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Exploring the Deconstruction of Heroism in George Bernard Shaw's Play *Arms and the Man*: A Post-Structuralist Study



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Abstract

This study examines the deconstruction of the traditional image of hero in George Bernard Shaw's play *Arms and the Man* (1894) through post-structuralist perspective. George Bernard Shaw questions the conventional perception of heroism through the portrayal of characters who thwart the romanticized ideals like love, bravery and war. Shaw presents the criticism of the rigid binaries of heroism vs. cowardice, romanticism vs. realism and honour vs. practicality. The research applies post structural concepts of deconstruction by Jacques Derrida (1976) to interpret the Shaw's language which destabilizes the fixity of conventional heroism. The study examines the character interactions, language and dramatic structure to reveal the Shaw's intended message about war and heroism. The close textual interpretation through critical perspective and historical context, finds out that the play *Arms and the Man* (1894) has not only deconstructed heroism but also reconstructed a unique and nuances comprehension of human valour. This study contributes to the broader discussion on fluidity of literary meanings and transformations of the concept of heroism in modern literature.

Keywords: Deconstruction, heroism, post-structuralism, reconstruction, textual analysis

Introduction

The present research is aimed to study Shaw's narrative techniques to challenge the literary and cultural traditions of heroic ideals. The research examines the techniques through which Shaw analyzes the contextual relativity and inherent instability of the celebrated concept of heroic ideals. The study engages with the post-structuralist notions by Roland Barthes (1977) and Jacques Derrida (1978) (to exhibit play's textual techniques which destabilized the traditional binaries such as war vs. peace, heroism vs. cowardice, and pragmatism vs. idealism. Through these binaries Shaw constructs ultimate results of his ideologies and underpins his notions about the celebrated subject matters.

The concept of heroism is deeply embedded in the literary and cultural traditions of humanity. It is deeply associated with social ideals like bravery, moral righteousness and nobility. The works of literature have constructed heroic archetypes and framed them as paragon of human's social aspiration and virtue during many past centuries. The ideals of heroism were perpetuated by the society and became the part of social norms and values. The promulgation of the ideas of modernist and postmodernist critics scrutinized these traditional

constructs and almost subverted every false notion prevailing in the society. George Bernard Shaw's play *Arms and The Man* (1894) is a quintessential anti-romantic comedy. It is a seminal play which has deconstructed and challenged the conventional concept of heroism. It has subverted the glorification of the ideals like heroism, love and war through particular satirical narrative techniques which offered fertile ground for proceeding criticism.

Post-structuralism was a critical movement which emphasized the fluidity of meanings, language instability and deconstruction of binary oppositions. The critical analysis of *Arms and the Man* (1894) through post-structuralist perspective illuminates that the play not only shatters heroic ideals rather it highlights the resistance of fixed interpretation of language and meanings. It also invites the attentions of audience to challenge the preconceived notions of morality and valour. The fluidity of language and meaning subverts the fixed interpretation of literary works and provides them the open dimensions of analysis. So, the questioning and challenging aspects of Shaw's plays opened the new praxis of analysis and uniqueness of thinking in literature. The subverting of socially acceptable norms is not an easy task but the Shaw's linguistic skills have made it an easy target for him. Shaw has liberated meanings from the fixity and linked them with dynamic phenomenon. There is central truth or ultimate meanings of things for Shaw, rather everything is working under the dynamic cycle and change is the ultimate fate.

The concept of heroism has been dismantled by Shaw by passing it through the hierarchical structure of society and actual truth has been revealed through different binaries. Shaw has always traced the meanings of different social concepts through linking them with the present one. Shaw proclaims that the central idea of social heroism needs supplements like practical approach, rationality, vitality and harmony with self. The self-sufficiency of social hero is challengeable phenomenon and substitute or addition is always present in the world.

The concept of heroism often encompasses the set of virtues like self-sacrifice, bravery and honour. Shaw's *Arms and the Man* (1894) challenges these notions through satirical criticism. He sought to dismantle the existing illusions through his powerful ideas. The play argues that the heroism has limitations. The expositions of the contradiction of real heroism have been linked with human behavior. In the context of real world of characters, the ideal notions of heroism and bravery are momentous and cannot stand long against pragmatic approach. The idealism of society is shattered through the powerful language skills and

support of pragmatic ideas. Shaw employs satire, humour, and irony for the deconstruction of the archetype of traditional hero. His language invites the readers and audience to reevaluate their assumptions about the traditional constructions of different ideals like morality and heroism. This study is implemented to answer the following research questions:

1. How does George Bernard Shaw revolutionize the concept of heroism in literature?
2. How do post structuralist theories deconstruct the image of hero in George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man*?
3. What are the language strategies employed by Shaw to challenge the traditional image of heroism?

Significance of the Study

This study holds significant value from both cultural and literary perspectives as it delves into the redefinition of the concept of traditional heroism and its wider implications. Shaw's reevaluation of heroism has revolutionized and alternated traditional mindsets. The study encourages the individuals to reassess the value of romanticized depiction of different aspects of social life and mapped their actuality. Now rational trends are obvious in media and modern literature. The societal myths blinds the people but Shaw's plays have provided the critical eyes to the readers, through the expositions of these myths. The study has provided the innovative treatment to the subject matter of heroism through the analysis of Shaw's literary archetypes and enriching of given themes through skillful language.

The study also delves into the philosophical and psychological underpinnings of Shaw's mouthpiece characters through highlighting that how the desires, fears and motivations undermine traditions of social heroism. The present study highlights that the social constructs and human behaviour are juxtaposed to one another which can deviate individuals from abiding the social expectations. The individual is hero until he or she sacrifices desires and comes under the orbit of social incarcerations. The self actualized individuals are free to act upon their own will, and society does not accept the free exercising of will. So, the study has provided a unique perspective to heroism and linked it with the consumption of self.

