

# CATCHPHRASES AND CHARACTERIZATION IN BERNARD SHAW'S PLAYS: A CORPUS-BASED STUDY

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# INTRODUCTION

- Bernard Shaw as a prolific playwright.
  - Intertwinement with his political, religious, and philosophical thoughts.
  - Drama of ideas – Discussion Plays.
  - Tendency to use idiomatic language.
  - Characterization through words, not action.
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# THE CORPUS

- 55 plays (out of 62 plays and 'playlets'). Roughly 1,000,000 words.
  - Not included: *Jitta's Atonement*, *Cymbeline Refinished*, *The Admirable Bashville*, most playlets.
  - One .txt file per play. No lemmas or tags.
  - Longest play: *Back to Methuselah* (83,271)
  - Shortest play: *Shakes versus Shav* (965 words)
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# THE METHOD

- Wordsmith Tools © v. 6.0
  - Wordlist (Index) – One wordlist per play – One index per play.
  - Compute clusters:
    - Cluster size – 3 to 6 words.
    - Cluster minimum frequency – 4 occurrences.
  - 29 plays contain clusters associated with a particular character.
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# INDICES

index file: index\_file

File Edit View Compute Settings Windows Help

N	Word	Freq.	%	Texts	%	Lemmas	Set
1	THE	1.049	4,41	1	100,00		
2	YOU	682	2,87	1	100,00		
3	TO	584	2,46	1	100,00		
4	I	581	2,44	1	100,00		
5	AND	549	2,31	1	100,00		
6	A	540	2,27	1	100,00		
7	OF	516	2,17	1	100,00		
8	IT	319	1,34	1	100,00		
9	HE	318	1,34	1	100,00		
10	THAT	296	1,25	1	100,00		
11	RAINA	289	1,22	1	100,00		
12	IN	270	1,14	1	100,00		
13	WITH	267	1,12	1	100,00		
14	IS	263	1,11	1	100,00		
15	HER	256	1,08	1	100,00		
16	HIS	204	0,86	1	100,00		
17	ME	202	0,85	1	100,00		
18	SERGIUS	197	0,83	1	100,00		
19	AT	189	0,80	1	100,00		
20	HIM	186	0,78	1	100,00		
21	SHE	186	0,78	1	100,00		

# CLUSTERS

index file: index\_file

File Edit View Compute Settings Windows Help

N	Word	Freq.	%	Texts	%	Lemmas	Set
1	I DON T	19	0,08	1	100,00		
2	GOES TO THE	14	0,06	1	100,00		
3	DO YOU KNOW	10	0,04	1	100,00		
4	THERE IS A	10	0,04	1	100,00		
5	DON T KNOW	9	0,04	1	100,00		
6	ON THE OTTOMAN	9	0,04	1	100,00		
7	THAT S THE	9	0,04	1	100,00		
8	DOWN ON THE	8	0,03	1	100,00		
9	I SHALL BE	8	0,03	1	100,00		
10	YOU DON T	8	0,03	1	100,00		
11	DEAR YOUNG LADY	7	0,03	1	100,00		
12	DON T BE	7	0,03	1	100,00		
13	HE SITS DOWN	7	0,03	1	100,00		
14	THE TOP OF	7	0,03	1	100,00		
15	THE TOP OF THE	7	0,03	1	100,00		
16	TO THE DOOR	7	0,03	1	100,00		
17	TOP OF THE	7	0,03	1	100,00		
18	YOU ARE A	7	0,03	1	100,00		
19	A COUPLE OF	6	0,03	1	100,00		
20	CHEST OF DRAWERS	6	0,03	1	100,00		
21	DOWN ON THE OTTOMAN	6	0,03	1	100,00		
22	I AM NOT	6	0,03	1	100,00		
23	I HOPE YOU	6	0,03	1	100,00		

# THE RESULTS

- Types of clusters (catchphrases) from the point of view of characterization:
    - Personality
    - Ideology.
    - Diction.
    - Relationship with other characters.
    - Situation in the play.
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# CATCHPHRASES: PERSONALITY

Philip (*You Never Can Tell*):

- PHILIP (maturely). No, Dolly: my knowledge of human nature confirms...
- PHILIP. I doubt it. My knowledge of human nature leads me to believe that...
- PHILIP. [...] and I don't think, judging from my knowledge of human nature...
- PHILIP. [...] Now my knowledge of human nature leads me to believe that...
- PHILIP. [...] Trust my knowledge of human nature.
- PHILIP. My knowledge of human nature is fairly extensive, Mr. McComas...
- PHILIP. [...] My knowledge of human nature teaches me not to expect too much.



# CATCHPHRASES: PERSONALITY

Augustus (*Augustus Does His Bit*):

- AUGUSTUS. What! You mean to tell me that when the lives of the gallant fellows in our trenches...
- AUGUSTUS. Our gallant fellows are dying in the trenches; and you want a rise!
- AUGUSTUS. [...] Think how our gallant fellows are suffering in the trenches!
- AUGUSTUS. [...] You make bets and abuse the confidence of the hardworked officials who are doing their bit for their country whilst our gallant fellows are perishing in the trenches—

# CATCHPHRASES: IDEOLOGY

Spintho (*Androcles and the Lion*)

- SPINTHO. What does it matter? If you die in the arena, you'll be a martyr; and all martyrs go to heaven, no matter what they have done. That's so, isn't it, Ferrovius?
- SPINTHO. What's the good of praying? If we're martyred we shall go to heaven, shan't we, whether we pray or not?
- SPINTHO. I'll repent afterwards. I fully mean to die in the arena I'll die a martyr and go to heaven.

