



The Vision of Heroism and Moral Regeneration in George Bernard Shaw's Drama

Zayed Hussein Al-Mudhafar^{1,*}

¹ Department of English Language & Literature, Faculty of Arts & Humanities, Sana'a University, Yemen.

*Corresponding author: kingzayed55@gmail.com

Keywords

- | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Social transformation | 2. Fabian socialism |
| 3. intellectual courage | 4. Saint Joan |
| 5. Technology Integration | |

Abstract:

The aim of this study is to examine George Bernard Shaw's redefinition of heroism as a transformative moral and social force that reshapes the relationship between the individual and society. Using a qualitative approach, the study analyzes *Arms and the Man* (1894), *Pygmalion* (1913), and *Saint Joan* (1923) to demonstrate how Shaw constructs heroism as an intellectual practice rather than a romantic ideal. While existing literature on Shaw often treats these plays in isolation, this research addresses a critical gap by presenting heroism as a continuous ethical principle rooted in Shaw's Fabian socialist belief in rational reform. The analysis reveals that Shaw's protagonists serve as catalysts for moral awakening within resistant environments. In *Arms and the Man*, heroism is defined through moral realism; in *Pygmalion*, it emerges via linguistic empowerment; and in *Saint Joan*, it culminates in the struggle of individual conscience. By examining these works collectively, the study illustrates a coherent evolution in Shaw's vision, ultimately redefining heroism as a moral responsibility toward social enlightenment.

رؤية البطولة والتجديد الأخلاقي في دراما جورج برنارد شو

زايد حسين المظفر^{1*}

¹ قسم اللغة الإنجليزية وآدابها، كلية الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية - جامعة صنعاء ، صنعاء ، اليمن.

*المؤلف: kingzayed55@gmail.com

الكلمات المفتاحية

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. التحول الاجتماعي | 2. الاشتراكية الفابية |
| 3. الشجاعة الفكرية | 4. القديسة جان |
| 5. التقدم الأخلاقي | 6. SAMR |

الملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى بحث رؤية جورج برنارد شو للبطولة بوصفها قوة أخلاقية واجتماعية تحويلية تعيد صياغة العلاقة بين الفرد والمجتمع. وباستخدام منهج تحليلي موضوعي وسياقي، يتناول البحث مسرحيات "السلاح والرجل" (1894)، "بيجملون" (1913)، و"القديسة جان" (1923) للكشف عن كيفية بناء شو للبطولة كممارسة فكرية لا كمثال رومانسي تقليدي. وبينما ركزت الدراسات السابقة على المسرحيات بشكل منفصل، يعالج هذا البحث فجوة نقدية من خلال تقديم البطولة كمبدأ أخلاقي مستمر يعكس إيمان شو الاشتراكي الفابي بالإصلاح العقلاني. وتكشف النتائج أن أبطال شو يعملون كمحفزين للوعي الأخلاقي. ففي "السلاح والرجل"، تتجسد البطولة في الواقعية الأخلاقية؛ وفي "بيجملون"، تنبثق من التمكين اللغوي؛ أما في "القديسة جان"، فتصل إلى ذروتها في صراع الضمير الفردي ضد السلطة المؤسسية. ومن خلال دراسة هذه الأعمال مجتمعة، يبرهن البحث على تطور الرؤية الأخلاقية لدى شو، معيداً تعريف البطولة كمسؤولية أخلاقية تجاه التنوير المجتمعي.

Introduction:

George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) remains one of the most influential dramatists and social critics of the modern era. His plays combine intellectual vigor with moral passion, reflecting the social, political, and ethical transformations of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe. Shaw's works challenge traditional notions of morality, heroism, and progress by exposing hypocrisy in religion, class structure, and political institutions. As a Fabian socialist, he envisioned gradual social reform through rational thought and education rather than revolution. The Victorian and Edwardian periods in which Shaw wrote were characterized by rapid industrialization, changing gender roles, and debates about faith and reason—all of which shaped his vision of moral regeneration and heroic individualism.