Literature Review

The theory of post-structuralism questions the immobile meanings and hierarchic binaries in textual data and offers a lens to examine how concepts like valour and heroism are changed. Derrida (1976) has suggested that the meanings are deferred and dependent on the context of

the situation highlighted in the selected text. It opens the prospects of deconstructing conventional impression of heroic deeds. This given movement proves applicable in interpreting Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* (1894). The romanticist ideals like love, war and heroism are criticized through irony and subversion of the exalted personalities and situation in the selected play.

The theory of deconstruction challenges the structuralist notion of fixed meanings and binary opposition in language usage. Derrida considers that language is inherently unstable and meanings are always deferred. He named this concept as *differance* (Derrida, 1976). The concept of *differance* destabilizes the traditional logocentric approach which believed upon the privilege of speech over writing (Culler, 1982). It has changed the traditional methods of deriving meanings from the text and liberated the text from the limited interpretations.

Post-Structuralism also emphasizes upon the binaries, such as heroic/anti-heroic, idealism vs. pragmatism, offers vision into Shaw's projection of the given subject matter. Barthes (1977) suggested that these binaries are volatile and reciprocally dependent upon the context of the situation created by author in the selected text. Shaw has dismantled the heroic vs. anti-heroic dichotomy in *Arms and the Man* (1894) and suggested that heroism is context-dependent rather than absolute. Sergius' pomposity is un-minded by his incompetency in practical situation of life, while Bluntschli's ability to tackle the situation practically specifies actual heroic mind which establish the practical traditions in human life.

Many literary critics have applied the theory of deconstruction to analyze various texts. Through this, they have revealed hidden contradictions and the instability of meaning. For example, Paul de Man (1979) argued that literary texts often undermine their own claims to truth, exposing the inherent ambiguity of language. Similarly, Miller (1987) demonstrated that deconstruction can be used to challenge the authority of narrative structures. It has demonstrated that no text can fully control its own meaning. Many elements in the text are responsible for the creation of meanings. The fluidity of meanings is crucial factor for these theorists.

Traditional heroism in literature has been a subject of critical analysis for decades. The conventional depiction of heroes often reflects the socio-cultural values of the time. It highlights the characteristics of that specific era such as bravery, honor, and moral superiority. However, modern literary criticism challenges these representations and highlights their limitations and exclusionary tendencies. This review investigates various scholarly

perspectives on challenging or subverting traditional heroism by depicting flawed, anti-heroic and collective protagonists. In a study, Atwood (2003) has presented a reluctant heroine whose survival relies on resistance rather than conquest. She challenges the myth of the solitary and triumphant hero. Likewise, Coetzee's (1999) work *Disgrace* complicated the notion of heroism by portraying a morally ambiguous protagonist. He reflects the fragmented ethical landscape of postcolonial societies. These narratives have suggested that heroism can emerge from weakness, elasticity, and solidarity rather than dominance and superiority.

George Benard Shaw's mouthpiece characters and heroes, such as in *Arms and the Man* (1894) and *Saint Joan* (1923) have mainly prioritize reason over emotional state of mind. They are self-interested and favoured social changes rather and resisted the concepts of self-sacrifice or bravery. Bentley (1947) examined that Shaw's heroes undermine traditional heroic ideals and made them more misanthropic and less ennobling. His pragmatic views have been criticized for decreasing the emotional and spiritual attributes of heroism. Holroyd (1997) argued that George Bernard Shaw has depicted Bluntschli as a practical and unromantic hero. He challenged the societal celebrated concepts like glorification of war and bravery. However, Shaw's anti-romantic position has been criticized for reducing heroism to mere practicality. He has stripped heroism from any idealistic or emotional appeal (Innes, 2002).

George Bernard Shaw is a leading figure of modernist drama. He often employs satire and realism to question societal norms. His play *Arms and the Man* (1894) presents his mouthpiece character Bluntschli, who is the anti-hero and acted as counterpoint to Sergius. Sergius is a romanticist yet blemished hero. Innes (1998) noted that Shaw has dismantled traditional heroic archetypes by juxtaposing Sergius' melodramatic ideals with Bluntschli's pragmatic realism. The Bluntschli's rejection of romanticized war resonated with Shaw's broader criticism of Victorian idealism. He employs irony to critique romantic ideals of war and love.

Lane (2006) highlighted that Shaw used humor and irony to expose the absurdity of Sergius' valor by deconstructing the glorified imagery of military heroism prevalent in Victorian and Edwardian literature. He has presented war as a messy and bureaucratic affair. He came up with the suggestion that noble pursuits make human life better but war puts us into a challenging and horrific situation. Raina infatuated with Sergius' heroism at beginning undergoes a modification that is comparable to the play's deconstruction of heroism. As

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Peters (1998) argued that Raina's shift represented a critique of gender percept notions of heroism. He further suggested that women are often envoy to inactive observer of male heroics. The Shaw's portraiture of Raina corresponded with post structuralist criticism of gendered power dynamics. It further destabilized the idea of heroism as a entirely male domain.

This research is valuable for scholars and students of literature, particularly those interested in modern drama, realism, and Shaw's critique of romantic ideals. It provides an insight into how Shaw's work reflects broader shifts in literary thought, moving away from conventional hero-worship to a more rational and practical view of human nature. It provides them a pathway to challenge traditionalism of the world and come out with newly generated ideas which is the requirement of the modern world.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach for examining the deconstruction of heroism in George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* (1894) since it is appropriate for literary studies that seek to interpret and evaluate the meanings which are embedded in texts. It has primarily used the textual analysis to explore that how Shaw challenges the accepted notions of heroism through his characters, dialogues and narrative structures. The research methods are planned to provide a broad understanding of Shaw's debasement of traditional heroism in the social and political context of the play.

