



Comparison and other “Modes of Order” in the plays of Bernard Shaw

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ABSTRACT

Bernard Shaw is widely regarded as one of the most important playwrights in the English language, ranking often second only to Shakespeare. This literary prominence, however, is not matched by a significant number of stylistic analyses, much more so in the case of linguistically-oriented ones. One of the few studies in Shaviana with a clear stylistic approach is Ohmann's (1962) monograph. However, it focuses on Shaw's non-dramatic writings and, due to its publication date, it does not utilize software tools for corpus stylistics. The purpose of this paper is to analyze Bernard Shaw's use of certain comparative structures in his dramatic writings (what Ohmann calls 'Modes of Order' in his book) with the aid of the technical and methodological advances of computer-based stylistics, thus utilizing an innovative outlook because of the combination of stylistics and corpora research.

KEYWORDS:

Bernard Shaw, drama, stylistics, corpus stylistics, syntax

RESUMEN

Bernard Shaw está considerado uno de los dramaturgos más importantes en lengua inglesa de la historia, quizá sólo superado por Shakespeare. El escaso caudal de análisis estilísticos no se corresponde con el calibre de sus obras, en especial por la práctica inexistencia de estudios de corte lingüístico. Una de las escasas excepciones es el libro de Ohmann (1962), si bien sólo se centra en las obras no dramáticas de Shaw y, debido a su fecha de publicación, no utiliza herramientas digitales de estilística de corpus. El propósito de este artículo es analizar el uso que hace Bernard Shaw de ciertas estructuras comparativas en su obra dramática (lo que Ohmann llama 'Modes of Order' en su monografía) con la ayuda de los avances técnicos y metodológicos de los estudios computacionales, empleando por tanto una perspectiva novedosa al sintetizar la estilística y la lingüística de corpus.

PALABRAS CLAVE:

Bernard Shaw, teatro, estilística, estilística de corpus, sintaxis

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1. INTRODUCTION

Computers have been a major global tool for the last few decades, and researchers around the globe, in every discipline, are aware of their potential. In the humanities, where computers are still a subsidiary tool for the most part, traditional processes such as writing, editing or printing cannot possibly be conceived without the aid of electronic devices. When it comes to corpora research, however, computers become the fundamental tool without which none of the advances in this area of linguistics would have been possible. Take, for instance, the unmanageable size of those concordance volumes that were written before the digital era. Not only did it take their authors a comparatively large amount of time and effort to compile them, but they are also impractical when it comes to looking for specific data¹. How much easier and quicker it is to carry out the same type of searches within a present-day digitized database.

Despite the key role that certain software tools² play in this type of research, the importance of computers is only rivalled by that of the researchers who, in the first place, envisioned the potential of a systematic and objective literary analysis. After all, some primitive corpora analysis was also done by Hugh of St Cher when he made a concordance to the Vulgate (c. 1290). Therefore, the scholarly interest is not new, although computers have undoubtedly brought about methodological changes insofar as they have been needed to perform certain tasks whose completion leads to further questions on the nature and goals of corpora research.

Richard Ohmann looks into literature from a CL perspective, if tentatively because of his entirely “manual” approach. Richard Ohmann’s PhD dissertation, published in 1962 as a monograph entitled *Bernard Shaw: The Style and the Man*, remains one of the major milestones in the history of *Shaviana*, and of stylistics in general. This is so because, first of all, he sets out to write this monograph at a time when “American and English criticism had no firm tradition of stylistic analysis” (Ohmann, 1962: xi). Furthermore, Ohmann’s analysis is far more structural than it was customary at the time. As he points out in his introduction, he presents a “discussion of his [*Shaw’s*] habitual patterns of thought and feeling” and “a search for lines of connection between rhetoric and conceptual scheme” (*ibid.*: xii). As a result of this ground-breaking approach, Ohmann performs many of the tasks that corpora analysts are accustomed to, which includes counting, sorting, sampling, and exemplifying.

This essay intends to review the first part of the first chapter of Ohmann’s book, entitled ‘Modes of Order’. In particular, the purpose of this paper is to analyze the role of all sorts of comparisons and comparative structures in Shavian dramatic discourse. These include superlatives, similes, stereotyped comparisons, and certain conditional expressions.

There are two key elements in my analysis, however, which differ from that of Ohmann’s: first, whereas he only analyzes Shaw’s non-dramatic writings, especially his essays, I will concentrate exclusively on Shaw’s plays. Secondly, the initial method of survey

will include computer-based corpora tools, a technical and methodological component that Ohmann’s study lacks. This study of Shaw’s dramatic language intends to describe some of the techniques through which Shaw fleshes out his dramatic skill, especially in his “theatre of ideas”.

2. METHOD

It seems necessary to make a couple of preliminary remarks on where this study stands within the broad framework of corpus stylistics before the mechanical aspects of its method are described. In this respect, this analysis is mainly qualitative (Schmied, 1993) in the sense that it is strongly driven by *apriori* categories that were already identified by Ohmann. This particular outlook provides a useful starting point for stylistics since, as McEnery and Wilson suggest (2001: 78)

Qualitative forms of analysis offer a rich and detailed perspective on the data. In qualitative analyses, rare phenomena receive, or at least ought to receive, the same attention as more frequent phenomena and, because the aim is complete detailed description rather than quantification, delicate variation in the data is foregrounded.