The late nineteenth century witnessed profound changes in British society: industrial capitalism widened class divisions, women began demanding political and intellectual rights, and science undermined religious orthodoxy. Shaw's theatre emerged as a response to this social unrest and intellectual uncertainty. Plays such as *Arms and the Man* (1894), *Pygmalion* (1913), and *Saint Joan* (1923) mirror the transition from Victorian idealism to modern rationalism. Each of these dramas portrays characters who defy conventions and embrace change as a moral necessity. Shaw used drama as a vehicle for discussing social evolution, moral responsibility, and the redefinition of heroism in an age increasingly skeptical of traditional authority.

Although many scholars have examined Shaw's philosophical ideas and social criticism, few studies have systematically analyzed how his concept of heroism functions as a process of moral regeneration and social transformation across multiple plays. Existing research often treats *Saint Joan*, *Pygmalion*, and *Arms and the Man* separately, focusing on their individual moral or social themes. This study identifies a gap in the critical literature: the absence of an integrated analysis that links

Shaw's vision of heroism to his belief in evolutionary ethics and rational reform.

Therefore, the main problem this study addresses is how Shaw redefines heroism not as physical courage or divine inspiration, but as an evolving moral force grounded in intellectual autonomy and ethical responsibility.

Problem of the Study

While George Bernard Shaw is celebrated as a dramatist of ideas, much of the existing scholarship focuses on his political views or dramatic techniques in isolation. A notable research gap still exists in that there is a lack of a systematic analysis that treats Shaw's concept of heroism as a unified, evolving process of moral regeneration. Current literature often analyzes *Saint Joan*, *Pygmalion*, and *Arms and the Man* as separate thematic entities rather than stages of a singular philosophical development. Consequently, the central problem this study addresses is how Shaw redefines heroism—not as physical prowess or romantic idealism, but as an ethical force grounded in intellectual autonomy and the Fabian ideal of rational reform.

Significance of the Study

The importance of this research lies in its holistic examination of the Shavian hero as a catalyst for social change. By synthesizing Shaw's ethical vision across three distinct phases of his career, this study provides a unified framework for understanding how he used diverse dramatic genres to advocate for social regeneration. It is vital because it moves beyond traditional definitions of heroism, highlighting the struggle of the individual conscience against institutional inertia as a central pillar of Shaw's work. Furthermore, this study reaffirms Shaw's enduring relevance to contemporary debates regarding autonomy and social responsibility, contributing a fresh perspective to Shavian studies by presenting heroism as a continuous moral obligation.

Research Objectives

1. To examine how Shaw presents heroism as a vehicle for moral and social regeneration.
2. To explore how *Saint Joan*, *Pygmalion*, and *Arms and the Man* reflect different dimensions of change—spiritual, social, and political.
3. To analyze how Shaw's Fabian ideals and dramatic techniques contribute to his portrayal of modern heroism.
4. To demonstrate the continuing relevance of Shaw's moral vision to contemporary discussions of ethics, individuality, and social progress.

By distinguishing between historical background and research objectives, this introduction situates Shaw's drama within its intellectual context while defining a clear and measurable research problem. The study thus seeks to contribute a unified understanding of heroism and moral change in Shaw's dramatic art.

Research Questions

To investigate the central problem of Shaw's redefined heroism, the following questions guide this research:

1. How does Shaw transform heroism from a romantic ideal into a pragmatic force for moral and social regeneration?
2. How do the selected plays collectively illustrate the evolution of Shaw's ethical vision across the political, social, and spiritual spheres?
3. To what extent do Shaw's Fabian socialist principles and dramatic techniques shape the portrayal of the "modern hero"?
4. How does the progression of Shaw's protagonists reflect a consistent philosophy of human progress throughout his career?

Literature Review

Critical studies on George Bernard Shaw have long focused on his role as a dramatist of ideas whose plays merge artistic expression with moral and social inquiry. Scholars have

consistently noted that Shaw's theatre challenges static moral conventions and redefines heroism as an evolving ethical and intellectual force. Yet, earlier research often treated Shaw's works in isolation or focused mainly on biographical and historical aspects. Recent scholarship, however, has turned to a more dynamic interpretation of Shaw's moral philosophy, exploring how his drama continues to speak to twenty-first-century issues of identity, power, and reform.