This research centers on the characters of the play, its dialogues, and thematic elements which contribute to the deconstruction of heroism in the play. The design involves the close reading of the primary text of the selected novel *Arms and the Man* (1894). It will help to identify key literary techniques used by Shaw (such as irony, satire, and realism). The close reading of the *Arms and the Man* (1894) is conducted which focuses mainly on key characters such as Captain Bluntschli, Raina Petkoff and Sergius Saranoff. This textual analysis of the play provides the identification of the instances where language, symbolism and irony destabilize traditional heroic narratives. The meanings, structure, deeper implications of language are analyzed to consider the themes and motifs of the play. The present research also incorporates secondary sources, including critical essays on Shaw's works and post structuralist criticism of literature.

The methodology of the present study intends to provide an organized and in depth exploration of George Bernard Shaw's deconstruction of heroism in *Arms and the Man*

(1894). The assemblage of textual analysis, thematic study, and contextual perspective forms the ground for the interpretation of Shaw's criticism of conventional heroism in *Arms and the Man* (1894). The following dimensions of the play have helped the researchers to interpret it effectively and come out with significant arguments.

1. Irony and Subversion: George Bernard Shaw has employed irony to ridicule the romanticized ideals of heroism. Through romanticist hero Sergius, Shaw has delivered the message of the falsity of conventional, flawed and performative hero.
2. Deconstruction of War: The pragmatic views of Captain Bluntschli regarding war and survival challenge the binary of heroism versus cowardice. He presents a more nuanced perspective of war and emotional concept of heroism.
3. Language and Meaning: The dialogues of the play *Arms and the Man* (1894) underscore the fluidity and instability of concepts like courage and honor. The play has converted the meanings of these concepts and revealed them as dependent on context and interpretation.
4. Destabilizing Binaries: George Bernard Shaw has blurred the lines between hero and antihero, courage and cowardice and love and practicality through which he questions the validity of rigid heroic ideals.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The post structuralist theory challenges the fixed meanings, binary oppositions, and the stability of language. It emphasizes the fluidity of meanings and the undependability of concepts. George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* (1894) has deconstructed the traditional notion of heroism. Through the exposition of the contradictions between romantic ideals and the harsh realities of war, he has presented his anti social ideas about most celebrated concepts. The witty dialogues and the ironic situations of the play have dismantled the binary between hero and coward, love and practicality and idealism and realism.

Shaw (1894) has challenged the conventional notions of heroism. Through the satirical portrayal of war, love and social ideals, Shaw has shattered the socially prestigious ideals. From a post structuralist point of view, the play has deconstructed the heroic representation of society by exposing the constructed and unstable nature of traditional heroism. The analysis of the textual data delves into how Shaw dismantled the romanticist ideals of heroism through characters, dialogue and dramatic irony. The questioning of the reliability of socially constructed truths has changed the minds of those who blindly follow

the celebrated social values.

Arms and the Man (1894) criticizes the unrealistic, traditional and romanticized perception of heroism. It is embodied in characters like Sergius Saranoff and Captain Bluntschli. The play questioned the binary opposition between heroism and cowardice. It has shown that what society labels as heroism is often based on illusion. Sergius, the so called war hero has represented the idealized heroic figure in the eyes of Raina. However, Shaw deconstructed this image by exposing the gap between appearance and reality “He is the hero of Slivnitsa... the idol of the regiment” (Shaw 1894, p. 10). The extreme idealistic point of view of the women and society has been delivered by Shaw in a mocking manner. The unreal hero, Sergius is idolized. His victory is depicted as a product of luck rather than bravery. His success in the cavalry charge is mocked by Bluntschli, a mouthpiece character of Shaw, “It was a madman's charge and ordered by a lunatic” (Shaw 1894, p. 22). He has destabilized the binary opposition between heroism and madness. The author also suggested that what is perceived as bravery is often irrational. This aligns with Derrida’s concept of *différance*, where meaning is deferred and unstable (Derrida, 1978).

Bluntschli, who is the pragmatic Swiss soldier, embodies a new unromantic view of heroism. His practical attitude contrasts with the glorified image of war “I carry chocolate instead of cartridges” (Shaw, 1894, p. 17). This line deconstructs the conventional image of a soldier and prioritized physical needs. Shaw suggested that survival and practicality hold more value than reckless bravery. The choice of chocolate as a symbol challenged the idealized view of heroism which is rooted in violence and sacrifice.

In the beginning of the the play, Raina idolized Sergius but gradually becomes disillusioned for the fake aspects of his persona. Her shifting perspective highlights the instability of fixed meanings “I suppose soldiering is the coward’s art after all” (Shaw 1894, p. 46). Raina’s realization destabilizes the binary of heroism versus cowardice. It illustrates that societal ideals are constructed and subject to revision. This aligns with the post structuralist view that meaning is not fixed but constantly in flux. Shaw’s use of irony also reinforces the deconstruction of heroism. The exaggerated language of the characters often highlighted the absurdity of their beliefs. For instance, Sergius’s declaration “I never withdraw” (Shaw 1894, p. 53) becomes ironic when contrasted with his secret affair with Louka. It is undermining the heroic image which is projected by society.

Through *Arms and the Man* (1894), Shaw exposed the social construction like heroism. His

deconstruction of the heroic images of society is aligning with post structuralist principles. The play has dismantled the binary oppositions like heroism and cowardice. These expositions have revealed that these concepts are fluid rather than fixed. By portraying heroism as a social construct rather than an inherent quality, Shaw invites the audience to question the ideological frameworks that shape their perceptions of reality. This deconstruction highlights the instability of meaning, making *Arms and the Man* (1894) a powerful critique of traditional ideals.