Because of this methodological peculiarity, the core of the analysis is essentially corpus-based, rather than corpus-driven. Thus, corpus data is utilized here for the purpose of validating, adjusting or refuting Ohmann’s claims, this time for Shaw’s dramatic works. It is worth reminding the reader that Ohmann’s claims were made “before large corpora became available to inform language study” (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001: 65). Therefore, in a more general sense, it may also be relevant to note that Ohmann’s study is primarily deductive insofar as he highlights certain modes of expression from the study of Shaw’s texts, thus drawing conclusions from an immanent analysis of Shavian in a “bottom-up” process. On the contrary, this essay contains results which are obtained by virtue of an inductive and somewhat aprioristic system, since the relevant linguistic units are already known and they are measured against the categories and stylistic notions that Ohmann puts forward.

However, regardless of the systematic comparison with Ohmann’s study, other general claims about Shaw’s dramatic style will be made in this essay, particularly in the light of some of the findings herein.

The actual method of analysis in this study begins, needless to say, with the building of a corpus. In this case, it has been necessary to digitize all of Shaw’s plays³. This is a particularly painstaking task due, among other reasons, to the playwright’s peculiar spelling conventions. As anyone familiar with the text of his plays knows, Shaw does not use an apostrophe in contracted forms such as “youve” (“you’ve”), “well” (“we’ll”), “theyre” (“they’re”), and the like. In addition, there are a few words that he systematically spells

differently, especially (notoriously, for some) the name of William Shakespeare (“Shakespear”), and other words such as show (“shew”) or sponge (“spunge”)⁴. Abbreviations like Mrs. or Mr. are not followed by a stop in Shaw’s plays, either.

Each of the plays is then saved in a single plain text file (i.e., with a .txt extension) so that they can be processed with the aid of Wordsmith Tools © software⁵. The mechanical part of the analysis consists in a Concord© search of the syntactic structures that Ohmann mentions explicitly in his study. These include kernels conventionally associated with similes, such as “as if”, “like the”, “like a/an”, “as the”, “as a/an”, “as * as⁶”, and “nothing but”. Conventional comparative expressions are also searched for, including any occurrence of “than”, superlative endings (“-est”) and keywords for superlative units (“[the] most”). Finally, the concordance search incorporates some other relevant words such as “would” and “should” (and their negative forms). In this respect, this is simply a re-creation of Ohmann’s study in Shaw’s plays, although there is a new inductive approach that stems from the corpus-based, qualitative analysis; as well as a global vision of these stylistic phenomena that can only be obtained from the quantitative overview that CL provides.

The above queries for key words and phrases return more than 12,000 hits⁷. However, there is some preliminary technical work necessary to discard those search results that do not meet the semantic and syntactic criteria to qualify as a comparative structure. As several expert linguists interested in literary analysis like Ullmann or Halliday (2002: 106) have remarked: “In stylistics we have both to count things and to look at them, one by one”.

To begin with, many of the terms that have been identified carry a different sense than expected, something that has happened fairly often with “like a/an” and “like the”, typically because “like” is very frequently used as a verb in similar contexts⁸:

MORELL. [...] No: I **like a** man to be true to himself, even in wickedness. [*Candida*]

JENNIFER [*to Ridgeon, politely*] So glad you **like the** pictures, Sir Colenso. Good morning. [*The Doctor’s Dilemma*]

It is relatively straightforward to reduce the number of occurrences of “like” as a verb in our concordance search. Basically, new searches are made which include a personal pronoun right as a context word before “like”. Likewise, other searches are made allowing for “do not”, “don’t” or “dont” (i.e., “do*”) up to two slots to the left of “like”. These account for the forms “I like the”, “I don’t like the”, and “I do not like the”, as well as for any other combination of a personal pronoun, “like”, and “the/a/an”, regardless of whether the verb is in the affirmative, negative or interrogative form. Those tokens can be then combined with the initial query, so that they are marked in the search results. This can be done by merging all the concordance files, and then removing duplicates. Those duplicates are automatically

highlighted in the search results, which makes it easy to ignore them⁹, thus reducing the number of results considerably¹⁰.

A great deal of concentration is also mandatory if certain overlapping structures are not to be counted twice. As it is easy to see, there are times when “like the” and “the most” belong to the same phrase, thus making up just one stylistic unit, as in the following from *Misalliance*:

LORD SUMMERHAYS. [*extricating his hands and sitting down*] Where on earth did you get these morbid tastes? You seem to have been well brought up in a normal, healthy, respectable, middle-class family. Yet you go on **like the most** unwholesome product of the rankest Bohemianism.

This type of drawback can also be solved by merging the files that contain the concordances of both “like the” and “the most”, thus highlighting duplicated occurrences. This also cuts down the overall figure of potential examples. In the rest of queries, duplicates are likewise removed from the search results by merging all the concordance files. The context horizon set for this study is 5 words either left or right, so that correlated examples are found within the speech of the same character or an adjacent turn, thus preserving all valid examples. For the case study of “as”, for example, the final outcome of merging all the search files yields a very manageable figure of 592 results¹¹.

Other problems arise because of the search options the software allows. For example, if punctuation is ignored, the computer will put together words from different sentences, hence yielding fictitious results. This produces –to use the terminology of communication theory– lots of unwanted noise. As you can see in the following extract from *Saint Joan*, there is no simile in what the computer recognizes as “like the”, because of the contiguity of those two words:

CHARLES. What is hell **like**?
THE SOLDIER. You wont find it so bad, sir. Jolly.

After the first query, punctuation is taken into consideration and the end of sentences is set as the landmark for halting multi-word searches.

