaw is known for his discussion plays that provide ample scope for the stylistic interpretation. His characters are seldom mouthpieces, propagating his ideas. His irony and paradoxes can better be brought out through his skillfully woven dramatic language. Discourse analysis is a criterion that focuses on the linguistic structure of the dramatic dialogue. G.B. Shaw's plays, next in global fame to Shakespeare's, are unexhausted literature of discourses that have hardly been interpreted on their rich linguistic structure. Though more than fifty plays have been written by the noble laureate, *Candida* has restricted in the number of characters, but artistically valued much in its triangle discussion to deal with the characters' nobility and happiness; passion and reason. Thus, the play is a resourceful art to be explored with the spectacle of stylistics. Researchers have already been done in the speech act theory, irony and paradox and some other related topics on this particular play. This paper is an attempt in the stream to study of Shaw's *Candida* in the light of its semantic-stylistic value.

Keywords: semantic, lexical and stylistic analysis

Introduction

The word 'style' itself has no satisfactory definition as many language critics try to give their vague idea for the complex term Paul Simpson attempts to define:

'Style' a term that includes the whole armoury of rhetorical devices, phonetic and semantic with their larger structural extensions such as tragedy and comedy the function of style is to unify or at least encourage the reader to attempt to unify literature's disparate linguistic parts. As such it is the exact opposite of grammar, whose function is not primarily to unite but to divide. (Simpson)

Peter Barry states, "Stylistics is a critical approach which uses the methods and findings of the science of linguistics in the analysis of literary text". It focuses on the linguistic features such as grammatical structure, overall meanings and their effects. In recent times, it also explores the non-linguistic, Para-linguistic elements. In short, it is detailed analysis of verbal and non-verbal analysis of a literary work. Stylistics, unlike other recent theories, rejects the notion of shift in meaning and emphasizes definite meaning for the textual world under consideration." Linguists use their specialized knowledge not just to support existing readings but to establish new ones" says, Barry.

For example, feminist stylistics, cognitive stylistics and discourse stylistics, to name just three, are established branches of contemporary stylistics which have been sustained by insights from, respectively, feminist theory, cognitive psychology and discourse analysis (Sampson). It is believed that there is a huge difference between the identifying linguistic features in a text and the interpretation to be rendered. This hermeneutic (act of interpretation) gap may result in the poor stylistic study. This essential difference should be contemplated well in advance before the commencement of the study.

Sampson opines, "it is fair to say that contemporary stylistics ultimately looks towards *Language as Discourse*: that is,

towards a text's status as discourse, a writer's deployment of discourse strategies and towards the way a text 'means' as a function of language in context". Ring out the *Description* and the *Interpretation* of the technical aspects of a text is a prime duty of stylistics. It strongly believes in the doctrine that literature can be analyzed as it is 'universe of discourse' through language. The aim of the language in a literary work is not simply to amuse, induce or to regret but to transcend the conventional boundary to specialize in creativity.

Semantics deals with the interpretation of meaning in a text. It focuses on the sentences 'truth value'. Sometimes it covers the place of pragmatics. While semantics deals with the stable meaning of a language as a system and confined to the text in general, pragmatics liberally utilizes the system for communication to find meaning on particular occasions and context. Semantics has been classified with its different modes of interpretations. Grammatical, lexical, historical, formal, componential and cognitive are some of its interpretive approaches.

Semantic is commonly defined as that part of linguistics that deals with meaning. Either word meaning or sentence meaning is interpreted. In other words, it deals with lexis (words) and phraseology (fixed-combination of words). The study makes a simple attempt to interpret some of the semantic devices used in G.B.Shaw's *Candida* to highlight how the writer expresses his ideas with the use of his chosen words and phrases in a denotative or literal sense and how the semantics serve the purpose of the stylistics with its figurative and connotative interpretation of the sense of words and sentences.

Discussion

Candida deals with the question of women's independence in Victorian society. *Candida* is the loyal wife of the Reverend James Mavor Morell and she stands behind his success. The conflict in the plot arises from the arrival of a young poet, March banks, who falls in love with *Candida* and she is now to

decide whether to leave with him or continue to stay with her Morell. The main theme is Victorian love and marriage. It traces the real requirement of woman from her life.