The centrally projected figure of heroism, Sergius, is introduced as the archetypal romantic hero. Raina's idealistic description of him in the beginning of the play "My hero, My king" (p. 1) frames him as the epitome of bravery. However, the post structuralist lens revealed that this perception is constructed through cultural narratives rather than any inherent qualities. The Sergius' own disillusionment with war challenges this ideal "Soldiering, my dear madam, is the coward's art of attacking mercilessly when you are strong, and keeping out of harmway when you are weak" (p. 12). The given line destabilizes the binary opposition between bravery and cowardice and exposed the brutality involved in war. The supposed hero's confession aligns more with Bluntschli's pragmatic view of war. He took war as disastrous and ready for action only with the demand of situation. It also shows that heroism is not a fixed essence but a linguistic construct shaped by context and perspective.

Bluntschli represents the deconstructed hero who is practical, unromantic and mundane. His self-deprecating humor dismantles the conventional image of the war hero "I am a professional soldier: I fight when I have to, and am very glad to get out of it when I haven't to" (p. 17). Through this, Shaw blurs the boundary between bravery and cowardice, implying that self-preservation and rationality may be more heroic than reckless valor. Post structuralism emphasizes that meaning is not fixed but contingent. The Shaw's projection makes Bluntschli's pragmatism a valid if subversive form of heroism.

Raina's initial infatuation with Sergius embodies romantic idealism. But her gradual attraction to Bluntschli reveals the constructed nature of her emotions. When Bluntschli exposes the absurdity of Sergius's cavalry charge, he forces Raina to confront the artificiality of her ideals. He argued that "Do you know what the higher love is? Very fatiguing thing to keep up for any length of time" (p. 23). Here, Shaw uses humor to deconstruct the notion of idealized love. Post-structuralism suggested that language creates rather than reflects reality.

Raina's "higher love" is merely a linguistic construct which is subjected to redefine.

Sergius's oscillation between gallant lover and disillusioned cynic exemplifies the instability of identity. His ironic confession "I never could resist a pretty woman" (p.23) undermines his earlier posture of noble self-restraint. This instability highlights the post-structuralist idea that identity is not unified but fragmented. It is collided with multiple, often contradictory meanings coexisting within the same subject.

Through *Arms and the Man* (1894), Shaw has changed the romanticized notions of heroism, love and identity. He revealed that their contingent and constructed nature has no valid foundation. By juxtaposing characters like Bluntschli and Sergius, the play destabilizes fixed meanings. It aligns with post structuralist ideas of multiplicity and fluidity. Heroism emerges not as an inherent virtue but as a fluctuating concept shaped by language, perception and social narratives.

George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* (1894) is a significant play that satirizes the romanticized notions of war and heroism prevalent in 19th century European society. The play can be interpreted as a deconstruction of fixed ideas of heroism, truth and identity. Post-structuralism, which challenges the idea of fixed meanings and absolute truths, provides a lens through which Shaw's characters and their beliefs can be reevaluated. Shaw subverts traditional heroic ideals by exposing the instability of language, identity and social constructs in *Arms and the Man* (1894). Post-structuralism questions the structuralist idea that language and meaning are stable. Shaw's play reveals how the text dismantles the rigid binaries of heroism and cowardice, love and pragmatism, reality and illusion.

One of the primary ways through which Shaw has destabilized the notion of heroism is through the language of his characters. Captain Bluntschli, the so called "chocolate-cream soldier," serves as the play's most potent symbol of anti heroism. Raina Petkoff initially romanticizes war calls soldiers like her fiancé Sergius heroes. However, Bluntschli's practical view of war disrupts this ideal "Nine soldiers out of ten are born fools" (Shaw, 1894, p. 6). Bluntschli's assertion dismantles the binary between hero and coward. It views that bravery in war is often a product of chance rather than virtue. According to Derrida (1976) language constructs reality but it also contains contradictions that unravel its own claims. Here, Shaw uses Bluntschli's speech to reveal the absurdity of the heroic ideal. He suggested that bravery is not an inherent trait but a social construct.

Raina's infatuation with Sergius is another target of Shaw's deconstructive approach. Her

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perception of love is shaped by literature and social conventions. She declares "I have only to think of you as you were last year... charging the enemy at Slivnitsa" (Shaw, 1894, p. 11). However, Sergius's own words undermine this romantic ideal:

I never felt so ashamed in my life... I was making
a heroic dash when a coward would have sent us all
to kingdom come" (Shaw 1894, p. 39).

This confession has collapsed the binary between heroic and cowardliness. The heroic dash is exposed as a reckless act rather than a noble one. As Barthes (1977) suggests that language has developed myths that perpetuate power structures. By making Sergius acknowledge his shame, Shaw uncovers the myth of the chivalrous hero. The recurring motif of chocolate versus bullets epitomizes the play's signifiers which is central to post structuralist theory. Bluntschli carries chocolates instead of ammunition, symbolizes his pragmatic approach and negation of idealistic aspects of life. Raina initially mocks at him:

Do you stuff your pockets with sweets, like
a schoolboy, even in the field? (Shaw, 1894, p. 15)

In the end of the play, Bluntschli's practicality wins Raina's admiration. His approach towards life and consideration for physical needs attracts Raina's attention. On the other hand, Sergius's idealism is exposed as hollow. The signifier chocolate shifts in meaning and aligns with competence rather than cowardice. This fluidity of meaning reflects Derrida's (1976) concept of difference where the meaning of a word is constantly deferred through its relationship with other words.

Post structuralism has challenged the notion of fixed identities and Shaw's characters embody this instability. Raina presents herself as a romantic heroine, yet her interactions with Bluntschli reveal a more pragmatic, self-aware woman. As she argued "I suppose soldiering has made you cry-baby" (Shaw 1894, p. 14). This playful teasing contrasts with her earlier lofty language. It exposes that the performative nature of her identity is a mark of her personality. As Butler (1990) argued that identity is not inherent but is constructed through repeated social performances. Raina's shifting persona exemplifies this idea. It also suggests that identity is fluid rather than fixed.