There are certain limitations that may only be overcome with a completely re-designed corpus. For example, some of the search results include stage directions, which are also discarded in this study. Since the tagging of the Shavian text according to its source (whether a character’s speech or the author’s directions) is not part of the project so far, lines like the following one from *You Never Can Tell* are manually singled out and ignored¹²:

VALENTINE [*as if she had paid him the highest compliment*]. You overwhelm me, Mrs Clandon. Thank you.

There is another general stylistic caveat that must be considered when addressing literary analyses of texts from such different genres: the diversity of matter and style between Shaw's prose and his plays, especially in the area of language that concerns this study. Unless these differences are taken into consideration, any parallelism established between Ohmann's ideas and mine is bound to be biased and misleading.

Perhaps the most immediate difference between both genres¹³ is the fact that plays are conversational in nature, whereas in essays there exists typically only one speaker, and that speaker will usually hold the floor throughout the entirety of the text. In this respect, the entities or states that are being compared in dramatic discourse may originate in the minds of two different characters, which would potentially suggest a greater conceptual heterogeneity than in argumentative prose, where comparisons are usually –if not always– produced within the mental framework of the writer.

Another genre distinction that is worth commenting on is that of content. Although all Shavian texts are philosophically dense, plots and storylines are only to be found in the plays. Therefore, some of the comparative structures that will be found in them function as dramatic devices towards the development of the story, whereas they are exclusively argumentative devices elsewhere. In the case of his prose, especially in the pamphlets and speeches, there are no narrative constraints other than those necessary for the author's train of thought. This usually implies that abstract comparisons are relatively more abundant in non-dramatic texts.

There is another issue that cannot be neglected: the relationship between the plays and their respective prefaces. Tempting as it is to deal with plays and prefaces as “built of the same materials” and “products of the same moral and dramatic impulses” (Duba, 2005: 223), it is nonetheless also true that Shaw gradually recanted from this literary bond. This separation was also based on genre distinctions, because “the prefaces to my plays have nothing to do with the theatre” (Shaw, 1965: viii). It is therefore essential to look into the comparative structures found in the plays with eyes unbiased by the links conventionally acknowledged between Shaw's dramatic texts and his prefatorial works.

On the whole, the differences between plays and prose together with the different approaches of Ohmann's study and mine allows for a remarkably distinct type of analysis that is only nominally parallel to that of *The Style and the Man*.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section the role of comparative structures in Shaw's plays is compared to Ohmann's findings in his study about non-dramatic writings. Therefore, the reader will initially find two complementary results throughout the essay: On the one hand, a stylistic outline of Shaw's use of comparative structures and other ‘Modes of Order’ in his dramatic writings; on the

other, a contrastive analysis of these results and Ohmann’s. This, in turn, will offer a helpful assessment of the main differences between Shaw’s dramatic and non-dramatic writings as regards the syntactic structures analyzed herein. Furthermore, it will set up the necessary data on Shaw’s comparative discourse to facilitate additional insights on his dramatic style.

To begin with, the first conclusion that Ohmann draws is that Shaw’s knack for paradox and shocking statements is one of the reasons why he often employs these structures “to compare things that are in many ways quite disparate” (1962: 17). This is something that also happens in the plays, where many conflicting views are sketched by means of “disparate” comparisons. Take, for instance, these lines from *A Village Wooing*, in which rapturous infatuation is regarded as akin to lightning:

A. [...] An extraordinary delight and an **intense love** will seize us. It will last **hardly longer than the lightning flash** which turns the black night into infinite radiance. It will be dark again before you can clear the light out of your eyes; but you will have seen...

However, this way of creating new images by means of the comparison of unexpectedly analogous elements is far from being “a special use” (*ibid.*). On the contrary, it is one of the major stylistic features of Shaw’s dramatic style, in which these shocking comparative juxtapositions perform all sorts of dramatic functions. For instance, this is the key to some manifestations of political and philosophical didacticism in Shaw’s plays, because “the sugar that carried the propaganda pill down” (Purdom, 1956: 77) often takes the form of shocking comparisons that connect the most disparate ideas.

On some occasions, “disparate comparisons” are used to portray certain characters, a stylistic strategy which conveys much of the customary quickness of Shaw’s plays, as well as the ideological perspective of the character in question. A prototypical example would be Keegan, from *John Bull’s Other Island*, who constantly resorts to far-fetched comparisons for his conversational counter-attacks:

KEEGAN. [...] Well, perhaps I had better **vote for an efficient devil** that knows his own mind and his own business **than for a foolish patriot** who has no mind and no business

KEEGAN. In the accounts kept in heaven, Mr Doyle, **a heart purified of hatred** may be worth more even **than a Land Development Syndicate** of Anglicized Irishmen and Gladstonized Englishmen.

KEEGAN. Could you have told me this morning where hell is? Yet you know now that it is here. Do not despair of finding heaven: **it may be no farther off.**

Keegan can even take comparisons close to the boundaries of absurdity, regardless of the similarities between the entities that are being compared:

KEEGAN. [...] So when I felt sure of my vocation I went to Salamanca. Then I walked from Salamanca to Rome, an sted in a monastery there for a year. **My pilgrimage to Rome taught me that walking is a better way of travelling than the train; so I walked from Rome to the Sorbonne in Paris;** and I wish I could have walked from Paris to Oxford; for I was very sick on the sea.

The weighing of two apparently unconnected things is not the prerogative of specific characters. On the whole, this device is relatively common amongst Shaw's characters, particularly when sarcasm and satire¹⁴ are involved. Take, for example, the following passage from *Too True to Be Good*:

THE SERGEANT. Nothing to do with me! You dont know me, my lass. Some men would just order you off; but to me **the most interesting thing** in the world is the experience of a woman thats been shut up in a cell for years at a time with **nothing but** a Bible to read.