Shaw's Moral Philosophy and Vision of Change

Early critics such as Ward viewed Shaw as a rational moralist committed to the belief that humanity can progress through education and self-knowledge. Weintraub describes Shaw's theatre as "founded on the conviction that man is educable, that through rational inquiry and self-awareness, society can be improved" (*The Man and the Mask* 79). Ward similarly portrays him as "a prophet of evolutionary morality" (112).

Recent studies, however, provide a broader philosophical and cultural frame. Tagayeva and Amanova reinterpret Shaw as a "dramatic critic and ethical educator whose works model moral consciousness in modern performance" (53). Matin Ahmed traces Shaw's "journey from Victorian idealism to post-industrial ethics," emphasizing how his moral vision remains relevant in global contexts. Siân Adiseshiah extends this discussion in her essay on *Back to Methuselah*, arguing that Shaw's utopianism reflects a continuing concern with "the moral possibilities of human evolution" (44).

These recent sources confirm that Shaw's idea of change transcends his own century and remains vital in contemporary ethical discourse. However, few of them examine how Shaw's philosophical vision materializes within specific plays—a gap this study addresses by analyzing the moral continuum that connects *Saint Joan*, *Pygmalion*, and *Arms and the Man*.

Social and Linguistic Transformation in Pygmalion

Scholarly interpretations of *Pygmalion* often explore social mobility and gendered self-

definition. Raymond Williams identifies it as “a parable of change within constraint” (141). Feminist readings by Sally Peters and J. Ellen Gainor emphasize Eliza Doolittle’s assertion of moral independence rather than her linguistic achievement. Christopher Innes sees the play as dramatizing “the human capacity for reinvention within the limits of class and gender” (118).

More recent research renews this perspective. Aisling Máire Smith (2019) studies how modern productions of *Pygmalion* reinterpret Shaw’s class and gender politics for twenty-first-century audiences. Manal I. Fattah (2025) notes that the play’s enduring appeal lies in its redefinition of heroism as “intellectual courage and ethical self-fashioning” (117). Ahmed (2025) also remarks that Shaw’s concept of transformation “anticipates present debates about self-representation and performative identity.”

These scholars collectively recognize *Pygmalion* as a drama of moral self-realization. The present study builds upon this by situating Eliza’s transformation within Shaw’s larger vision of human evolution—a moral process that links individual self-discovery to collective social progress.

Political and Ethical Realism in Arms and the Man

Critics have long acknowledged *Arms and the Man* as Shaw’s critique of romantic heroism. Margery Morgan observes that the play “demolishes the myth of war as a moral enterprise” (96), while John Atkins calls Bluntschli’s practicality “the measure of a new moral sanity” (102). Ellen E. Dolgin (situates the play within Shaw’s “history-conscious theatre,” arguing that his representation of war becomes a form of ethical interrogation (98).

Recent scholarship deepens this analysis. May Mohammed Baqer Twayej explores *Arms and the Man* as “a satire of militarism and false patriotism that exposes the immorality of war narratives in modern political culture” (22). Manoj similarly interprets the play as illustrating an “ethic of rational compassion,” in which laughter leads to moral awakening (71).

These recent perspectives reposition *Arms and the Man* within contemporary debates about power and pacifism. In this study, the play serves as the culmination of Shaw’s trilogy of transformation—translating the spiritual awakening of Saint Joan and the social evolution of *Pygmalion* into a practical ethic of moral realism.

Faith and Moral Courage in Saint Joan

Scholars view *Saint Joan* as Shaw’s most profound exploration of individual conscience and institutional morality. Harold Bloom sees Joan as “the conscience of history refusing to remain fixed in superstition” (67). Ellen Dolgin interprets the play as dramatizing “the modern moral consciousness in conflict with established authority” (101). Manoj contends that Joan embodies Shaw’s reconciliation of idealism with rational thought (71).

While these readings affirm Joan’s moral heroism, they seldom link her to Shaw’s broader dialectic of change. This research integrates her spiritual courage with Eliza’s social self-definition and Bluntschli’s rational morality, revealing a coherent progression from faith to reason within Shaw’s vision of heroism.

