

The devil's disciple and a tale of two cities



The most obvious contrast between the two texts is the fact that 'A Tale of Two Cities' is a novel, while 'The Devil's Disciple' is a play. This difference of genre makes the use of the narrative voice vary greatly, despite the fact that both authors are trying to convey opinions and create images through the narrator. In its original form, 'A Tale of Two Cities' was meant to be read in instalments. The use of the narrative voice is crucial for reminding the reading audience of what happened previously in the tale.

The voice also sets the scene quickly, taking the reader to the specific setting for that instalment. This is particularly crucial in 'A Tale of Two Cities' because of the switches across the channel and within a country the separate characters backgrounds. While none of this deals explicitly with the irony in the narrative voice, it is crucial to realise that Dickens voice is employed in many jobs, not only least acting as a signpost to the reader to explain where in history and geography Dickens is taking the reader in a specific instalment. Shaw's voice does not have such a multi faceted job, if the audience are watching the play rather than reading it.

In the case of watching the play, the scene is set, the characters are played by actors and the narrative voice becomes redundant to the audience, if not the actors, because all the asides are being performed by the cast. For the purpose of this essay, I will consider the reading audience of Shaw, as opposed to the viewing audience. I will do this because if the narrative voice becomes redundant to a viewing audience it would be very difficult to reveal the irony in 'The Devil's Disciple'. This is not as unorthodox as it might seem, Shaw was expecting 'The Devil's Disciple' to be read, not just to be watched. The evidence for this is the extensive notes Shaw includes as '

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scene setters' and character expansions, in much the same way as Dickens employs his narrative voice.

For example, before the first word is said by any character there are roughly six hundred words of description from Shaw about Mrs Dudgeon and her home. While there is an argument to suggest that Shaw included all these notes for the actors purposes, this can be discounted by looking at the descriptive passage on Mr Anderson in Act 1, where in his first entrance Shaw describes him as ' a shrewd, genial, ready Presbyterian divine of about 50 with something of the authority of his profession in his bearing. But it is an altogether secular authority, sweetened by a conciliatory sensible manner not at all suggestive of a quite thorough going other worldliness'. This description could not possibly be acted to this extent; this draws me to the conclusion that Shaw was providing such details for readers of the play to give them a more rounded view of the characters. In the first instalment of ' A Tale of Two Cities' Dickens uses his narrative voice to express satirical opinions on contemporary issues. Using the traditional role of the narrative voice he sets the scenes, creating the opposition between England and France.

In doing this the voice uses sarcasm to express the distaste with some of France's practices of the time: ' She[France] entertained herself, besides, with such humane achievements as sentencing a youth to have his hands cut off, his tongue torn out with pincers and his body burned alive because he had not kneeled down'. In this way Dickens is exploring the negative aspects of each of the states but by doing so in a ironic tone he is revealing the way social opinions of the time are clouded by politeness and double

standards. In this particular instance, France prides itself on the sophistication and humanity of its population as well as their piety. Dickens is pointing out that while France believes itself to be pious and sophisticated, the punishment for going against this ideal is barbaric and cruel. He is highlighting the country's double standards and hypocrisy with his own mirror of it using the language of irony.

This level of irony is also found in Dickens when he is mocking a character, in the instalment 'monsieur the Marquis in town' Dickens uses irony to illustrate the level of greed and ignorance that the Marquis has. Dickens goes into great detail on the number of people it takes to feed the Marquis his chocolate: 'yes, it took four men all ablaze with decoration' and further on 'it was impossible for monseigneur to dispense with one of these attendants on the chocolate and hold his high place under the admiring heavens'. This feigned politeness continues in this chapter from Dickens, to illustrate how false the Marquis himself is. The character of the Marquis is falsely polite and generous within his own circles, 'so polite and impressible was monseigneur' says Dickens, but in reality he is cruel and greedy. This is illustrated in his dealings with the parents of the child he ran over. Shaw uses sarcasm in much the same way: in the first act, Shaw is sarcastic about the Dudgeon family in his narrative voice.

For example when the women of the family all pretend to cry through grief at the death of their father in law, he says 'it was an affecting moment' this remark is undoubtedly sarcastic as he does not, and does not wish the reader to empathise with the Dudgeons. So in order to make his position clear, he mocks them and highlights their insincerity and falseness. In a <https://assignbuster.com/the-devils-disciple-and-a-tale-of-two-cities/>

sense Shaw wants to do this because he wants to illustrate how false the part of society he is parodying are, but also he is making sure that the rift between 'real' characters like Richard and Anderson with who the audience can empathise with and hyperbolic characters like Mrs Dudgeon is widened. For Dickens, the French revolution was recent history. This meant his audience would recognise his commentary on the issues.

Dickens welcomed his reputation as a social reformer: this was why he commented on the societies in question so readily. The same is true of Shaw. The American War of Independence was not such recent history for Shaw, but it had many parallels to the Irish wars, which had proximity to Shaw. To the same extent, the comments on the American society can be translated to fit that of his own, and his criticisms are just as valid when considering the American war, as well as the Irish conflicts.

Through subtle irony Shaw, like Dickens, is mocking society. They both are trying to point out the flaws in the social systems which they live in. Shaw is mocking the insincerity of religion through the character of Mrs Dudgeon, while Dickens is mocking the greed and corruption of the ruling classes like the Marquis and Mr Stryver. Neither Dickens, nor Shaw uses their irony when the emotional tension is high. This is so as not to detract from the genuine emotions which they have used with the previously mentioned 'real' characters to which audiences can empathise. In the traditions of melodrama Dickens and Shaw both try to go to the extremes of emotion and to be ironic in these scenes, such as Judith's plea for Richard to say who he is and save his life act 3.