SWEETIE. Years! What are you talking about? **The longest** I ever did was nine months; and if anyone says I ever did **a day longer** she's a liar.

The Sergeant's condescending attitude towards Sweetie is blatant, to say the least. This attitude ironically pivots around the description of an otherwise dull period in Sweetie's life in the superlative degree of interest.

The stylistic usefulness that certain comparative absurdities may have for Shaw does not imply that he discards stereotyped comparisons altogether¹⁵. On the contrary, they are also a source of literary creativity when Shaw manages to create major estrangement effects because of the personal way in which he associates them with anomalous collocates. See, for example, a couple of actual occurrences of "as poor as a church mouse" in two different plays:

MRS HUSHABYE. [...] She is going to marry a perfect hog of a millionaire for the sake of her father, who is **as poor as a church mouse**; and you must help me to stop her. (*Heartbreak House*)

LADY BRITOMART. [...] Sarah will have to find at least another 800 pounds a year for the next ten years; and even then they will be **as poor as church mice**. (*Major Barbara*)

Whereas the first example from *Heartbreak House* is a perfectly conventional use of the phrase, because of the real financial issues that are driving Ellie to marry Mangan, the same does not apply to Lady Britomart's words. In the third act of *Major Barbara*, she is trying to convince her husband (Undershaft) to provide for her daughters (Sarah and Barbara), both of whom are engaged to men who do not meet Lady Britomart's expectations of success. In this scene, Lady Britomart's plea for financial support can be seen in a gloomily sarcastic way, given that it is only from her snobbish viewpoint that her daughters will be "poor as church

mice". Therefore, even stereotyped comparisons provide a fitting ground for creativity through the technique of juxtaposing apparently unconnected elements or situations.

These stereotyped comparisons also reveal themselves as a fruitful device in terms of phraseological creativity, because Shaw likes to distort the expectations of the audience/reader. In other words, Shaw often changes the canonical element that epitomizes the quality in question (i.e., the mouse in "as poor as a church mouse"). In addition, the new lexical element usually produces a synergic meaningful effect in the text, because it normally includes some specific reference to the dramatic situation. Take, for instance, the Devil's words in the third act of *Man and Superman*:

THE DEVIL. Well, he came here first, before he recovered his wits. I had some hopes of him; but he was a confirmed Life Force worshipper. It was he who raked up the Superman, **who is as old as Prometheus**; and the 20th century will run after this newest of the old crazes when it gets tired of the world, the flesh, and your humble servant.

In this dream act, "Don Juan in Hell", The Devil is a remarkably irreverent character who plays on several aspects of the afterlife folklore at every opportunity. Most of these playful turns of phrase bring to our attention the importance of Mephistophelean images in western civilization, like when The Devil finds it "a high compliment" that people "use my name to secure additional emphasis" after The Statue had apologized for saying "Why the devil..."¹⁶. With this in mind, it is hardly surprising that The Devil should use his own particular phrase to define extreme oldness ("as old as Prometheus") instead of the canonical "as old as the hills". It is clear that in this dramatic setting the figure of the mythological titan fits this comic, yet philosophically dense third act.

To finish with Shaw's use of disparate comparisons, the summit of this device can be witnessed when characters, plot and stylistic motifs come together in a climactic scene whose dialogues pivot around these innovative structures. That is clearly the case in these lines from *Pygmalion*:

LIZA. Oh, indeed. Then what are we talking about?
 HIGGINS. About you, not about me. If you come back I shall **treat you just as I have always treated you**. I can't change my nature; and I don't intend to change my manners. My manners are exactly the same as Colonel Pickering's.
 LIZA. That's not true. **He treats a flower girl as if she was a duchess**.
 HIGGINS. **And I treat a duchess as if she was a flower girl**.
 LIZA. I see. [*She turns away composedly, and sits on the ottoman, facing the window*]. The same to everybody.
 HIGGINS. Just so.
 LIZA. **Like father**.
 HIGGINS [*grinning, a little taken down*] **Without accepting the comparison** at all points, Eliza, it's quite true that your father is not a snob, and that he will be quite at home in any station of life to which his eccentric destiny may call him. [*Seriously*] The great secret, Eliza, is not having bad manners or good manners or any other particular sort of

manners, but **having the same manner for all human souls: in short, behaving as if you were in Heaven**, where there are no third-class carriages, and **one soul is as good as another**.

This is only one of the many cases in which Shaw's use of comparative structures significantly surpasses the techniques outlined by Ohmann, which justifies the additional stylistic remarks that accompany the primary parallel analyses.

Another form of employing comparisons which is interesting for Ohmann from a stylistic point of view is Shaw's appeal to readers "to compare and find similar not two things but the extent to which two things share a certain quality" (1962: 18). The linguistic structure that Ohmann typically associates with this use of comparison is "no more ____ than"¹⁷. According to Ohmann (*ibid.*), "the second term in each comparison is more obviously absurd than the first, and therefore carries the first down to its level of plausibility". Indeed, similar structures with similar functions can be found in Shaw's plays, as in the Teacher's words to Youth 2 trying to explain how the stories of ancient texts frame our thought:

TEACHER. I believe nothing. But there is the same evidence for it as for anything else that happened millions of years before we were born. It is so written and recorded. As I can neither witness the past nor foresee the future I must take such history as there is as part of my framework of thought. **Without such a framework I cannot think any more than a carpenter can cut wood without a saw.** (*Farfetched Fables*)

