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From Experience to Dramatic Criticism: Shaw's Intellectual Vision in Arms and the Man

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between George Bernard Shaw's intellectual development, social observations, and dramatic ideology, with particular reference to his play Arms and the Man. It investigates how Shaw's experiences and intellectual formation contributed to his treatment of major social and literary issues, including war, love, heroism, romanticism, realism, violence, class, gender, and social relationships. The study also examines the dramatic and linguistic techniques through which Shaw transforms these concerns into social and intellectual criticism, particularly humour, satire, irony, wit, exaggeration, and figurative language. A descriptive-analytical approach was adopted, combining literary analysis of Arms and the Man with empirical evidence obtained through a questionnaire administered to English-language teachers. The questionnaire consisted of 20 Likert-scale statements and was analysed using SPSS Version 25. The reported reliability coefficient was 0.777, indicating acceptable internal consistency. The findings demonstrate strong agreement among respondents concerning the relationship between Shaw's intellectual vision and his dramatic representation. The first hypothesis obtained a mean of 4.399, with 93.4% positive responses and a statistically significant chi-square value of 184.810 (p = .001). The second hypothesis obtained a mean of 4.260, with 88.9% positive responses and □² = 154.157 (p = .001). The third hypothesis obtained a mean of 4.288, with 86.6% positive responses and χ^2 = 291.484 (p = .001). The findings indicate that Shaw's dramatic language functions not merely as entertainment but as a vehicle for questioning conventional assumptions and exposing contradictions between appearance and reality. The study concludes that Arms and the Man represents an important early expression of Shaw's developing dramatic ideology, particularly his challenge to romanticized conceptions of war and love and his preference for a more realistic and intellectually critical understanding of human behaviour.

Keywords: George Bernard Shaw; Arms and the Man; dramatic ideology; realism; romanticism; war; heroism; satire; dramatic language; social criticism

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

George Bernard Shaw occupies a distinctive position in modern English-language drama. He was not only a playwright but also a critic, essayist, political thinker, social commenta-

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tor, and advocate of intellectual and social reform. His dramatic works frequently challenge conventional assumptions concerning society, morality, gender, class, politics, economics, war, and human relationships. Shaw's dramatic writing developed within a complex intellectual environment shaped by his personal experiences, independent reading, social observations, political interests, literary criticism, and engagement with contemporary intellectual movements. His development as a writer was therefore closely associated with his broader intellectual development. His dramatic works frequently employ dialogue, irony, paradox, humour, satire, and social confrontation to expose contradictions in conventional beliefs. Among Shaw's early plays, Arms and the Man is particularly important because it provides a concentrated dramatic treatment of romantic idealism and practical realism. The play questions conventional representations of military heroism and romantic love while presenting characters whose beliefs are challenged by unexpected encounters with reality. The play therefore provides an appropriate literary context for examining the transformation of intellectual ideas into dramatic representation. Rather than treating the relationship between biography and literature as a simple one-to-one correspondence, this study considers Shaw's life experience and intellectual development as contextual factors that help illuminate the formation of his dramatic vision. The thesis on which this article is based specifically identifies the need to examine the relationship among Shaw's life experience, intellectual development, social philosophy, aesthetic principles, and dramatic representation.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

George Bernard Shaw and Arms and the Man have received considerable critical attention. Scholars have examined the play from perspectives including anti-romanticism, realism, war. criticism, heroism, social satire, rhetoric, stylistics, and dramatic technique. However, these dimensions are often examined separately. The central problem addressed by the present study is therefore the insufficiently integrated understanding of how Shaw's experiences and intellectual formation contributed to his dramatic ideology and how that ideology is manifested in Arms and the Man. The study does not claim that the characters and events of the play are direct autobiographical representations. Instead, it investigates how Shaw's intellectual and social environment may illuminate the transformation of ideas into dramatic characters, conflicts, dialogue, humour, irony, satire, and theatrical structures.

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1.3 Objectives of the Study

The study aims to:

1. examine the relationship between Shaw's life experiences and his intellectual development;
2. examine Shaw's use of humour, satire, irony, wit, exaggeration, and figurative language;
3. investigate the extent to which Shaw transforms intellectual and social ideas into dramatic form.