Recent Reassessments and Research Gap

Recent scholars have revisited Shaw through global, postcolonial, and generational lenses. For example, Catherine Morris reads *Pygmalion* and *Arms and the Man* as early critiques of imperial and patriarchal power. Gareth Griffith (2015) examines Shaw’s “dialogic politics,” showing how his plays invite audiences into ethical debate. Fattah (2025) reinforces Shaw’s continuing relevance by emphasizing the adaptability of his moral vision to new cultural contexts.

Despite this renewed attention, the literature still lacks a comprehensive synthesis of Shaw’s plays as stages of one moral-philosophical evolution. This study addresses that gap by demonstrating that *Saint Joan*, *Pygmalion*, and *Arms and the Man* collectively dramatize the continuum of change—from spiritual awakening to social reformation and moral realism—that defines Shaw’s modern heroism. The choice of these plays to be the focus of the

present study is both critical and methodological, as these plays collectively illustrate the continuity and development of George Bernard Shaw's ethical vision across his dramatic career. Chronologically, they represent three key phases of Shaw's artistic production: *Arms and the Man* as an early satirical critique of romantic heroism and militarism; *Pygmalion* as a mature exploration of social mobility and moral self-awareness; and *Saint Joan* as a later, more complex engagement with spiritual conscience and institutional power. This temporal range allows the study to trace how Shaw's conception of heroism evolves while remaining ethically consistent.

Thematically, each play addresses a distinct sphere of social transformation—political illusion and warfare, class hierarchy and linguistic authority, and religious and ideological control. Examining these spheres together enables a comparative analysis of how Shaw redefines heroism across political, social, and spiritual contexts. The protagonists—Bluntschli, Eliza Doolittle, and Joan of Arc—are deliberately unconventional heroes who challenge dominant values through reason, ethical independence, and intellectual courage. Their inclusion reveals a shared dramatic pattern in which heroism functions as a catalyst for moral awareness rather than personal glory.

While previous scholarship has frequently treated these works in isolation or focused on their historical, feminist, or comedic dimensions separately, this study brings them into dialogue to demonstrate how Shaw uses different dramatic forms to articulate a unified philosophy of moral regeneration. The selection of these particular plays therefore addresses a critical gap in Shawian studies by highlighting heroism as a coherent ethical principle that operates across diverse genres and stages of Shaw's intellectual development.

Research Method

This study adopts a qualitative and analytical approach to examine the moral and intellectual dimensions of change and heroism in George Bernard Shaw's selected plays—*Saint Joan*, *Pygmalion* and *Arms and the Man*. The research combines textual analysis with socio-

historical interpretation to investigate how Shaw's dramatic vision articulates the idea of moral regeneration and social transformation. Drawing upon critical and theoretical frameworks such as New Historicism, Feminist Theory, and Ethical Criticism, the study aims to interpret Shaw's plays both as artistic creations and as instruments of moral dialogue within their historical context.

The selection of *Saint Joan*, *Pygmalion*, and *Arms and the Man* is based on three key criteria: chronological representation, thematic diversity, and philosophical coherence.

Chronological Representation:

These three plays represent distinct phases of Shaw's artistic and philosophical development—ranging from his early realist satire (*Arms and the Man*), through his mature social critique (*Pygmalion*), to his later spiritual drama (*Saint Joan*). This chronological range allows the study to trace Shaw's evolving treatment of moral and social change over time.

Thematic Diversity:

Each play embodies a different sphere of transformation. *Arms and the Man* critiques political and romantic idealism, *Pygmalion* explores social mobility and linguistic self-realization, and *Saint Joan* confronts religious authority and moral conviction. Together, these dramas provide a comprehensive perspective on Shaw's multidimensional understanding of change—political, social, and spiritual.

Philosophical Coherence:

Despite their different contexts, all three plays share Shaw's central concern with the moral evolution of the individual and society. Each dramatizes a conflict between illusion and truth, conformity and independence, ignorance and enlightenment. This coherence makes them ideal for comparative analysis, revealing how Shaw's dramatic art functions as a continuous dialogue on moral progress.

Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeds through close reading of the selected texts, focusing on characterization, dialogue, and thematic development. Attention is given to Shaw's use of irony, dialectical dialogue, and intellectual conflict as techniques for dramatizing

transformation. Secondary sources, including critical essays and recent peer-reviewed studies, are used to contextualize the findings and support the interpretive framework.