Most often, however, the dramatic corpus shows that this type of comparative structure does not rely on assimilating absurdity and plausibility, but rather on eradicating conventional conceptions by contrasting two totally sensible concepts that would seem incompatible in the eyes of the majority of the audience. This technique accounts for much of Shaw's universally acknowledged wit:

RIDGEON. Yes. Life does not cease to be funny when people die **any more than** it ceases to be serious when people laugh. (*The Doctor's Dilemma*)

GUNNER. [...] The strength of a chain is **no greater than** its weakest link; **but the greatness of a poet is the greatness of his greatest moment**. Shakespear used to get drunk. Frederick the Great ran away from a battle. But it was what they could rise to, not what they could sink to, that made them great. (*Misalliance*)

Notwithstanding the argumentative¹⁸ function of these "negative" comparisons, they also serve the purpose of characterization equally well. Tanner describes his own ethical system to Ann with an identical structure:

TANNER. [...] Up to that time you had traded pretty extensively in being a good child; but you had never set up a sense of duty to others. Well, I set one up too. Up to that time I had played the boy buccaneer with **no more conscience than a fox in a poultry farm**. (*Man and Superman*)

The line between characterization by means of comparison and humor is certainly a thin one, as Tanner himself demonstrates when he makes use of a parallel structure to warn Octavius about the threats that family life poses for his source of inspiration (Ann):

TANNER. Well, hadn't you better get it from her at a safe distance? Petrarch didn't see half as much of Laura, nor Dante of Beatrice, as you see of Ann now; and yet they wrote first-rate poetry--at least so I'm told. They never exposed their idolatry to the test of domestic familiarity; and it lasted them to their graves. **Marry Ann and at the end of a week you'll find no more inspiration than in a plate of muffins.**

Ohmann also argues that Shaw sometimes makes it "possible to play on the similarity dimension indirectly, by pointing to an *inequality*, and Shaw's superlative and comparative forms belong to the same stylistic cluster as the locutions of equality" (1962: 18). This is to imply that "any of these forms throws similarity into relief, whether by raising it or by depressing it" (*ibid.*). In my opinion, there is much to say about the different forms and functions of these manifestations of inequality, so I don't agree with Ohmann's claim that "Shaw's use of the comparative and superlative degrees hardly needs documentation" (*ibid.*). For one thing, their conceptual intensity –particularly in the case of the superlative degree– allows for powerful semantic enjambments in the vein of Shaw's paradoxical language. Such method is particularly appropriate for Shaw's didactic ideal of "startling the public out of its bland complacency" (Henderson, 1911: 305). Much the same happens in the following exchange from *A Village Wooing*:

Z. I speak **for your good**.

A. [*rising wrathfully*] **The most offensive liberty one human being can possibly take with another. What business is it of yours?**

On some occasions, still, the superlative degree of comparison does not assist intellectual argumentation or moralistic propaganda. Certain dramatic events not acted on stage can be gauged by the audience from its depiction by superlative structures and other intensifying devices. The following lines from *The Philanderer* illustrate this point:

CHARTERIS (rising indignantly). You ungenerous wretch! Is this your gratitude for the way I have just been flattering you? What have I not endured from you--endured with angelic patience? Did I not find out, before our friendship was a fortnight old, that all your advanced views were merely a fashion picked up and followed like any other fashion, without understanding or meaning a word of them? Did you not, in spite of your care for your own liberty, **set up claims on me compared to which the claims of the most jealous wife would have been trifles.** Have I a single woman friend whom you have not abused as old, ugly, vicious--

Charteris's complaints are directed towards Julia for her jealousy, but the cause of his distress is only revealed through his words, since this is the first scene in which we actually see Charteris and Julia together on stage. Julia's jealousy and the troubles in her relationship

with Charteris are partially depicted through the excessive semantic quality of a few lexemes (ungenerous, wretch, endure, abused, old, ugly, vicious). By contrast, Charteris applies opposite concepts to himself (flattering, angelic patience). Despite all this, a great deal of the dramatic strength of the scene stems from the deft use of two different degrees of comparison. These syntactic structures avoid a direct mention of the extent of Julia's jealousy, and yet they deliver a perfect mental image of it.

I must also bring to the reader's attention the different forms that the superlative degree of the adjective may take; forms that may not have been considered beforehand. Take, for instance, the scene in which Blanco interrogates Feemy, a witness in Blanco's trial, in *The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet*:

BLANCO. I was on a horse, was I?

FEEMY. Yes you were; and if you deny it you're a liar.

BLANCO [*to Strapper*] **She saw a man on a horse when she was too drunk to tell which was the man and which was the horse--**

FEEMY [*breaking in*] You lie. I wasn't drunk--at least **not as drunk as that.**

The first thing to notice is the use of the "too + adjective + to + verb" structure, which is another superlative variant that had not been considered from the outset¹⁹. The comic and conceptual power of this mode of expression, however, is undeniable. First, because it involves the repetition of all the key lexical elements of the conversational interchange ("man", "horse", "drunk"). In addition, the gradation in the successive use of two different comparative structures by two different characters illustrates the wide-ranging stylistic potential of these expressions.