1.4 Research Questions

The study addresses the following questions:

1. How did George Bernard Shaw's life experiences and intellectual development contribute to the formation of his dramatic ideology?
2. How are Shaw's intellectual and social ideas concerning war, heroism, class, gender, romanticism, realism, nationalism, and social reform represented and transformed in Arms and the Man?
3. How does Shaw's use of dramatic and aesthetic techniques in Arms and the Man transform his intellectual and social vision into a distinctive dramatic form?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

The study tests the following hypotheses:

H1: Shaw's life experiences and intellectual development significantly contributed to the formation of the intellectual, social, and aesthetic principles underlying his dramatic ideology.

H2: The major conflicts and characters in Arms and the Man function as dramatic representations through which Shaw challenges romantic idealism and conventional assumptions concerning war, heroism, class, gender, and social relationships.

H3: Shaw employs humour, wit, irony, exaggeration, and figurative language for significant dramatic and critical purposes, particularly to question romantic ideals of love and war.

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2. Literature Review

2.1 Shaw's Intellectual and Dramatic Development

Shaw's dramatic career cannot be separated completely from his intellectual development. His experiences and intellectual interests contributed to a body of drama characterized by argument, social criticism, intellectual confrontation, and challenges to established conventions. His engagement with social and political thought, together with his interest in dramatic reform, contributed to the development of a theatre in which characters frequently represent conflicting ideas. Rather than relying exclusively on conventional dramatic action, Shaw often uses dialogue as a means through which social and philosophical questions are debated. His dramatic technique is consequently closely connected with his intellectual purpose. Characters are frequently placed in situations where inherited assumptions encounter practical circumstances. Humour and irony become mechanisms for exposing contradictions between what people believe and what actually occurs.

2.2 Romanticism and Realism in Arms and the Man

One of the central tensions in Arms and the Man is the opposition between romantic idealism and practical realism. The play challenges idealized representations of military courage and romantic love. SergiusSaranoff initially represents the conventional image of the heroic soldier. His military behaviour is associated with honour, glory, courage, and romantic heroism. However, the play gradually exposes the limitations and contradictions of this image. Captain Bluntschli provides an alternative perspective. His practical attitude toward warfare undermines the traditional heroic image of the soldier. His famous preference for carrying food rather than unnecessary ammunition becomes part of Shaw's larger comic challenge to romantic conceptions of war. The conflict between romantic expectations and practical realities also appears in the treatment of love. Raina's initial conception of Sergius is highly idealized, while her encounter with Bluntschli introduces a different understanding of human relationships.

Thus, romanticism is not simply rejected through direct argument. It is destabilized through dramatic contrast, humour, character development, and irony.

2.3 War and Heroism

War constitutes one of the most important subjects of the play. Shaw challenges the ten-

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dency to represent warfare as an arena of pure honour and heroic achievement. The play instead presents war as an activity involving fear, confusion, material necessity, personal survival, and human imperfection. This approach allows Shaw to question conventional heroic narratives. The character of Bluntschli is particularly important in this respect. His practical understanding of warfare contrasts sharply with Sergius's romantic conception of military glory. The contrast creates one of the play's major comic and ideological conflicts. Shaw's treatment of heroism therefore encourages the audience to reconsider whether conventional courage and military glory necessarily represent genuine human virtue.

2.4 Love and Romantic Idealism

Love in Arms and the Man is also treated critically. Raina's relationship with Sergius initially appears to embody an idealized romantic conception of love. However, the development of the plot gradually reveals differences between appearance and reality. Shaw uses these differences to question romantic assumptions. Characters frequently believe themselves to be behaving according to noble ideals while their actions reveal more complicated motives. The movement from idealization toward greater realism is therefore central to the play's dramatic structure.

2.5 Humour, Satire, and Irony

Humour is one of Shaw's most effective dramatic instruments. Serious subjects are presented through comic situations and witty exchanges, allowing the audience to question ideas without being confronted by a purely didactic argument. Satire operates by exposing contradictions between conventional beliefs and practical reality. Dramatic irony is particularly important because the audience can recognize contradictions that the characters themselves may fail to perceive. Through these techniques, Shaw transforms comedy into a form of intellectual criticism.