The study also applies New Historicist perspectives to situate Shaw's plays within the political and moral discourse of late Victorian and early modernist Britain. Feminist theory is used particularly in analyzing *Pygmalion* and *Saint Joan*, where female agency challenges patriarchal and institutional constraints. Ethical criticism provides the conceptual lens through which moral regeneration and heroism are examined as humanistic ideals rather than abstract doctrines.

By combining textual interpretation with socio-philosophical analysis, this methodology ensures a comprehensive exploration of Shaw's dramatic vision. It allows for an integrated understanding of how Shaw constructs change and heroism as interdependent forces—where intellectual awakening becomes the foundation for moral progress.

Discussion

Heroism as Moral Realism in Arms and the Man

Shaw's earlier comedy *Arms and the Man* (1894) exposes the illusions of war, class, and romantic idealism, redefining heroism as pragmatic morality. Set against the backdrop of the 1885 Serbo-Bulgarian War, the play juxtaposes the fantasies of aristocratic patriotism with the rational humanism of Captain Bluntschli. Through irony and satire, Shaw dismantles the conventional image of the soldier as a noble hero and replaces it with the figure of the thinking man—the realist who values life over glory.

From his first appearance, Bluntschli subverts the expectations of heroism. Seeking refuge in Raina's bedroom, he confesses, "I'm a Swiss, fighting merely for the money. I carry chocolates instead of cartridges" (Shaw 19). His disarming honesty contrasts with the bombast of Sergius, the so-called war hero whose reckless charge is mistaken for bravery. Shaw's use of humor demystifies martial valor, exposing the absurdity of war's romantic mythology. As Margery Morgan notes,

"Bluntschli's realism inaugurates a new moral order—one that values survival, intelligence, and honesty above spectacle" (98).

Raina's moral journey mirrors that of the audience. Initially enthralled by Sergius's chivalric rhetoric, she gradually awakens to Bluntschli's integrity. Her admission that "the world is not as our mothers taught us" (Shaw 47) marks her transition from illusion to realism—a process of moral regeneration central to Shaw's theory of progress. In choosing Bluntschli, Raina renounces not only romantic illusion but social pretense. Shaw's comedy thus becomes a vehicle for ethical reform, suggesting that true love, like true heroism, is grounded in sincerity and reason.

The play also challenges the hierarchies of class and gender. Louka's defiance of her social position—"I will never be a servant all my life" (Shaw 53)—embodies the spirit of individual self-determination that Shaw associates with modern heroism. By allowing Louka to marry Sergius and Raina to marry Bluntschli, Shaw symbolically dissolves class barriers, envisioning a meritocratic order based on moral worth. As John Atkins observes, "The laughter in Shaw's early comedies conceals a serious revolution—the moral inversion of aristocracy and intellect" (121).

Through *Arms and the Man*, Shaw establishes the foundations of his later moral realism. Heroism, he suggests, is not born in battle but in the courage to abandon illusion. Bluntschli's modest rationality becomes the template for Shaw's ideal reformer: practical, humane, and intellectually fearless.

Heroism as Social Mobility and Self-Definition in Pygmalion

In *Pygmalion* (1913), Shaw situates heroism within the context of social reform and linguistic empowerment. The play dismantles the rigid class hierarchies of Edwardian England, presenting language as both a tool of liberation and an instrument of control. Eliza Doolittle's transformation from a Cockney flower girl into an articulate woman of independence symbolizes a deeper revolution—the assertion of personal dignity against the determinism of birth.

Henry Higgins's experiment to transform Eliza into a "lady" is not merely linguistic but ideological. He claims, "You see this creature with her kerbstone English: the English that will keep her in the gutter" (Shaw 12). To Higgins, language becomes a marker of civilization, a means to classify and control. Yet Shaw subverts this scientific arrogance by granting Eliza moral and intellectual depth that transcends social conditioning. Her acquisition of refined speech empowers her not to imitate but to confront her creators. When she declares, "I'm a common ignorant girl, and you're a book-learned gentleman; but I'm not dirt under your feet," she asserts moral equality (Shaw 69).