If Shaw was ironic within this conversation, the emotion of the drama would be undermined as it was in act 1. This would spoil the purpose of both scenes. Act 1 would lose its sarcasm and Shaw's attack on society would be lost. Similarly, the genuine affection and heroism of Richard would be lost if Shaw undermined either character with irony.

In effect the two ideas work in binary opposition: without the reality of the characters of Judith, Anderson and Richard the hyperbolic strictness of Mrs Dudgeon would not be so amusing and apparent, neither would the various 'brothers' stupidity and blind faith, nor would the emphasised 'Britishness' of the soldiers with their faith in the system of gentlemanly conduct. Similarly without the exaggerated characteristics of the peripheral characters the realism of the emotions of Judith, Anderson and Richard and to a certain extent Essie would be damaged. Dickens also refrains from using sarcasm at dramatic moments in the novel. Instead he uses irony in a more conventional way.

It is ironic that Carton becomes the sacrifice for Darnay, as they both love the same woman and that it is seemingly not in his nature. In this instance the irony is crucial to the drama of the narrative. Similarly Richard's replacement of Anderson creates the dramatic basis of the narrative. In these instances The narrative voice is forced back into providing its overview and detail of the scene and characters personal opinions. When in this role, Dickens' voice takes on free indirect speech to convey more meaningfully and seamlessly the characters thoughts and feelings. Although this technique is also used by Dickens in his more ironic passages: in the instalment 'The fellow of Delicacy', itself an ironic title, as Mr Stryver, the <https://assignbuster.com/the-devils-disciple-and-a-tale-of-two-cities/>

subject of the instalment is not in any way delicate, Dickens uses free indirect speech to parody Mr Stryver.

' Mr Stryver having made up his mind to that magnanimous bestowal of good fortune on the doctor's daughter, resolved to make her happiness known to her before he left the town for the Long Vacation. This sentence is written as if from Stryver's point of view, comprising his over complicated way of speaking, ' magnanimous bestowal' but moreover his thoughts and feelings have been encapsulated by Dickens. The narrative makes it seem that Stryver's proposal to Lucy would be the greatest honour she could ever receive, and in fact it would make her happy. The reader knows this not to be the case and Stryver's selfish, and inflated opinion of himself is revealed through the opening lines of the instalment. In this sense it is irony is self revealing, and the reader is entertained by the character's lack of self knowledge.

This, like the distinction between Richard and Mrs Dudgeon in ' The Devil's Disciple' works to strengthen the distinction between characters which the reader can empathise with, due to their self knowledge, and characters which are in a sense caricatures due to their lack of self knowledge and hyperbolic nature: in this case Stryver. Shaw also uses the idea of caricatures in his narrative. Burgoyne is a caricature of an Englishman. Shaw makes Burgoyne a hyperbolically polite gentleman, fixated with the issues of valour, patriotism and most importantly the credibility of ones state of being a gentleman.

Through the rapport between Richard and Burgoyne, the latter's impersonal and bizarre attitude towards Richard's death, with the emphasis on the noble way to die is being derided by Shaw is his approach to act 3. ' My dear lady, our only desire is to avoid unpleasantness' this sentence alone shows his impeccable politeness but Judith's retort holds Shaw's opinion: ' is it nothing to you what wicked thing you do if only you do it like a gentleman? '. Due to this particular scene being a peak of emotional intensity, the passage, words and even the narrator's words are not explicitly ironic for the reasons mentioned above. However, the portrayal of Burgoyne as the stereotypical Englishman is ironic by nature of its sarcastic tone and the hyperbolic representation. Despite Burgoyne's quick repartee he is not a character we easily empathise with.

Despite this his attitude and language makes the audiences identify with him far more easily than characters like Mrs Dudgeon. Another inexplicit use of irony that can be found in Shaw but not in Dickens is the deliberate misleading of the reader. When, in Act 2 Anderson appears to flee, leaving Richard to die for him, the audience believes that Anderson was a liar and that he is a coward as Judith does. In the final scenes of the play, it becomes apparent that this was not the case, that both the audience and Judith have been tricked into believing the exact opposite of the truth. This creates a sort of ' ironic relief' at the end of the play, by making the reader feel slightly guilty for ever having doubted the minister. Despite the difference in genres, I believe Dickens and Shaw use narrative irony in a similar way, to achieve a similar result.

Both authors wish to deride the society of which they are creating a parody. Both are trying to establish a way of highlighting the excessive points of their society by creating hyperbolic characters which they can ridicule, or situations that can be mocked by the narrator itself. For example in an introductory passage to 'The Devil's Disciple' Shaw writes, 'They have convinced both Americans and English that the most high minded course for them to pursue is to kill as many of one another as possible, and that military operations to that end are in full swing, morally supported by confident requests from the clergy of both sides for the blessing of God on their arms. this sentence is ironic to the reader because the reader can see the fault in both sides, as it seems obvious to an objective person that both are wrong. This type of irony is not for comic affect, nor relief, but for Shaw's political aim of illustrating how pointless the war is and how ironic it is that neither side can realise the opposition's point of view or how ironic it is that they are trying to use the same force against one another.