The title *Candida* itself is a lexical unit to be interpreted before the semantic discussion. A.C. Ward opines that “the title gives a clue to the main purpose of Shaw’s life. Candida, unlike Jane, or Mary, or Ann, is not a common English name. It is made up from the adjective ‘candid’, meaning ‘frank’ or ‘truthful’ and to be frank and truthful concerning everything he wrote about was Shaw’s constant aim, just it was Candida’s aim in her dealing with her husband, the Reverend James Mavor Morell and their young friend, the poet, Eugene March banks”. (Shaw) it is seen through her nature that she is impartial and free from all prejudices. Therefore, the apt lexical choice further implies the concept of emerging ‘new woman’ of Shaw. It is called ‘charactonym’ in semantic analysis, where the name of the character is symbolic. In *Candida*, it is deliberately chosen by the playwright to evoke the picture of a frank, candid, straightforward person. She is innocent and pure, but intelligent and capable of looking after herself.

Contradiction

In semantic study, contradiction plays a pivotal role. Contradiction arises when incidents can be noticed in literary creation where characters contradict with lack of confidence with what they have asserted. The device of contradiction hangs audience/reader’s mind into puzzlement what they should believe or what not.

Self-contradictory statement

The neglecting of their own pronounced words and not sure about what they have done.

Morell: [quite at a loss] Yes. No, I don’t know what you mean. (Act II)

In self-contradictory statement, Morell is now shocked about the *Candida*’s perspective on March banks, because March banks once made a remark on the over-conscious work of Morell with respect to socialism and preaching. The same complaint was laid again by *Candida* against by *Candida* against Morell, which reflected in his distorted and confused verbiage in the above statement.

Candida: [with a guilty excess of politeness] Oh yes it’s very nice. Go on, Eugene. I’m longing to hear what happens to the angel. (Act III)

Again it is used in *Candida*’s travel from unconscious to conscious response, when she is in dilemma about her man’s decision that why he had left them both lonely. Yet, she pretended to be attentive by raising a query to March banks regarding the poem. The pretention is very much exhibited in the compensative and over enthusiastic lexis and phraseology such as ‘very nice’, ‘go on’ and ‘longing to hear’.

Identical Repetition

It is the same verbal group uttered by different characters to mean the same or different idea. They are identical in *form* either to mean the same idea or else *function* differently with each other. In this play, Shaw largely exploits this semantic device. For instance in the conversations between Morell and March banks

Morell: (looking sternly down at March banks) well?

March Banks: [Squatting cross-legged on the hearth-rug and actually at ease with Morell - even impishly humorous well? (Act III)

In identical repetition ‘*Well*’ is used to denote ambiguous and suspicious thought of Morell towards March banks and second one-‘*Well*’-is used again in positive perspective of March banks towards *Candida* that she never owes anything to March banks and they move in a cordial manner.

Symbol

One of the eminent ways that a writer employed to hide layers of meaning in his works is through the use of symbols. Katie Wales defines a symbol “as a sign whether visual or verbal, which stands for something else within a speech community”.

Morell: Yes: we have the same father—in Heaven. (Act I)

Here the symbol is very crystal clear that Morell is a great devotee to his religion that he never practices any partially including to his wife. Thus he mentioned father—in Heaven to Proserpine to show his fraternity and universal notion of love.

Morell: (rather shortly) I always keep my curates in their places as my helpers and comrades If you get as much work out of your clerks and warehousemen as I do out of my curates, you must be getting rich pretty fast. Will you take your old chair? (Act I)

In a symbolic way Morell is mocking the Burgess’s past life style as “Will you take your old chair?” When he earlier in the play mocked Morell that he” is privilege to be a bit of a fool, you know.” It further intimates the reader of the unconventional notions of Shaw who is an iconoclast in every respect. He simply took” old chair” as a symbol to represent that it is of little use to utility to the society at present. Here, the character, Morell acts as a mouthpiece of Shaw.

Figures of Speech

Through the use of figurative language, an author varies the basic literary language where words mean exactly what they are in dictionary. Figurative language invites reader to an imaginative thought to analyze the views of an author. This language is also referred as ornamental or jewel of literary language.

Anacoluthon

It is a stylistic device and is interruption within a sentence from one structure to another. In this interruption, the expected sequence of grammar is absent. Katie Wales’s dictionary of stylistics defines the term as “used in rhetoric and traditional grammar to refer to a grammatical sequence which begins in one way, and finishes in another”.