Through post structuralist analysis, *Arms and the Man* (1894) emerges as a profound critique of rigid binaries in society. Shaw deconstructs the ideal of heroism, exposing it as a linguistic and social construct rather than an inherent truth. By destabilizing language,

identity and social myths, he challenged the audience to question the very foundations of their beliefs. The play's enduring relevance lies in its ability to reveal the hidden contradictions that underlie seemingly absolute values.

George Bernard Shaw has employed various language strategies in *Arms and the Man* (1894) to deconstruct the traditional image of heroism. It aligns with post structuralist principle that question fixed meanings and destabilize conventional narratives. Shaw's strategic use of irony, dialogue and characterization not only challenges the idealized hero but also subverts the romanticized notions of war and bravery which were prevalent in 19th century literature. George Bernard Shaw's language strategies contributed to the deconstruction of heroism through key textual evidence and critical examination.

Irony serves as one of the primary linguistic strategies. Shaw has used it to dismantle the traditional image of heroism. Throughout the play, Shaw juxtaposes characters' expectations of heroism with the stark realities of war. The title of the play, *Arms and the Man* (1894) has been taken from the opening line of Virgil's Aeneid. It signals a parody of the classical epic tradition. Unlike Virgil's glorification of war, Shaw's play exposes the absurdity of idealizing soldiers. Bluntschli, the "chocolate cream soldier" embodies this irony. When Raina, captivated by romantic ideals expressed her admiration for Serbian soldiers, Bluntschli replied to her in the following words:

I don't believe the first man is a coward. I believe
he is a born soldier... What use is he on a horse?
You should see him on foot with that gun. He can
run like the wind." (Shaw, 1894, p. 25)

Bluntschli's pragmatic view of war contrasts sharply with Raina's romanticized vision. His ironic tone challenges the traditional association of heroism with bravery and honor. It is suggesting that survival, not glory defines a soldier's success. Shaw employs satirical dialogue to further dismantle the heroic ideal. The conversations between Raina and Bluntschli are laced with humor that exposes the hollowness of traditional heroism. When Bluntschli candidly admits that he carries chocolate instead of ammunition, Raina's expectations of a gallant soldier are shattered and she says:

Do you stuff your pockets with sweets
like a schoolboy, even in the field?" (Shaw 1894, p. 21)

The juxtaposition of chocolate and weapons humorously undermines the association

of soldiers with violence and bravery. This comic reversal destabilizes the conventional image of the warrior as a fearless and self sacrificing hero. As Innes (1998) notes that Shaw's satirical dialogue invites the audience to question the ideological frameworks that construct heroism as a fixed and noble concept. Shaw deconstructs the archetype of the heroic soldier through language that reveals the constructed nature of heroism. Sergius, the supposed war hero becomes a figure of mockery rather than admiration. His exaggerated speech and affected mannerisms expose the performative nature of heroism:

I never withdraw! The officer who retreats
is a disgrace to his regiment. The soldier who
dies is his regiment's hero." (Shaw 1894, p. 32)

This declaration is delivered in a bombastic tone and highlights how heroism is often a theatrical pose rather than a genuine moral virtue. Derrida's (1976) theory of *différance* suggested that language never fully conveys fixed meanings rather defers them indefinitely. In this light, Sergius's grandiose rhetoric becomes a self referential performance which is undermining the stability of the heroic identity he seeks to affirm.

A key post structuralist strategy in Shaw's language is the reversal of binary oppositions. Traditional heroism relied on binaries such as bravery vs. cowardice and honor vs. self-preservation. However, Shaw complicates these distinctions by portraying Bluntschli's cowardice as more rational than Sergius's bravery. Bluntschli's pragmatic worldview dismantled the binary between hero and coward, as he said "When you have been through as many battles as I have, you won't want to talk about it." (Shaw 1894, p. 45). Through the privilege of Bluntschli's disillusioned perspective, Shaw reverses the conventional association of heroism with bravery and elevates self preservation as a more authentic response to war.

Shaw incorporates metafictional elements that draw attention to the constructed nature of heroism as a literary convention. Raina's constant reference to operatic tropes and romantic novels highlights that literature shapes her expectations of heroism. Bluntschli's pragmatic language disrupts this romantic discourse "Nine soldiers out of ten are born fools" (Shaw 1894, p. 22). This self-referential dialogue exposes the gap between literary representations of war and its lived realities.

Through irony and satirical dialogues, Shaw has criticized our social thinking process. Our psyche is developed by our social system. The deconstruction of archetypes molds the

complete concepts about social values. The binary reversals and metafictional elements help to interpret the deep message of Shaw. He employs a range of language strategies to challenge the traditional image of heroism in *Arms and the Man* (1894). These strategies align with post structuralist principles by destabilizing fixed meanings and exposing the constructed nature of heroic ideals. Shaw's linguistic subversion not only critiques romanticized notions of war but also invites the audience to question the ideological frameworks that sustain them. As Derrida's theory of *différance* suggests, meaning is always deferred, so Shaw's play exposes heroism as a shifting, performative construct rather than an inherent virtue.

In *Arms and the Man* (1894), George Bernard Shaw employs a variety of language strategies to dismantle the romanticized image of heroism that was prevalent in Victorian society. Shaw's satirical tone, use of irony and subversion of conventional military rhetoric create a framework for post structuralist deconstruction of heroism. The linguistic techniques Shaw uses in the play to challenge the glorified ideals of war and heroism, help to understand his philosophy.

