

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

New Women and the Politics of Self: An Insight into Henrik Ibsen's "A Doll's House" and George Bernard Shaw's "Saint Joan"

Dr. Njong Divine

Head, Department of English Modern Letters,
Higher Teacher Training College-Bertoua, University of Bertoua, Cameroon

Abstract:

This article is entitled "New Women and the Politics of Self: An Insight into Henrik Ibsen's "A Doll's House" and George Bernard Shaw's "Saint Joan". The article investigates how the heroines in the plays of both authors break away from the mores of the Victorian and Norwegian societies in a bid to find their true selves. The article attempts a comparative analysis of the revolutionary attitudes of Ibsen's and Shaw's women. It illustrates the claim that the heroines of both authors are precursors of change and instruments of meaningful alteration. Based on the assumption that the women of Ibsen and Shaw are revolutionists and agents of socio-political, cultural, and economic transformation, the article posits that the unconventional mindsets of the heroines represent a threat to 19th-century society in general and the sacrosanctity of Victorian mores in particular.

Seen from the feminist and Marxist perspectives, this article focuses on how Ibsen and Shaw used the stage in the 19th century to create stereotypical new women to achieve a gradual and sometimes cataclysmic transformation of their societies. According to the article, to discover their true selves, the heroines of the playwrights must challenge the inanities of conformist degeneracy in society and break the confining chain that limits women's freedom.

Keywords: Women, revolutionary, Victorian, conformist, change, freedom, self, feminist and Marxist

1. Introduction

The history of the confinement and debasement of women is as old as the history of humanity and represents one of the universal problems of mankind. No civilisation, no matter its size or age, is innocent of the subjugation and arbitrariness that women have known worldwide. This eternal problem which is constantly masqueraded as cultural practices, religious edicts, and gender perception, continues to be the existential issue facing women today. Their continuous marginalisation results in confinement, seclusion, displacement, and other crippling disadvantages, bringing forth various layers of social closure. In an article entitled "Marginalisation of Women and the Social Exclusion Discourse", Shafey Kidwai notes that the deep-rooted privation of women on several counts in apparent and complex contexts manifests an ever-widening rupture in the social bond. Therefore, this is central to comprehending the multi-layered social exclusion discourse, which emerges as a new paradigm to analyse the dynamics of women's socio-economic, cultural, and political oppression.

As highlighted above, women's roles have been a big part of literature and are usually a representation of how these have evolved in real life. Many of the plays of Ibsen and Shaw are considered by many to be representations of the issues women faced in the 19th century. During the 1800s, women gradually began to become more independent. More and more women entered the workforce and took on more responsibilities. However, this change was a gradual process. Just because it was becoming more acceptable to work does not mean a woman could decide to get a job and work alongside a man. It depended on class and social status.

This unfortunate situation of women has been a major concern for Ibsen and Shaw for a long time. Victorian society and even Norwegian society reduced the woman to being nothing more than a daughter, a wife, and a mother. Both playwrights developed an intense curiosity to change this order of things. Both authors consider their society chauvinistic, with women assigned permanent traditional and stereotypical roles of chastity, purity, obedience, and frugality. According to them, a woman's respect is not supposed to be measured by her submissiveness to her husband, father, brother, or any other male in society. This was the case in the Norwegian and Victorian societies.

Gender difference was, therefore, a reality worldwide, but the situation was even more intense in the Victorian period with its demanding and demeaning principles of respectability and morality. While race, religion, region, and occupation were all meaningful aspects of identity and status, the main organising principles of Victorian society were gender and class, and gender ideology was based on the doctrine of "separate spheres". This defined the differences between men and women and suggested that men were physically strong while women were weak. In a book entitled 'Understanding the Victorians: Politics, Culture, and Society in Nineteenth-Century Britain', Susie Stenbach notes that:

For men, sex was central, and for women, reproduction was central. Men were independent, while women were dependent. Men belonged in the public sphere, while women belonged in the private sphere. Men were meant to participate in politics and paid work, while women were meant to run households and raise families. Women were also thought to be naturally more religious and morally finer than men (who were distracted by sexual passions by which women supposedly were untroubled). While most working-class families could not live out the doctrine of separate spheres because they could not survive on a single male wage, the ideology was influential across all classes. (7)

Therefore, men and women in the Victorian period had to live according to the dictates of society. If a man or woman did not possess the qualities desired by society, the opposite sex would dismiss the person as an unsuitable mate. In *'The Importance of Being Earnest'* and *'The Picture of Dorian Gray'*, Oscar Wilde discusses the impact of Victorian society's unrealistic expectations on the individual showing how rejection, whether from a potential partner or society as a whole, can lead to deceit and double life in order to satisfy conventions.

The patriarchal nature of Victorian society was, therefore, clear and very challenging for the Victorian woman. Society gave the former one main role in life: to marry and participate in their husbands' interests and business. Before marriage, they would learn housewife skills such as weaving, cooking, washing, and cleaning unless they were of a wealthy family. If they were wealthy, they did not always learn these tasks because their maids primarily took care of the household chores. Women were typically not allowed to be educated or gain knowledge outside the home because it was a man's world.

In an article entitled "Victorian Women Expected to Be Idle and Ignorant", Charles Petrie posits that "From infancy, all girls who were born above the level of poverty had the dream of a successful marriage before their eyes, for by that alone was it possible for a woman to rise in the world" (Petrie 180). Women were therefore denied the privilege to work or participate in a man's world and spent their formative years preparing for marriage. Furthermore, they expected the men to take care of them and provide for them since they could not provide for themselves.