Finally, Ohmann finds that "the evocation of similarity takes still other shapes that are both less classifiable according to form and less clearly associated with comparison" (1962: 19). For example, conditionals such as "would"²⁰ or "should" are grammatical forms that can also be linked with the comparative mode, because they "usually make an implicit juxtaposition of an actual state of affairs with one to be imagined" (1962: 20)²¹. This is perhaps the type of comparison whose function runs closest in both dramatic and non-dramatic texts. This is especially so in the so-called Discussion Plays²², where Shaw's didacticism questions the conventional ideas of the audience by contrasting them with hypothetical and sometimes utopian counterparts in drama. These philosophical challenges also illuminate the dramatic setting, especially when the historical background is judged against a hypothetical course of events, whether realistically or anachronistically. Take, for instance, Valentine's ideas about the sort of girl who would resist his advances, which is also a general reflection on the liberation of women, a common motif in *You Never Can Tell*:

VALENTINE. The thoroughly old fashioned girl. If you had brought up Gloria in the old way, **it would have taken me eighteen months** to get to the point I got to this afternoon in eighteen minutes. Yes, Mrs. Clandon: the Higher Education of Women delivered Gloria into my hands [...]

This passage presents some ironical remarks on the values and ideas of "the modern woman" when courted by a man whose methods "are thoroughly modern". The discursive function of this type of conditional comparison may also take the form of social denunciation in this play, as in the following conversation between Blanche and Sartorius:

SARTORIUS. No, my dear: of course not. But do you know, Blanche, that my mother was a very poor woman, and that her poverty was not her fault?

BLANCHE. I suppose not; but the people we want to mix with now dont know that. And it was not my fault; so I dont see why *I* should be made to suffer for it.

SARTORIUS [enraged] Who makes you suffer for it, miss? **What would you be now** but for what your grandmother did for me when she stood at her wash-tub for thirteen hours a day and thought herself rich when she made fifteen shillings a week?

BLANCHE [angrily] I suppose **I should have been down on her level instead of being raised above it**, as I am now.

The conflicting views these two characters sustain are beyond the scope of this essay. However, they carry much stylistic weight because they both resort to conditional modals to conform their pleas. This suggests that the popular opinion amongst many critics that Shavian characters are only fictional *alter egos* of the dramatist cannot possibly be accurate. If these characters were Shaw's puppets, their conflicting views would not be portrayed with similar techniques, regardless of which character gets the dialectic upper hand.

There are other instances of these conditional phrases that do not cover the implied ideology of the play, but rather that of a single character. This is another form of characterization that can also be accounted for by the use of hypothetical comparative structures. Take, for instance, The Clergyman's expression of his natural apprehension in *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles*:

THE CLERGYMAN. Oh yes: I wish I hadnt. It tortures me. You know, **I should have enjoyed being a pirate's chaplain sometimes if it hadnt been for my terrible conscience**. It has made my life one long remorse; for I have never had the strength of mind to act up to it.

This mode of expression highlights the character's meekness, a condition that is to be found everywhere else throughout the play, especially when the twin sisters Maya and Vashti overpower him with their mischievous sensual appeal.

Sometimes the ideological force of these contrasting parallelisms does not rest entirely on a single character, but on a group of characters who personify a particular mindset. In *Saint*

Joan the religious and political leaders who oppose Joan search for every possible canonical alternative to make their case for Joan's prosecution:

THE CHAPLAIN. But some of the most important points have been reduced almost to nothing. For instance, The Maid has actually declared that the blessed saints Margaret and Catherine, and the holy Archangel Michael, **spoke to her in French. That is a vital point.**

THE INQUISITOR. You think, doubtless, that **they should have spoken in Latin?**

CAUCHON. No: he thinks **they should have spoken in English.**

THE CHAPLAIN. Naturally, my lord.

It seems quite clear that both the cause they choose to plot against Joan and the ideal canonical alternatives they suggest become a source of derisive criticism against the prosecutors of the Maid of Orleans, and the legal tactics they employed²³. It should be obvious by now that characterization is one of the strictly dramatic functions of comparative structures that Ohmann could not possibly have thought of when considering Shaw's essays.

Humor, as with the rest of comparative structures, is closely connected with the use of conditionals, which explains why stylistically loaded expressions are more likely to be found in comedies. Usually, the mental image evoked by a hypothetical condition strengthens the mocking spirit of a remark. In *Too True to Be Good*, Sweetie employs such conditionals to laugh at Aubrey's squeamishness: "SWEETIE. You're dainty, arnt you? If chambermaids were as dainty as you, **you'd have to empty your own slops**".

Despite the emphasis that this essay has tried to place on the role of comparative structures and other "modes of order" in Shaw's dramatic discourse, these units have been neglected for the most part. Their importance, however, is far from being peripheral to Shaw's stylistic prowess. We must not forget that some of the plays are synthesized by means of similes that encapsulate their essence. That is conspicuously the case in *Press Cuttings*, where Balsquith and Mitchener cynically summarize the social and political ordeals they had to undergo, thus:

BALSQUITH [...] [*To Mitchener*] The moral of the occasion for you, Mitchener, appears to be that you've got to give up **treating soldiers as if they were schoolboys.**

MITCHENER. The moral for you, Balsquith, is that you've got to give up **treating women as if they were angels.** Ha ha!

The multifold stylistic potential of "modes of order", as well as their ubiquitous nature, throws into relief the relevance of these linguistic structures for any comprehensive appraisal of Shaw's dramatic discourse. If the culmination of some of Shaw's plays depends on comparative expressions, it can be said that a study of their dramatic function, like this one, was clearly in order.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Some general ideas that derive from this study have already been discussed in the previous section, especially the systematic comparison of Ohmann's findings and my own results. However, if we are to pinpoint the main aspects in which this particular study helps to cast some light on Shaw's use of comparative structures, there are certain elements that cannot be missed.

To begin with, the sheer figures²⁴ provide an illuminating approximation to the importance these units have in Shaw's dramatic style. A basic concordance study confirms the notion that Shaw is equally prone to argumentative structures –including, but not limited to, comparisons– in his dramatic writings as in his essays, which demonstrates that comparative structures are deeply embedded in the author's writing skills.