The primary language strategy used by Shaw to dismantle the traditional image of heroism lies in his use of irony and satire. The character of Captain Bluntschli functions as a mouthpiece for Shaw's anti heroic philosophy. Early in the play, Bluntschli discredits the romanticized view of war held by Raina and her society. When Raina boasted about Sergius "My hero, My king" (Shaw 1894, p. 12), the idealized language reflects her conventional understanding of heroism. The heroism of Victorian society was rooted in the chivalric traditions. However, Bluntschli's response undercuts this ideal and exposed the pragmatic reality of warfare.

The Bluntschli's famous declaration "I carry chocolate instead of cartridges" (Shaw 1894, p. 15) exemplified Shaw's ironic inversion of the heroic archetype. The image of a soldier carrying chocolate rather than ammunition ridicules the traditional notion of courage associated with the battlefield. This seemingly trivial confession dismantles the assumption that heroism is defined solely by physical bravery and violence. In a post structuralist reading, this statement destabilizes the binary opposition between the concepts of bravery and cowardice and suggested that survival and pragmatism hold equal if not greater value.

Shaw further challenges the traditional image of heroism through Raina's exaggerated idealization of her fiancé Sergius. Raina exclaims "There shall be no sham hero for me. If I

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ever meet a man who is truly brave, truly generous and a gentleman, my heart and soul. I shall know him” (Shaw 1894, p. 19). The hyperbolic language here underscores the constructed nature of Raina’s heroic ideal. However, this statement is laced with dramatic irony. The audience is already aware of the superficiality of Sergius’s heroism.

Bluntschli's interjection “Nine soldiers out of ten are born fools” (Shaw 1894, p. 22) directly dismantles the myth of military glory. This aphoristic statement exposes the irrationality underlying the traditional concept of heroism. The phrase operates as a linguistic rupture that deconstructs the binary opposition between heroism and foolishness. Shaw is positioning them as intertwined rather than mutually exclusive.

The play's dialogue reveals the power dynamics embedded in language and how they serve to uphold or challenge dominant discourses of heroism. Raina’s condescending tone when addressing Bluntschli and calling him a “chocolate-cream soldier” (Shaw 1894, p. 28) initially reinforces the stereotype of the unheroic mercenary. However, this playful insult becomes a term of endearment as the narrative unfolds and highlights that language is not fixed but subject to reinterpretation.

Bluntschli's response to Raina “I am a professional soldier. I fight when I have to, and I don't fight when I don't have to” (Shaw 1894, p. 27) challenged the essential view of heroism. His pragmatic philosophy reframed the concept of bravery as a form of selfpreservation rather than self sacrifice. Post structuralist theory views language as a site of contestation, and this exchange exemplifies that linguistic signs can destabilize dominant ideologies.

Shaw employs symbolic language to further undermine the traditional image of heroism. The recurring motif of chocolate becomes a metaphor for the pragmatic soldier. Chocolate is often associated with luxury and indulgence. It contrasts with the austere imagery of military life. This juxtaposition creates a symbolic disruption of the hero's idealized image. Moreover, the metaphor of the “chocolate-cream soldier” suggests that vulnerability and practicality are more sustainable virtues than reckless bravery and pretentiousness. This symbol operates as what Derrida (1976) terms a *différance*, a signifier that defers the fixed meaning of heroism and opens it to multiple interpretations. For Shaw, heroism is always true to one’s self rather than facade impression.

Humor plays a crucial role in Shaw's linguistic strategy. The comic tone of the play lightens the critique of heroism. It makes it more palatable for the audience. For example,

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Bluntschli's deadpan delivery of lines such as "It is our duty to live as long as we can" (Shaw 1894, p. 25) transforms what might be perceived as cowardice into a rational philosophy. This humorous re-framing encourages the audience to question the conventional glorification of death in war.

Shaw's linguistic strategies in *Arms and the Man* (1894) dismantled the traditional image of heroism by exposing its constructed and often contradictory nature. Through irony, satire, dialogue, symbolic language and humor, Shaw has deconstructed the romantic ideals of heroism embedded in Victorian society. The interplay between characters like Bluntschli, Raina, and Sergius reveals how language is both a tool of ideological reproduction and a site of subversive resistance. By destabilizing the binary oppositions of bravery and cowardice, bravery and pragmatism, Shaw opens the possibility for new interpretations of heroism that align more closely with human vulnerability and rationality.

Shaw consistently uses irony to expose the gap between the idealized concept of heroism and its reality. One significant example occurs when Bluntschli remarks "Do you know what the higher love is? Very fatiguing thing to keep up for any length of time, Raina. One feels the need of some relief after it" (Shaw 1894, p. 32). Bluntschli's casual dismissal of higher love is contrasted with Raina's idealized vision of love and heroism. The irony lies in the way Bluntschli reduces the grand concept of love to mere fatigue. It reflects Shaw's criticism that society glorifies abstract ideals detached from practical human needs. The use of the word fatiguing highlights the impracticality of sustaining romanticized heroism in real life.

Similarly, Shaw employs irony when Sergius sarcastically comments "What a man! Is he a man?" (Shaw 1894, p. 34). Here, Sergius ironically questions Bluntschli's masculinity after learning that he carried chocolates instead of cartridges during the battle. The repetition of the word man emphasizes how rigid gender norms are often tied to traditional images of heroism. Shaw challenges this stereotype by presenting Bluntschli's pragmatism as more heroic than Sergius's performative bravado. Bluntschli's dialogue frequently undercuts the glorification of war. For instance, he states "Nine soldiers out of ten are born fools" (Shaw, 1894, p. 36). This blunt observation dismantles the traditional association of soldiers with bravery and intelligence. The hyperbolic phrase nine out of ten highlights the absurdity of romanticizing soldiers as noble figures. It suggests that the majority of them are mere pawns in the machinery of war. The casual tone further strips the military of its grandeur, reducing it

to a domain of ordinary, flawed individuals.