# CATCHPHRASES: IDEOLOGY

Mrs Hyering (*The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles*)

- THE Y. W. Dont ask yourself anything, my child. Let life come to you. March.
- THE Y. W. Well, let life come to you I always say; and dont cry out until youre hurt.
- THE Y. W. [...] I always say let life come to you; and dont bother about religion.
- THE Y. W. Thats right. Let life come to you, I always say.
- THE Y. W. [...] Well, let yourself rip. Let life come to you.
- THE Y. W. [...] I always say let life come to you; but here it's coming a bit too thick for me.
- MRS HYERING. Buck up, Mr Hammingtap. Let life come to you.
- MRS HYERING. Thats right, Mr Hammingtap: let life come to you.
- MRS HYERING. Well, stick to the enchantment while it lasts. Let life come to you.
- MRS HYERING. Dont let that conscience of yours worry you. Let life come to you.

# CATCHPHRASES: DICTION

## Cokane (*Widowers' Houses*)

- COKANE. Neglige, my dear fellow, negligé.
- COKANE. Trench, my dear fellow: your beer is waiting for you.
- COKANE. [...] Trench, my dear fellow, allow me to introduce you to er ?
- COKANE. [...] And what did I see on our return ? what did her father see ? Oh, Trench, Trench ! No, my dear fellow, no, no. Bad taste, Harry, bad form !
- COKANE. Lady Roxdale, my dear sir : he means Lady Roxdale. Do express yourself with a little more tact, my dear fellow.

# CATCHPHRASES: DICTION

Sir Arthur (*On the Rocks*)

- SIR ARTHUR. [...] No, your Grace, my lords and gentlemen. Nationalize the land if you will; nationalize our industries if we must; nationalize education, housing, science, art, the theatre, the opera, even the cinema; but spare our women.“
- SIR ARTHUR. My lords and gentlemen: you are not theorists. [...] We are husbands and fathers. Yes, my lords and gentlemen: husbands and fathers.
- SIR ARTHUR. [...] Yes, your Grace, my lords and gentlemen, my clerical friends. We need peace. [...] Not the battlefield but the fireside--yes, your Grace, yes, my lords and gentlemen, yes, my clerical friends, the fire--"

# CATCHPHRASES: RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS

## Eliza (*Pygmalion*)

- THE FLOWER GIRL [subsiding into a brooding melancholy over her basket, and talking very low-spiritedly to herself] I'm a good girl, I am.
- LIZA. You're no gentleman, you're not, to talk of such things. I'm a good girl, I am.
- LIZA. I ain't got no mother. Her that turned me out was my sixth stepmother. But I done without them. And I'm a good girl, I am.
- LIZA. No: I don't want no gold and no diamonds. I'm a good girl, I am.
- LIZA [...] I was never in trouble with the police, not me. I'm a good girl—
- LIZA. I'm a good girl, I am; and I won't pick up no free and easy ways.

# CATCHPHRASES: RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS

## Redbrook (*Captain Brassbound's Conversion*)

- REDBROOK [*hastily*]. **Shut up, you fool.** [*He elbows Drinkwater into the background.*]
- REDBROOK [...]. **Shut up, you fool,** will you? [*Again he pushes him back with a furtive kick.*]
- REDBROOK [*again suppressing him*]. **Shut up, you fool,** I tell you.
- REDBROOK [*as before*]. **SHUT up, you fool,** will you?
- REDBROOK [...]. [*Drinkwater opens his mouth to corroborate.*] **Shut up, you fool.**
- REDBROOK [*collaring him*]. Oh **shut up, you fool.** Get out. Hold your ton—

# CATCHPHRASES: SITUATION IN THE PLAY

Waiter (*You Never Can Tell*)

- WAITER [*philosophically*]. Well, sir, you never can tell. [...] Yes, sir, you never can tell.
- WAITER. [...] You never can tell, sir: you never can tell. [He goes into the hotel.]
- WAITER. [...] But if I had my life to live twice over, I'd do it again, I'd do it again, I assure you. You never can tell, sir: you never can tell.



# CATCHPHRASES: SITUATION IN THE PLAY

Blanco (*The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet*)

- BLANCO [*with calm conviction*] He's a rotten Sheriff. Oh, a rotten Sheriff. If he did his first duty he'd hang himself. This is a rotten town.
- BLANCO. [...] I'm ready. Not that I'm guilty, mind you; but this is a rotten town, dead certain to do the wrong thing.
- BLANCO. Sheriff: you touch me home. This is a rotten world [...]
- BLANCO. And many of them. Boys: this is a rotten world.

# CONCLUSIONS

- Shaw utilizes fixed stretches of text (catchphrases) as a means to enhance or create characterization.
  - Associated with secondary characters, though not exclusively.
  - Relevant because of their influence beyond their immediate context.
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# THANK YOU!

Questions, suggestions, comments?

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