It is marked by a pause or dash. It is not necessary that the changes should be found in the structure. Sometimes they come from indistinct formulation or steeped emotion. Wales states “in longer and more complex sentences, from a failure perhaps to keep the whole construction intended in mind”. (Wales), it is used occasionally to deliver ‘a marked’ feeling. Simply to say, it is ‘inconsistency’.

Morell: When you last called—it was about three years ago, I think—you said The same thing a little more frankly (Act I). Your exact words then were:” just as big a fool as ever James?

Morell: How can you bear to do that whenoh, *Candida* (with

anguish in his? Voice) I had rather you had plunged a grappling iron into my heart than given me that kisses (Act II)

The change of stylistic structure is apparently understandable in the above example. This change in a sentence may occur to show the mental status of the speaker. He makes such statements due to the outburst of suppressed anger and the second one shows his distressed feeling with no interest to receive such a welcome kiss from Candida. The use of anacoluthon helps Shaw to cover the space to be travelled through contemplation. The second statement Shaw's use of this device helps him quit the irrelevant and vague flashbacks and instead, lay emphasis on the current agony of Morell.

Antonomasia

It is a literary term in which a descriptive phrase replaces a person's name. Antonomasia can range from lighthearted nicknames to epic names.

March Banks: I no longer desire happiness: life is nobler than that.

Parson James: I give you my happiness with both hands: I love you because you have filled the heart of the woman I loved. Good-bye (he goes towards the door). (Act III)

In the above example 'parson' is prefixed to James. Here, James pays reverence to March banks because his everlasting strength in securing and safeguarding the life of Candida attracts him. March banks further admire Morell's honesty for her surety, ability and industry for her livelihood, authority and position given for her dignity. The single word 'parson' is stated out to reverence and to reveal the transformed notions of March banks' ideals towards Morell.

Aposiopesis

It is a figure of speech in which the speaker abruptly leaves his speech at a dramatic moment as if he is overpowered by some emotion [fear, sad, happy, etc] or excitement and feels himself unable to complete his speech.

Morell: (impetuously) oh, bother your understanding! You've kept me Late for Candida (With compassionate fervor) my poor love: how did you manage about the luggage? How (Act I)

Here "how did you manage about the luggage? How" is incomplete with the *excitement* arrival of Candida to Morell. It is a sign of surprise that cannot be rendered through any verbal terms. Shaw does not wish to fill the dialogues with mushrooms of questions to indicate the great concern of Morell to Candida as Aposiopesis simply substitutes the inexplicable love possessed by Morell in his sudden dumb-found nature.

Correction

Correction is a figure of speech that makes amendment in a statement just produced by further detailing the meaning.

Burgess: (collapsing into an abyss of wounded feeling) Oh, well... Why are you so changed to me? I give you my word I come here in pyro (pure) friendliness ... (Act I)

The correction saves from misconception of meaning and leads to decipher the meaning properly with its full impact as in above example. The word 'pyorr' (pure) denotes its right phonetic accent. Shaw is always conscious of the right pronunciation and often drills his readers and actors in imparting the same as Higgins drills Eliza Doolittle in the play, *Pygmalion*. If the word, 'pure' is given plainly, it could have been articulated as

/p3:r/, therefore, to impart the right pronunciation /pjua/ through the usage pyorr, he consciously made the amendment.

Hyperbole

Hyperbole is a form of exaggeration, where a statement could be described in all heights. Abrams describes it as a "trope called hyperbole is a bold overstatement, or a extravagant exaggeration of factor or possibility, it may be used either for serious or ironic or comic effect". There is yet another definition from Grice, "hyperbole is a case of conversational implicature in which the first maxim of quality is flouted". (Galperin 1977)

March Banks: She offered me all I chose to ask for, her shawl, her wings, the wreath of stars on her head, the lilies in her hand, the crescent moon beneath her feet (Act III)

March banks exaggerates the tenderness of Candida through this device "She offered me all I chose to ask for, her shawl, her wings, the wreath of stars on her head, the lilies in her hand, the crescent moon beneath her feet" to abandon Morell's thoughts on refusal.