In fact, the mere technical development of this study provides valuable insights on the analyzed stylistic phenomena. For instance, when the large number of duplicates is simplified by merging different concordance searches, an intricate network of interrelated terms becomes visible. One concludes, therefore, that Shaw does not rely on one particular structure to create comparative passages.

As far as characterization is concerned, despite the fact that stylistic analysis already shows that it is closely connected with comparisons, corpus research makes available quantitative data regarding the use of comparative structures by each individual character. These data allows researchers to map Shavian characters according to these linguistic units, thus facilitating further analysis in terms of argumentative force, hierarchical dramatic position, and so on.

In a corpus-based qualitative study such as this one, corpora research reveals curious patterns when making generalizations about particular phenomena. For instance, certain stereotyped comparisons rank particularly high amongst Shaw's favorites. Our knowledge about these phraseological patterns pinpoints certain stylistic and argumentative areas of Shavian dramatic discourse.

Finally, corpora also serve the function of using statistics to challenge claims that are only supported by impressionistic insights. For example, whereas "should" and "would" are only considered by Ohmann "odd" allies of other modes of order whose comparative function "can be argued" (1962: 20), corpora research shows that they are the numerically predominant units, not only in absolute terms, but also in the productivity of their combinations with other structures studied herein. Furthermore, they perform the widest variety of stylistic functions and they are used by Shaw very flexibly to connect his train of thought with the hypothetical sociopolitical changes that he wishes to facilitate. Likewise, the ubiquitous nature of the superlative degree of comparison speaks volumes about Shaw's dialectic dramatic force, by virtue of which his characters always seem to be right from their respective points of view (Shaw, 1965: 160).

NOTES

1. This is one of the reasons why traditional concordances usually consider only key words, often in memorable contexts. The difficulty of compiling a concordance also means that only a few books have been considered worthy of the effort, mainly sacred texts. For further information on the history of concordances, especially in English, see Burton (1981). As far as size is concerned, Aysough's concordance of Shakespeare's plays (1790), for instance, has roughly 1800 pages of user-unfriendly data in simple charts that cannot be contrasted other than manually. Much the same can be said of contemporary efforts in traditional concordances. *The Catholic Bible Concordance for the Revised Standard Version* (2009) is another bulky volume (well over 2000 pages) that requires an archaeologist's skills for sorting data.
2. These include simple word processors, digital concordances, database interfaces or corpora tools specifically designed for linguistic analysis, such as ConcGram © or Wordsmith Tools ©. There exist certain meta-tools that help researchers compile, compare and annotate corpora (Wmatrix ©).
3. Virtually the whole of Shaw's dramatic production has been used to create this corpus of plays. A few of the so-called playlets, however, have been left out. In order to facilitate the replicability of this section of empirical work, an exhaustive list of the plays in the corpus follows (in alphabetical order): *The Admirable Bashville, Androcles and the Lion, Annajanska, The Apple Cart, Arms and the Man, Augustus Does His Bit, Back to Methuselah, Beauty's Duty, Buoyant Billions, Caesar and Cleopatra, Candida, Captain Brassbound's Conversion, Cymbeline Refinished, The Dark Lady of the Sonnets, The Devil's Disciple, The Doctor's Dilemma, Fanny's First Play, Farfetched Fables, The Fascinating Foundling, Geneva, Getting Married, The Glimpse of Reality, In Good King Charles's Golden Days, Great Catherine, Heartbreak House, How He Lied to Her Husband, The Inca of Perusalem, The Interlude at the Playhouse, John Bull's Other Island, Major Barbara, Man and Superman, The Man of Destiny, The Millionairess, Misalliance, Mrs Warren's Profession, The Music-Cure, O'Flaherty, V.C. , On the Rocks, Overruled, Passion, Poison and Petrification, The Philanderer, Press Cuttings, Pygmalion, Saint Joan, Shakes Versus Shav, The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet, The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles, The Six of Calais, Too True to Be Good, A Village Wooing, Why She Would Not, Widowers' Houses, and You Never Can Tell.*
4. One of the reasons behind these spelling peculiarities is Shaw's interest in phonetics and spelling as scientific disciplines. That is why he always advocated for the spelling reform of the English in an attempt to turn it into a more phonetic language. The importance of phonetics in the works of Bernard Shaw cannot be overstated since, in his own words, if you "rule out phonetics, the spelling of 'programme' remains neither an irrational spelling nor an anomalous one: it is simply a French spelling; and the sole objection to it is that in English it is unphonetic; and leads the people who have never heard it pronounced to say programmy, and the people who have never seen it written to write program, and be humiliated and snubbed by the empty uppish" (Tauer/Shaw, 1965: 13).
5. For those readers who are not familiar with this set of software tools, I suggest they read the user's manual, available online at <http://www.lexically.net/downloads/version5/HTML/index.html> For the purpose of this essay, it suffices to say that there exist three different tools (Concord, KeyWords and Wordlist) whose names are, I should say, self-explanatory.
6. The asterisk denotes any word token may appear in between both words.
7. Virtually the whole of Shaw's dramatic production has been used to create this corpus of plays. See Appendix for further numerical data.
8. All excerpts from Shaw's plays have been quoted from the Dodd, Mead & Co. Edition (Six volumes, 1962). I have highlighted some phrases in bold to direct readers to the specific linguistic segments analyzed in the main text.
9. All the search options described in this essay are available in the WordSmith © Suite.
10. See Appendix for a comparison between the raw figures of concordance hits at the outset of the study and after the appropriate search refinements.
11. This procedure is repeated with the six most productive searches of the corpus ("as", "most", "like", "than", "should" and "would"). See Appendix.