Bluntschli continues this deconstruction when he confesses “I tell you, the artillery man told me to come in. He was quite friendly about it. Gave me some chocolate, too” (Shaw 1894, p. 39). This anecdote juxtaposes the supposed hostility of war with unexpected moments of camaraderie and hospitality. Shaw uses everyday objects like chocolate to demystify the battlefield. He portrays it as a space where survival often hinges on practicality rather than heroism. The inclusion of chocolate as a symbol of comfort further undermines the conventional imagery of war as a stage for noble deeds. A stark contrast emerges between Bluntschli's pragmatic language and the lofty rhetoric of Raina and Sergius. When Raina accuses Bluntschli of lacking heroism, he retorts:

I am a professional soldier: I fight when I have to
and am very glad to get out of it when I can." (Shaw, 1894, p. 41)

The phrase professional soldier implies duty rather than passion. It questions the romantic notion that soldiers fight for glory. Bluntschli's candid admission prioritizes self preservation over sacrifice. It is aligning heroism from survival rather than selfless devotion. Shaw's choice of the word glad injects an almost comic relief and further dismantled the gravity traditionally associated with military service.

Through Raina's evolving perspective, Shaw has subtly criticized the female gaze that perpetuates romantic heroism. Early in the play, Raina idealizes Sergius but later she begins to question these ideals “I suppose soldiering has to be a trade like any other trade” (Shaw 1894, p. 48). The word trade reduces soldiering to mere labor. It strips it of mere heroic connotations. This linguistic shift reflects Raina's gradual disillusionment with romantic ideals. By framing soldiering as a mundane occupation, Shaw challenges the notion that military service is inherently noble.

Sergius, the epitome of romantic heroism becomes a vehicle for Shaw's satire. His exaggerated speech patterns reveal the performative nature of chivalry “What a divine being! What more is left for me but to die?” (Shaw 1894, p. 45). The hyperbolic language and melodramatic tone expose the artificiality of the chivalric code. Shaw uses Sergius's excessive sentimentality to suggest that traditional heroism often relies on empty rhetoric rather than genuine courage.

Through these language strategies as irony, satire, pragmatic dialogue and the subversion of romantic tropes, Shaw systematically dismantles the traditional image of

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heroism in *Arms and the Man* (1894). The play's language challenges idealized representations of war and valor. It replaced them with a more nuanced, humanistic vision of heroism. By giving voice to pragmatic characters like Bluntschli and allowing idealistic figures like Raina to evolve, Shaw offers a compelling critique of the linguistic and cultural frameworks that sustain conventional heroism.

Language plays a pivotal role in constructing and deconstructing the concept of heroism in George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* (1894). Shaw's witty dialogue, ironic remarks and subtle wordplay challenge the traditional romanticized notion of heroism and exposed its fragility. Applying post structuralist theory, particularly Jacques Derrida's ideas of language instability and deferred meaning, highlights how language becomes a tool to dismantle the binary opposition of heroism versus cowardice.

Irony is one of Shaw's primary linguistic tools which help him to deconstruct heroism. From the very introduction of Captain Bluntschli, the so called "chocolate cream soldier" the traditional image of a heroic soldier is immediately subverted. When Raina discovers Bluntschli prefers chocolate over cartridges, her idealistic notions of a soldier are shattered:

I am a professional soldier: I fight when I have to
and am very glad to get out of it when I haven't to.

You're only an amateur: you think fighting's
an amusement (Shaw, 1894/2008, p. 12).

Bluntschli's pragmatic approach to war contrasts with Raina's romantic imagination. The irony in this dialogue dismantles the fixed association of soldiers with bravery and fearlessness. According to Derrida's concept of *différance*, meaning is not fixed but deferred. It is constantly shaped by its opposite (Derrida, 1976). Here, heroism is defined not by bravery but by its opposite self-preservation.

Major Sergius Saranoff is initially portrayed as the embodiment of traditional heroism "What a man! Is he a man! Is he a hero" (Shaw 1894, p. 18). However, as the play unfolds, Sergius's heroism is exposed as performative and shallow. His victory in battle is based on luck rather than skill. It is highlighting the arbitrary nature of heroism. As Derrida suggested that binaries are always hierarchical, with one term privileged over the other (Culler, 1982). Shaw's language exposes how heroism relies on an unstable linguistic construct, where cowardice lurks beneath the surface of bravery.

Throughout the play, characters frequently contradict themselves, reflecting the instability of language. Bluntschli's blunt honesty disrupts the fixed meanings of heroism, "Nine soldiers out of ten are born fools" (Shaw, 1894/2008, p. 26). This statement challenges the glorification of soldiers by suggesting that heroism is not an innate quality but a societal illusion. The phrase born fools destabilizes the assumption that soldiers possess inherent bravery. According to Derrida, language always defers meaning, preventing the final closure of meaning (Derrida, 1976). Here, heroism is deferred into foolishness, subverting the idealized narrative. Shaw uses satirical language to mock the romanticized heroism of both Raina and Sergius. When Raina describes Sergius's cavalry charge, she exclaims: "He flew at the enemy like an eagle" (Shaw 1894, p. 15).

However, Bluntschli later reveals that the charge was reckless and only succeeded due to a blunder by the enemy. The hyperbolic metaphor of the eagle is dismantled by the mundane reality of war. This aligns with Derrida's claim that meaning is always subject to reinterpretation and can never fully represent the truth. The recurring motif of the "chocolate cream soldier" serves as the ultimate symbol of deconstructed heroism. The nickname itself blends the language of war with domestic, harmless imagery. By associating a soldier with chocolate a symbol of comfort and vulnerability Shaw dismantles the rigid, masculine image of a hero "Do you know what the higher love is? Very fatiguing thing to keep up for any length of time" (Shaw, 1894 p. 37). Bluntschli's practical view of love parallels his pragmatic approach to war, further dismantling the idealism associated with both heroism and romance.