Shaw really achieves the credibility of the hyperbole as he begins with a common shawl to end in the supernatural crescent moon. Galperin says, "If the reader (listener) is not carried away by the emotion of the writer (speaker), hyperbole becomes a mere lie". The affection rendered to March banks by Candida is such that, even motherly, and right deserving all the praises.

Metonymy

Metonymy in literature refers to the practice of not using the formal word for an object or subject and instead referring to it by using another word. It is the practice of substituting the main word with a word that is closely linked to it. This is often traced through association.

Proserpine: (fretfully) its well you and I are not ladies and gentlemen: I'd talk to you pretty straight if a Mr. March bank wasn't here.....

Here... There, now I've spoiled this letter-have to be done all over Again Oh, I can't contain myself-silly old fathead! (Act II)

Candida: (reassured). Nonsense, papa. It's only poetic horror, isn't it? Eugene? (Act II) (Petting him)

The silly old fathead! Represent the stupidly and foolishness of Burgess by Proserpine. The March banks fear and darkness converted into *poetic horror* by Candida without knowing the real motives of March banks.

Paradox

The uniqueness of paradoxes lies in the fact that a deeper level of meaning and significance is not reverend at first glance but when it does crystallize, it provides astonishing insight:

March Banks: (turning to her). In a hundred years, we shall be the same age. But I have a better secret than that in my heart. Let me go now. The night outside grows impatient. (Act III)

The example exhibits the paradoxical implication in the two contradictory ideas 'Night' stands for stillness, quite and patient, while 'Impatient' is not the quality to be inherited by night as it is often a symbol of silence.

Periphrases

It is a stylistic device that can be defined as the use of excessive and longer words to convey a meaning which could have been

conveyed with a shorter expression or in a few words.

Morell: Yes, the lowest, because you paid worse wages than Any other employer-starvation wages-aye, worse than star Ovation wages-to the women who made the clothing your Wages would have driven them to the streets to keep.

Simile

Simile is one of the most important and widely used figures of speech. Chris Baldick defines, “comparison between different things, actions or feelings, using the words as or like”.

Morell: Scarlatina!—rubbish, German measles. I brought it into the house myself from the pycroft, street school a parson is like a doctor, my boy: he must face infection as a soldier must face bullets. (He rises and claps lexy on the shoulder) (Act I)

March banks we need it greatly and always. There are so many Things to make us doubt, if once we let our understanding be troubled. Even at home, we sit as if in camp, Encompassed by a hostile army of doubt (Act I)

In the above remarkable simile, the author compares ‘parson’ as a ‘soldier’ for facing infection like bullets and compares ‘home’ to a ‘camp’ to picture doubtful life. It is obviously a social criticism of Shaw. In his Arms and the Man, he announces war is a game of fools and soldiers are cowards. The inevitability of harsh criticism and sometimes death, confusion and hostility of a crowd are aptly compared using similes polished with the art of soldiering.

Zoomorphism

Zoomorphism includes the shaping of sometimes in animal form or terms. This word has been derived from the Greek origin *zoon*, meaning animal, and *morphic*, meaning shape or form.

Morell: (sitting down to have his laugh out). Why, my dear. Child Of course you do. Everybody loves her: they can’t help it. I like it. But (looking up whimsically at him) I say, Eugene: do you think yours is a case to be talked about? You’re under twenty: she’s over thirty. Doesn’t it look rather too like a case of calf love? (Act I)

March Banks: Misery! I am the happiest of men. I desire nothing now but her happiness (With dreamy enthusiasm) Oh, Morell let us both give her up. Why should she have to choose between a wretched little nervous disease like me, and a pig-headed parson like you? (Act II)

In both the examples human beings are related to the feeling and shape of the animals. The use of both ‘calf love’ and ‘a pig-headed’ takes the reader’s imagination to evaluate the relative behavioral state and attitude between man and animal.

To sum up, semantic study leads to the inner circle of meaning sketched by a literary writer. Audience/ reader have to decipher these semantic fields to visualize the complete image and intention of the writer. The semantic study of a work clarifies the treasure of devices that audience/reader has to search out to understand the mystery or to enjoy the aesthetic value of that work. Shaw’s plays are rich in its stylistic features. His semantic usages often enhance better understanding of the lexis and phraseology in his work. There is much scope for stylistic analysis in the works of Shaw. This is a little effort to bring out

some of the semantic devices employed in his works. It can be taken for higher level researches.

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