2.6 Figurative and Dramatic Language

The thesis emphasizes the significance of figurative language, including simile, metaphor, personification, irony, and related rhetorical devices. Such devices contribute to the thematic and satirical dimensions of the play. Shaw's language is therefore not merely decorative. Dialogue itself becomes a means of communicating social and philosophical ideas. The questionnaire findings reinforce this interpretation: respondents strongly recognized Shaw's use of language, humour, wit, irony, exaggeration, and figurative language as significant components of his criticism.

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2.7 Research Gap

Existing studies have provided valuable interpretations of Arms and the Man, particularly regarding realism and romanticism, war and heroism, anti-romanticism, satire, and dramatic technique. However, the present study seeks to integrate these dimensions with Shaw's intellectual and experiential development.

Its distinctive contribution lies in combining:

- biographical and intellectual context;
- thematic interpretation;
- dramatic and stylistic analysis; and
- empirical evidence from literature teachers.

The study consequently treats Arms and the Man as a significant site in which Shaw's developing intellectual, social, and aesthetic principles are transformed into dramatic practice.

3. Theoretical and Analytical Framework

The study adopts an integrated literary-analytical framework combining contextual, thematic, and stylistic approaches.

First, the **biographical-contextual dimension** considers Shaw's life experiences and intellectual development as contextual evidence rather than assuming direct autobiographical representation.

Second, the **thematic dimension** examines the major concerns of Arms and the Man, especially:

- war;
- heroism;
- love;
- romanticism;
- realism;
- violence;

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- class;
- gender; and
- social relationships.

Third, the **stylistic and dramatic dimension** examines how Shaw communicates these concerns through:

- dialogue;
- humour;
- irony;
- satire;
- wit;
- exaggeration;
- figurative language; and
- dramatic contrast.

This integrated framework enables the study to examine not only **what Shaw criticizes**, but also **how his dramatic language makes that criticism possible**.

Methodology .4

4.1 Research Design

The study employed a descriptive–analytical research design. Literary analysis constituted the principal qualitative dimension, while questionnaire data provided empirical evidence concerning respondents' perceptions of the literary and dramatic features examined.

4.2 Population and Sample

The study targeted English–language teachers in secondary schools in Al–Bayda City. The thesis identifies a population of 125 teachers and reports the use of simple random sampling. The results tables contained responses from 51 respondents. The article therefore reports the statistical results using N = 51 because the reported frequencies in the results

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tables total 51 respondents. However, the original thesis methodology contains an inconsistency in which a sample size of 30 is stated in one section. This discrepancy should be checked against the original questionnaires and SPSS dataset before journal submission.

4.3 Research Instrument

A questionnaire containing 20 statements was used. The statements were organized around the three research hypotheses and employed a five-point Likert scale:

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Not Sure
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

4.4 Validity and Reliability

The questionnaire was reviewed by academic referees. The thesis reports a validity coefficient of approximately 0.88.

The reliability of the 20-item questionnaire was tested using Cronbach's Alpha. The reported coefficient was **0.777**, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

4.5 Data Analysis

The questionnaire data were entered and analysed using **SPSS Version 25**. Descriptive statistics included frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, and median values.

A chi-square goodness-of-fit test was employed to determine whether the observed distribution of responses differed significantly from the expected distribution. The adopted significance level was **0.05**.

5. Results

5.1 Reliability of the Instrument

The questionnaire demonstrated acceptable reliability:

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Instrument	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Questionnaire	20	0.777

The coefficient of 0.777 indicates satisfactory internal consistency for the instrument used in the study.

5.2 First Hypothesis

H1: Shaw's life experiences and intellectual development significantly contributed to the formation of the intellectual, social, and aesthetic principles underlying his dramatic ideology.

The first hypothesis obtained the highest overall mean among the three hypotheses:

Measure	Result
Mean	4.399
Relative importance	88%
Positive responses	93.4%
χ^2	184.810
df	4
p	.001
Decision	Supported

The findings indicate a very strong tendency among respondents to agree that Shaw's experiences and intellectual development are relevant to understanding his dramatic ideology.