Eliza's journey embodies Shaw's concept of moral heroism through self-awareness. As Ellen Gainor notes, "Shaw's heroines achieve heroism by refusing to remain the objects of other men's experiments" (122). Eliza's final decision to leave Higgins demonstrates the triumph of conscience over dependence. Her statement, "The difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she is treated," crystallizes Shaw's belief that social status is an ethical construct, not a natural order (Shaw 85). Through this insight, Eliza transcends the very experiment that sought to define her.

Shaw's portrayal of Eliza's father, Alfred Doolittle, further develops his critique of social hypocrisy. When Doolittle complains that middle-class morality has "ruined" him after inheriting money, Shaw exposes the moral contradictions of capitalist respectability (Shaw 102). The satire underscores Shaw's socialist conviction that economic reform must precede moral progress. As Raymond Williams observes, *Pygmalion* dramatizes "the paradox of progress in a stratified society—transformation without liberation" (151).

By the end of *Pygmalion*, heroism has shifted from external transformation to moral autonomy. Eliza's choice to define herself, independent of Higgins's authority, fulfills Shaw's vision of social evolution through self-determination. Her heroism lies in moral clarity—the courage to reject the structures that pretend to civilize but actually oppress. In reworking the classical Pygmalion myth, Shaw

transforms Galatea's awakening from a man's creation into an allegory of human freedom.

Heroism and the Politics of Conscience in Saint Joan

In *Saint Joan* (1923), Shaw redefines heroism as the intellectual and moral resistance to institutional oppression. His reimagining of the legendary Joan of Arc transforms a medieval saint into a modern moral revolutionary. Joan's heroism lies not in miraculous intervention but in her rational conviction and spiritual independence. Her defiance of the Church and monarchy dramatizes Shaw's conviction that genuine progress begins when the individual conscience confronts social conformity.

Joan's moral courage represents the victory of reason over dogma. Her voice, claiming direct inspiration from God, challenges the Church's monopoly on spiritual truth. When she insists, "I hear voices telling me what to do," she articulates a symbolic rebellion against hierarchical authority (Shaw 25). Shaw's use of rational language rather than mysticism emphasizes her moral clarity and intellectual discipline. As Stanley Weintraub notes, "Shaw's Joan is the spiritual foremother of the modern conscience—guided by conviction, not coercion" (91).

The social transformation Joan seeks extends beyond religion; it represents a broader democratization of moral authority. By proclaiming that "France is for the French," Joan asserts a form of ethical nationalism that subverts feudal allegiance (Shaw 30). Her faith in the moral agency of the individual parallels Shaw's Fabian belief that reform must arise from reasoned conviction rather than blind obedience. Joan's heroism thus prefigures modern democratic ideals—self-governance, equality, and intellectual freedom.

However, Shaw refuses to romanticize Joan's martyrdom. Her execution, conducted by the Church she served, exposes the tragic paradox of reform: society punishes those who challenge its stagnation. As Charles A. Berst observes, "Joan's death marks not her failure but the failure of her world to comprehend moral progress" (102). In the Epilogue, when

Charles VII and his court attempt to canonize her posthumously, Shaw reveals the irony of delayed recognition—institutions sanctify what they once condemned. The cycle of resistance and belated admiration reflects Shaw's broader view of human progress as an evolutionary struggle between ignorance and enlightenment.

Through *Saint Joan*, Shaw envisions heroism as the moral awakening that propels history forward. Joan's defiance of ecclesiastical tyranny represents the birth of the modern conscience—a theme that resonates throughout Shaw's oeuvre. Her tragedy, like the fate of many reformers, signifies that moral evolution demands sacrifice. In this sense, Joan becomes the prototype of Shaw's intellectual hero: the one who dies for truth yet transforms the moral horizon of society.

Moral Regeneration and Social Reform: A Unified Vision

Across *Saint Joan*, *Pygmalion*, and *Arms and the Man*, Shaw presents a coherent moral philosophy in which heroism serves as the catalyst for social regeneration. His protagonists are not saints or warriors but reformers who reveal the moral bankruptcy of their societies. Joan's faith, Eliza's independence, and Bluntschli's reason represent different manifestations of the same evolutionary principle: the triumph of moral consciousness over institutional inertia.