12. The Sagittarius ORION Bernard Shaw Digitizing Project already has a powerful, searchable database with the digitized works of Bernard Shaw. Though it is still a pilot project, it continues to grow and improve at a swarming speed with “annotated texts, an annotated bibliography, contextual materials, reference materials, contemporary reviews, a curriculum, quizzes and activities, custom-made videos, a concordance, a search engine and YouTube videos” (Li, 2011: 208). Its web version (<http://shaw.yorku.ca>), however, can only be accessed from a Canadian IP, due to different copyright restrictions in Canada and elsewhere. As soon as Bernard Shaw enters the public domain worldwide in 2020, the Sagittarius project will surely facilitate (*ibid.*: 207) “new forms of online research networks”, “new levels of cross-cultural encounters and new means of collaboration between scholars and publishers”.
13. I am aware of the naivety of including all of Shaw’s prose in one single genre, because his non-dramatic writings include novels, pamphlets, prefaces, speeches, letters, and all sorts of essays. The same can be said of his plays. As Berst notes (1973: 294) “A considerable diversity in matter and method separate them [*the plays*]. Each develops in a distinctive context and idiom, from domestic comedy and romance to social drama and epic tragicomedy, from farce and parody to irony and allegory”. Nevertheless, this simple dichotomy serves the contrastive approach of this study.
14. The comparative expressions that put together unlikely semantic entities are no doubt one of the reasons why Keegan is described as having a “peculiar vein of humor”.
15. For example, Shaw employs the expression “as hard as nails” five times in five different plays (*You Never Can Tell*, *Mrs Warren’s Profession*, *Man and Superman*, *Heartbreak House*, and *John Bull’s Other Island*).
16. In the extract reproduced here, The Devil once again distorts the traditional literature about evil and sin when he adapts the quotation from the Book of Common Prayer (“from all the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil, Spare us, good Lord”) and puts the reference to the devil in the first person (“your humble servant”).
17. Like Shaw’s famous quip “A **vegetarian is not** a person who lives on vegetables, **any more than** a Catholic is a person who lives on cats”.
18. I think this is as good a time as any other to separate Shaw’s art of language from his philosophical and political thinking. Some of his characters do so in his plays by using the same negative comparisons that have been discussed so far. Marchbanks sums up the point in *Candida*, thus: [“MORELL (*Stung*). Marchbanks: you make it hard for me to control myself. My talent is like yours insofar as it has any real worth at all. It is the gift of finding words for divine truth. / MARCHBANKS (*impetuously*). It’s the gift of the gab, nothing more and nothing less. What has your knack of fine talking to do with the truth, **any more than** playing the organ has?]
19. The sequence “not as drunk as that” led me to explore the surrounding text.
20. From the point of view of computer-based corpora research, there is a caveat in the study of conditional expressions with “would” that must be taken into consideration: Very often the conditional auxiliary is abbreviated as “d” at the end of the corresponding word. The missing apostrophe makes these units even harder to identify, because some of the most common combinations may also be a perfectly spelt word (think of “wed”, for example). Due to these orthographic shortcomings, it is sometimes useful to resort to common search words that would appear in a conditional context. These words would include, amongst others, “rather”, “sooner”, and “only”.
21. Given the structural nature of this study, I have chosen not to look into other shapes the “evocation of similarity” may take, because they do not fall into common syntactic or phraseological patterns.
22. This is a term Shaw developed in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* to describe Ibsen’s habit of relying much of the dramatic weight to conversationally dense scenes. However, the term fits Shaw’s art of drama equally well, since it was Shaw who introduced this “theater of ideas” to the English stage. For further discussion on the topic, see Innes (1998).
23. This is another episode of historical revisionism –one of Shaw’s favorite habits- which contains some truth, as usual. According to most sources, Joan’s international prestige obliged the prosecutors to proceed with extreme caution throughout the trial. For instance, although initially “she was asked to respond to seventy articles of accusation; these were reduced to twelve,

submitted to experts for counsel, and after another round of consultation with the faculties of theology and canon law at the university of Paris, brought against Joan” (Hobbins, 2005: 4).

24. Although Ohmann does not present a comparable data chart in his book, there are two appendices to *The Style and the Man* where the reader finds a sample of word counts (adjectives), as well as additional examples of the selected linguistic structures.

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APPENDIX

| WORD OR PHRASE | OCCURRENCES (INITIAL QUERY) | OCCURRENCES (REFINED QUERY) |
|------------------------|--|---|
| Like the | 164 | 492 results are left for "like" together with any of the other words or phrases analyzed here, as described in the Method section. The rest of figures in this column account for the same procedure. |
| Like a/an | 491 [like a]/48 [like an] | |
| As if | 372 | 592 |
| As the | 311 | |
| As a/an | 748 [as a]/98 [as an] | |
| As <u>[word]</u> as | 738 | |
| Nothing but | 181 | |
| than | 1591 | 216 |
| -est [words ending in] | 2760 | |
| [The] most | 695 [out of which 280 correspond to the exact phrase "the most"] | 117 |
| Would/wouldn't | 2577 | 442 |
| Should/shouldn't | 1748 | 320 |
| TOTAL: | 12522 | GROSS TOTAL: 2179 COMBINATION OF ALL SIX REFINED CONCORD FILES: 2108 (71 DUPLICATES REMOVED) |