5.3 Second Hypothesis

H2: The major conflicts and characters in Arms and the Man function as dramatic representations through which Shaw challenges romantic idealism and conventional assumptions concerning war, heroism, class, gender, and social relationships.

Measure	Result
Mean	4.260
Relative importance	85%
Positive responses	88.9%

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χ^2	154.157
Df	4
P	.001
Decision	Supported

The results show substantial agreement that Shaw uses characters and dramatic conflicts to challenge conventional assumptions concerning love, war, heroism, and social relationships.

5.4 Third Hypothesis

H3: Shaw employs humour, wit, irony, exaggeration, and figurative language for significant dramatic and critical purposes, particularly to question romantic ideals of love and war.

The aggregate response distribution was:

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	150	49.0%
Agree	115	37.6%
Not Sure	20	6.5%
Disagree	21	6.9%
Total	306	100%

The overall mean was **4.288**, while the positive responses constituted **86.6%**. The chi-square value was **291.484**, with df = 4 and p = .001.

Thus, the third hypothesis was statistically supported.

5.5 Comparative Results

Hypothesis	Mean	Positive Responses	χ^2	df	p	Result
H1	4.399	93.4%	184.810	4	.001	Supported
H2	4.260	88.9%	154.157	4	.001	Supported
H3	4.288	86.6%	291.484	4	.001	Supported

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The three hypotheses were statistically supported. H1 achieved the highest mean and positive-response percentage, while H3 produced the highest chi-square statistic. The thesis appropriately notes that the chi-square statistic should primarily be interpreted in relation to statistical significance rather than as a direct measure of the strength of a hypothesis.

6. Discussion

6.1 Experience and Dramatic Ideology

The findings support the argument that Shaw's dramatic ideology can be better understood when his intellectual and experiential development is taken into consideration. The study does not suggest that every element of Arms and the Man corresponds directly to an event in Shaw's biography. Rather, his intellectual environment provides a context for understanding his preference for rational examination, social criticism, and challenges to conventional assumptions. The strong response to H1 indicates that respondents recognized this relationship between intellectual development and dramatic representation.

6.2 Romanticism versus Realism

One of the clearest features of Arms and the Man is the tension between romantic expectations and practical reality. The play repeatedly undermines idealized assumptions. Military glory is presented alongside fear, material necessity, and practical survival, while romantic love is examined through characters whose expectations do not correspond neatly with reality. This contrast gives the play its intellectual and comic energy. Shaw does not simply tell the audience that romantic ideals are problematic; he creates dramatic situations in which those ideals are exposed through action and dialogue.

6.3 Shaw's Criticism of War and Heroism

The treatment of war constitutes a central element of Shaw's dramatic criticism. Traditional heroic images are destabilized by practical considerations. Bluntschli's pragmatic approach to warfare challenges Sergius's romanticized conception of military honour. Through this contrast, Shaw asks the audience to reconsider what constitutes genuine courage and whether military glory should automatically be associated with moral superiority. The respondents' strong agreement with H2 reinforces the interpretation that the play uses character and conflict to challenge conventional ideas of heroism.

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6.4 Love and Human Relationships

The same opposition between appearance and reality operates in the treatment of love. Raina's initial idealization of Sergius represents a romantic conception of love. As the dramatic situation develops, however, the audience encounters a more complex understanding of attraction, identity, honesty, and human relationships. The comic treatment of romantic expectations therefore performs a critical function. Shaw exposes the distance between what characters imagine themselves to be and what their behaviour reveals.

6.5 Humour and Social Criticism

The findings concerning H3 indicate that respondents strongly recognized the critical function of humour and exaggeration. Shaw's humour makes complex social and philosophical issues accessible without reducing them to simple moral lessons. The audience is invited to laugh at situations that simultaneously expose serious contradictions. Comedy consequently becomes a method of intellectual inquiry.

6.6 Irony and Dramatic Contradiction

Irony is central to Shaw's dramatic technique. Characters often express beliefs that the audience can recognize as questionable or contradictory. This creates a distinction between character knowledge and audience knowledge. The audience becomes an active participant in interpreting the contradiction. Such dramatic irony strengthens Shaw's social criticism because it allows the audience to discover the weakness of conventional assumptions through the structure of the drama itself.