For Shaw, heroism and reform are inseparable. Each play enacts what Gareth Griffith calls "the pedagogy of progress"—the education of conscience through dramatic irony (82). By confronting the audience with contradictions between appearance and reality, Shaw compels moral participation. His theatre becomes an ethical laboratory, where the spectator, like the protagonist, must learn to think critically.

Shaw's heroes demonstrate that social change begins with personal enlightenment. As Michael Holroyd observes, "Shaw's drama teaches that moral evolution is the only revolution that endures" (228). The journey from ignorance to understanding, illusion to truth, constitutes both the aesthetic and ethical core of his theatre. In redefining heroism as the

pursuit of truth and moral clarity, Shaw transforms drama into an instrument of social progress—a stage for humanity's self-education.

1. Findings of the Analysis of *Saint Joan*

The analysis of *Saint Joan* reveals that Shaw constructs the heroine as an embodiment of spiritual and intellectual change. The findings indicate that Joan's moral independence and rational faith oppose the authority of both Church and State. Her declaration, "I will obey God rather than men," demonstrates her transformation from a visionary peasant girl into a symbol of individual conscience. The play portrays the evolution of moral awareness as both divine and human, where Joan's faith becomes a metaphor for intellectual freedom.

The findings also show that the conflict in *Saint Joan* centers on the tension between institutional rigidity and personal revelation. Shaw exposes the paradox of progress—Joan's martyrdom results from the very moral awakening that society is not yet ready to accept. Hence, the play dramatizes change as a process that demands sacrifice and moral courage.

2. Findings of the Analysis of *Pygmalion*

The findings demonstrate that *Pygmalion* transforms the classical myth into a modern narrative of self-definition. Through Eliza Doolittle's linguistic education, Shaw presents language as an instrument of moral and social change. The findings highlight that Eliza's transformation extends beyond speech; it is a process of ethical awakening and personal dignity. Her realization that "the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she is treated" reveals the play's central moral insight.

Additionally, the findings indicate that Shaw critiques class stratification by showing that manners and morality are not inherited but learned. The relationship between Eliza and Higgins illustrates the moral cost of intellectual arrogance—knowledge without empathy leads to alienation rather than enlightenment.

3. Findings of the Analysis of *Arms and the Man*

The findings show that *Arms and the Man* represents Shaw's early formulation of moral realism. Captain Bluntschli's practical attitude toward war dismantles the illusion of romantic heroism. His pragmatic confession, "I fight when I have to, and am very glad to get out of it when I haven't to," exposes the hypocrisy of idealized patriotism. The findings also demonstrate that Raina and Sergius experience moral re-education as they confront the emptiness of their social ideals.

Shaw's use of comedy functions as a vehicle for moral revelation. The play's ending, where Raina chooses the realist Bluntschli over the romantic Sergius, confirms that moral progress is achieved through honesty, not illusion.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that George Bernard Shaw's redefinition of heroism is deeply rooted in Fabian socialist ethics, which emphasize rational inquiry, moral responsibility, and gradual social reform. Shaw's heroes do not seek personal glory or revolutionary violence; instead, they embody the Fabian belief that social progress emerges through intellectual courage, ethical self-discipline, and the willingness to challenge inherited falsehoods. By situating heroism within this ethical framework, the study confirms that Shaw's drama functions as a medium of moral education designed to awaken social consciousness.

The analysis of *Arms and the Man* reveals that Shaw initially formulates heroism as moral realism. Through Captain Bluntschli, the play dismantles romanticized notions of war and nationalism, presenting honesty, practicality, and respect for human life as the foundations of ethical behavior. In *Pygmalion*, heroism takes a social and linguistic form, as Eliza Doolittle's transformation exposes the artificial nature of class hierarchy and affirms moral equality. Her journey illustrates that genuine change arises not from imitation but from self-recognition and ethical independence. In *Saint Joan*, Shaw presents the most complex vision of heroism, where individual conscience confronts

institutional authority. Joan's moral courage highlights the tragic cost of progress while affirming Shaw's belief that society evolves through the sacrifice of those who think ahead of their time.