The Poststructuralist theory reveals how language destabilizes fixed meanings, exposing heroism as a constructed illusion. By unraveling the linguistic threads that uphold traditional heroism, Shaw challenged the audience to question the narratives imposed by society. As Derrida has asserted that meaning is always deferred and Shaw's play exemplifies how heroism is not a stable, inherent quality but a fragile construct shaped by language.

George Bernard Shaw dismantles the traditional notion of heroism by employing post structuralist deconstruction of language. Shaw challenges the fixed meanings attached to heroism by exposing the contradictions and instability within the language used by the characters. The play systematically deconstructs the romantic ideals of heroism, particularly through the dialogues of Captain Bluntschli and Raina.

Bluntschli's pragmatic and ironic discourse serves as a primary tool in dismantling the idealistic notions of heroism. His language consistently undermines the romanticized concept

of the soldier as a fearless and noble figure. When he declares “I’m a professional soldier I fight when I have to, and am very glad to get out of it when I haven’t to. You’re only an amateur: you think fighting’s an amusement” (Shaw 1894, p. 16). He disrupts the binary between heroism and cowardice. According to Derrida’s concept of *différance*, the meaning of heroism is not fixed but defined by its opposition to cowardice (Derrida, 1978). Bluntschli’s language reveals that heroism is a constructed illusion rather than an inherent virtue.

Raina’s idealized vision of heroism is repeatedly dismantled through the irony embedded in her language. She initially refers to Sergius as “my hero” (Shaw 1894, p. 6). By the end of the play, she acknowledges the absurdity of such idealism. The repetition of “my hero” becomes ironic, showing the gap between the signifier hero and the signified Sergius. This aligns with Derrida’s view that language is inherently unstable and meaning is always deferred (Derrida, 1978). Sergius himself becomes a victim of the language that constructs his heroism. When he admits “I never felt so much like a man in my life” (Shaw 1894, p. 43), he inadvertently exposes the performative nature of masculinity and heroism. His own language reveals that heroism is not an essence but a role played in accordance with societal expectations.

The term “chocolate cream soldier” (Shaw 1894, p. 18) becomes a subversive signifier that destabilizes the heroic ideal. Chocolate, associated with pleasure and fragility, contradicts the traditional imagery of strength and valor. This playful inversion of language reveals that the meaning is constructed through arbitrary associations, echoing Derrida’s idea that signs derive meaning through their difference from other signs (Derrida, 1978). By exposing the gaps, contradictions, and performative nature of heroic discourse, the play aligns with post-structuralist theory. The instability of language challenges the traditional binaries of heroism and cowardice, suggesting that heroism is not a stable essence but a fragile construction sustained by language.

Findings and Conclusion

The textual analysis of the play *Arms and the Man* (1894) through the lens of post-structuralist theory reveals Shaw’s deliberate dismantling of conventional heroic ideals. Through the subversion of the glorified image of the romantic soldier, the author challenged the binary oppositions that structure traditional heroic narratives. The play had deconstructed the established definitions of heroism. The concept of heroism has been exposed as social

constructs rather than inherent truth. Shaw has changed the socially celebrated notions and provided his own unique aspects of these concepts.

The post structuralist theory emphasized on the instability of language and meanings and offered a profound understanding of Shaw's redefinition of heroism. The juxtaposition of Bluntschli and Sergius highlights the fluidity of heroic identity. Sergius, who has been projected as the romantic hero of the play, is unmasked as a figure driven by vanity. His military exploits are based on empty gestures rather than genuine bravery. Conversely, Bluntschli is the pragmatic and unromantic soldier. He emerged as the true embodiment of heroism through his intelligence, realism and rejection of outdated ideals.

This reversal of roles destabilizes the fixed meanings associated with heroism. The play suggested that valor and bravery are not absolute qualities but products of social and linguistic conventions. Furthermore, Shaw's use of irony and wit functions as a tool of deconstruction. He has exposed the absurdity of idealized notions of war and heroism through his powerful language expressions. The characters' dialogues continuously undermine their own assertions and reinforce the post structuralist claim that language is inherently self contradictory. Raina's shifting perceptions of love and heroism exemplify this instability. Her infatuation with Sergius's romantic image gradually dissolves in favor of Bluntschli's pragmatic worldview.

In light of the analysis, the play *Arms and the Man* (1894) stands as a pivotal text that redefines the conventional perception of heroism through a satirical and post structuralist lens. The play has challenged the romanticized ideals of heroism rooted in the Victorian era. It offers a more pragmatic and humanized representation of the heroic figure. Shaw dismantled the traditional dichotomy of heroism by exposing the gap between appearance and reality, valor and vulnerability and idealism and practicality. The characters, particularly Captain Bluntschli and Sergius Saranoff served as contrasting archetypes. The play has deconstructed the glorified notions of heroism prevalent in both literature and society. Moreover, George Bernard Shaw's portrayal of heroism has exterminated the binary oppositions of war and peace, courage and cowardice and honor and pragmatism. The play has emphasized that heroism is not found in the grandiose acts of battlefield valor but in the everyday choices of honesty, rationality and empathy.

In conclusion, George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* (1894) revolutionizes the concept of heroism by deconstructing its traditional ideals and proposing a more pragmatic,

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human-centered alternative. The play aligns with post-structuralist theory by revealing the constructed nature of heroic identity and challenging the binary oppositions that underpin conventional heroism. In *Arms and the Man* (1894), George Bernard Shaw employs a range of linguistic strategies to systematically deconstruct the conventional image of the traditional hero. Through irony, paradox, satire, and subversive dialogue, Shaw challenges the romanticized notions of heroism prevalent in both literature and society. The play's language is not merely a vehicle for communication but a tool for dismantling the ideological constructs associated with heroism, particularly in the context of war and love.

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