6.7 Figurative Language and Dramatic Meaning

The study further demonstrates the importance of figurative and rhetorical language. Similes, metaphors, personification, irony, exaggeration, and witty expressions help transform ordinary dialogue into a means of communicating broader social ideas. Consequently, language in Arms and the Man performs multiple functions: it develops character, advances the plot, produces humour, creates irony, and communicates ideological criticism.

7. Conclusion

This study has examined the relationship between George Bernard Shaw's intellectual development and his dramatic criticism in Arms and the Man. The findings indicate that

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Shaw's dramatic ideology is closely associated with his intellectual and social concerns. His drama challenges conventional assumptions rather than simply reproducing them. The analysis demonstrates that Arms and the Man is particularly significant because it brings together several interconnected concerns: war, heroism, love, romanticism, realism, violence, social relationships, and human behaviour. Shaw's treatment of these subjects depends heavily on dramatic language. Humour, irony, satire, wit, exaggeration, and figurative language allow him to transform serious social questions into engaging dramatic situations. The empirical findings strongly support this interpretation. H1 recorded a mean of 4.399 and 93.4% positive responses; H2 recorded a mean of 4.260 and 88.9% positive responses; and H3 recorded a mean of 4.288 and 86.6% positive responses. All three chi-square tests were statistically significant at p = .001. The study therefore concludes that Shaw's dramatic language is not merely decorative or entertaining. It is central to his intellectual and social purpose. Through comedy, irony, satire, and dramatic contrast, Shaw encourages audiences to distinguish between appearance and reality and to question established assumptions concerning love, war, heroism, and human behaviour.

8. Implications

The study has implications for literary scholarship and the teaching of English literature.

First, literary analysis can benefit from combining thematic interpretation with linguistic and stylistic analysis. The examination of dialogue, irony, humour, figurative language, and rhetorical structures can provide a deeper understanding of how literary meaning is constructed.

Second, Arms and the Man can be used pedagogically to encourage critical discussion of war, love, heroism, realism, romanticism, class, and human behaviour.

Third, the study demonstrates how literary language can function as social criticism. Students should therefore be encouraged not merely to identify themes but also to examine how authors construct and challenge ideas through language.

9. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that:

1. English and literature departments should integrate literary interpretation with linguistic and stylistic analysis.

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2. Literature teachers should encourage students to question assumptions presented in literary texts.

3. Arms and the Man should be used to stimulate critical discussion of war, love, heroism, realism, romanticism, and human behaviour.

4. Literature courses should demonstrate how language can function as an instrument of social criticism.

5. Students should compare different interpretations of Shaw's characters, themes, and dramatic techniques using textual evidence.

6. University literature curricula should give greater attention to stylistic and linguistic analysis alongside traditional literary approaches.

10. Limitations of the Study

The study has several limitations.

First, the empirical component was based on the perceptions of English-language teachers rather than a direct experimental investigation of readers' responses.

Second, the study focuses primarily on one play, Arms and the Man. Consequently, its findings concerning Shaw's dramatic ideology should not automatically be generalized to his entire dramatic corpus.

Third, the thesis contains a discrepancy between the stated sample size in the methodology and the number of respondents represented in the statistical tables. The reported statistical results are based on 51 respondents, whereas one methodological section states a sample of 30. This should be verified against the original dataset before submission.

Finally, the study is primarily literary and interpretive; therefore, the questionnaire findings should be understood as empirical support for the study's interpretive propositions rather than as definitive measurements of literary meaning.

11. Suggestions for Further Research

Future research could:

1. compare Arms and the Man with Shaw's later plays such as Pygmalion and Saint Joan;

2. examine Shaw's representation of heroism across different periods of his dramatic career;
3. conduct a corpus-based stylistic study of Shaw's dramatic dialogue;
4. investigate gender and social class in Arms and the Man from a contemporary theoretical perspective;
5. compare Shaw's treatment of war with that of other modern dramatists;
6. examine the relationship between humour and ideological criticism in Shaw's theatre;
7. investigate the reception of Arms and the Man among contemporary university students.

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