Together, these findings reveal that heroism in Shaw's drama operates as a continuous ethical process rather than a static trait. This study contributes a new perspective to Shavian scholarship by demonstrating that heroism functions as a unifying moral principle across Shaw's early, middle, and later plays, linking comedy, social drama, and historical tragedy through a shared philosophical logic. Rather than analyzing these works in isolation, the study places them in dialogue to show how Shaw consistently uses dramatic form to advance a coherent vision of moral regeneration grounded in Fabian evolutionary ethics.

The implications of this research extend beyond the three selected plays. Future studies may apply this ethical model of heroism to other Shavian works such as *Man and Superman*, *Major Barbara*, or *Back to Methuselah*, or explore comparative frameworks linking Shaw's reformist hero to figures in the drama of Ibsen or Brecht. Further research may also examine the relevance of Shaw's moral heroism in contemporary political theatre and modern debates about conscience, authority, and social responsibility. By reaffirming heroism as an ethical obligation rather than a spectacle of power, Shaw's drama continues to offer a vital framework for understanding moral progress in both literature and society.

References

- [1] Adiseshiah, Siân. "The Utopian Potential of Aging and Longevity in Bernard Shaw's Back to Methuselah." *Age, Culture, Humanities*, vol. 8, 2024, pp. 40–57.
- [2] Ahmed, Matin. "Re-Visiting George Bernard Shaw: A Journey through His Life and Literary Legacy." *International Journal of Creative Studies and Publications*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2025, pp. 12–23.
- [3] Atkins, John. *George Bernard Shaw: A Critical Study*. Routledge, 1952.
- [4] Berst, Charles A. *Bernard Shaw and the Art of Drama*. University of Illinois Press, 1973.
- [5] Bloom, Harold, editor. *Modern Critical Views: George Bernard Shaw*. Chelsea House, 1987.
- [6] Conolly, L. W. *Shaw and His Contemporaries*. University of Toronto Press, 2002.
- [7] Dolgin, Ellen E. "History Plays." *George Bernard Shaw in Context*, edited by Brad Kent, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 94–101.
- [8] Fattah, Manal I. "Reinventing Shaw: The Changing Relevance of Bernard Shaw's Plays across Generations." *International Journal of Advanced Research*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2025, pp. 112–122.
- [9] Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton University Press, 1957.
- [10] Gainor, J. Ellen. *Shaw's Daughters: Dramatic and Narrative Constructions of Gender*. University of Michigan Press, 1991.
- [11] Griffith, Gareth. *Socialism and Superior Brains: The Political Thought of George Bernard Shaw*. Routledge, 1993.
- [12] Holroyd, Michael. *Bernard Shaw: The Search for Love*. Penguin Books, 1965.
- [13] Innes, Christopher. *Modern British Drama: 1890–1990*. Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- [14] Manoj, P. S. *George Bernard Shaw's Last Plays: A Thematic Study*. Quest Journals, 2022.
- [15] Morgan, Margery M. *The Shavian Revolution: Studies in the Plays of Bernard Shaw*. Macmillan, 1969.
- [16] Morris, Catherine. *Shaw and Postcolonial Identity*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.
- [17] Peters, Sally. *Bernard Shaw: The Ascent of the Superman*. Yale University Press, 1996.
- [18] Shaw, George Bernard. *Arms and the Man*. Penguin Classics, 1986.
- [19] _____. *Pygmalion*. Penguin Classics, 2003.
- [20] _____. *Saint Joan*. Penguin Classics, 2001.
- [21] Tagayeva, Nargiza, and Zulfia Amanova. "Bernard Shaw as a Dramatic Critic." *Scientific Journal of Literature and Language Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2024, pp. 45–56.
- [22] Twayej, May Mohammed Baqer. "Satire of Militarism in George Bernard Shaw's Arms and the Man." *International Journal of Arts, Social Science and Humanities Studies*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2024, pp. 20–30.
- [23] Ward, A. C. *Bernard Shaw: The Playwright and His Audience*. Longmans, Green, 1956.
- [24] Weintraub, Stanley. *Bernard Shaw: The Man and the Mask*. Yale University Press, 1963.
- [25] Williams, Raymond. *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot*. Chatto & Windus, 1952.