In Victorian England and even in Norway, it was widely believed that women were inferior to men and fundamentally different from them in many ways. In a book entitled *"A Man's Place, Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England"*, John Tosh posits that women were set apart from the 'superior sex' by a natural physical endowment for specific tasks requiring distinctive attributes. He further notes, "Traditionally in Western society, men regarded women as not essentially different, but less perfect versions of themselves." (43-44). However, the rise of 'sensibility' in the eighteenth century led to a new trend for analysing human behaviour in terms of the nervous system. Subsequently, mental differences between men and women were increasingly stressed by the end of the eighteenth century. In addition, women were considered more sensitive to the emotional life around them, which gave them special qualities in the moral sphere. Thus, the moral gap between husband and wife was widely acknowledged. In his *"Keeping the Victorian House: A Collection of Essays"*, VD Dickerson notes, "More than in any other period, Victorian women and men agreed that women were the more spiritual sex. However, since their spiritual role was based in the home, they could not exercise public authority" (xvi). Consequently, women's sexual nature was adjusted to conform to this moralised femininity. Modesty, departing from the conventional view of being a discipline imposed by men on the lascivious sex, came to be seen as an inner quality that arose from a lack of sexual desire (Davidoff & Hall 401).

This study takes into consideration the similarity of the viewpoints of these writers on the issues of "love", "marriage" and "confidence" as factors determining the nature of relations between couples suggested in the above-mentioned plays. In this respect, will be considered:

- The way husbands look at their wives,
- Wives' response to the attitudes of their husbands

How all these affect the nature of the relationship between couples and the image that society reserves for women and the latter's reaction to it will be investigated. In their plays, *"A Doll's House"* and *"Saint Joan,"* respectively, Ibsen and Shaw demonstrate that the traditional attitude of men to women did not change even a bit at the end of the eighteenth century. Men were still not ready to see women as their partners in every respect.

This unfortunate situation of the Victorian woman began to change towards the end of the 19th century with the emergence of the "New Woman" concept. Although the phrase "New Woman" was invented by Sarah Grand in her article "The New Aspect of the Woman Question," it was developed and popularised by Henry James when he used it to describe American emigrants living in Europe (Stevens 27). In this regard, sensitive women who possessed material wealth showed a free spirit in their attitude and behaviour. They became responsive due to various social, political, and economic forces and took up new positions in cultural, social, political, and economic life.

In the last two decades of the Victorian age, one could see the beginning of change in the attitude of society towards gender relations. While the concept of patriarchal male domination was punctured and the modern concept of gender equality gained momentum, pertinent reflections started on issues of marriage and divorce laws, right to property, custody rights, educational and employment opportunities for women, and female suffrage. Furthermore, socio-cultural forces, new science, new technology, new education, and trends toward liberalisation brought about the emergence of the "new woman" in Literature. In fiction, these new women challenged male patriarchy, prompted intellectuals to redefine gender roles, and emphasised women's rights. They included social reformers, novelists, female students, and professional women. They have constituted strong defiance of the existing institutions of control and gender equations at various levels, such as the family, the society, the economy, and politics.

The "new woman" struggles to bring changes in society through the abolition of sexist attitudes and patriarchal domination. Simone De Beauvoir notes that one is not born but becomes a woman (De Beauvoir, 295). Thus, the "new woman" explores the idea of womanhood and its importance in the male-dominated society. She, therefore, chooses to

protest and fight against the age-old traditional beliefs and accepted norms and currents of the society. She also puts more emphasis on exploring her true potential to improve her low position in her family and society as well. Referring to this, K. Meera Bai, in *"Women's Voices: In the Novels of Indian Women Writers"*, opines that the word "New Woman" has come to signify the awakening of women into a new realisation of their place and position in family and society. Conscious of her individuality, the "new woman" has been trying to assert her rights as a human being and is determined to fight for equal treatment with men. (Qtd in Srivastava 15-16). Therefore, the "new woman" is an assertive and self-willed woman searching to discover her true self. Her purpose is not only to seek equality and rights but to learn more about her space, recognition, respect, and understanding from her male counterpart. With a feminist mindset, she challenges the modern man that she is no more passive and docile but a kind of woman who has the potential to change the traditional fanciful and dogmatic thoughts that have undermined and ignored the full potential and space of the woman in the past.

The "New woman" can therefore be said to be identical to the feminist ideal as she questions the traditional gender norms and fights for equality in various spheres of life like economic, political, social, educational, sexual rights, and duties in patriarchal societies. While struggling to assert herself in a strictly male-oriented society, she is determined "to achieve self-determination through life, growth, and experience, thereby giving birth to a new woman" (Allen 7). As Charlotte Perkins Gilman described her, "Here she comes, running, out of prison and off the pedestal; chains off, crown off, halo off, just a live woman" (Allen 32).

The core issue for the new woman, as seen in the plays of both playwrights, is that men find it difficult to accept the fact that women are complementary to men in the family and social life. Therefore, the plays under study have been seen here from a Marxist feminist perspective and a cultural Marxist standpoint. As reflected by these playwrights, men's traditional conception of women does not lead to the acceptance of mutual equivalence.

Although accomplished differently, the main female characters from each play decide to take their life choices into their own hands and step outside the box that society has made for them. Their choices and the timing of the 19th-century feminist movement caused the plays of Ibsen and Shaw to become associated with being supportive of feminism. The characters could be seen as victims in situations caused by the men around them. As a result, many began to argue that the characters were Ibsen's and Shaw's way of advocating feminism. The two authors never confirmed this, but many critics feel that others focus too much on the gender of the main characters, and the plays are representations of realism. If one looks past the gender labels applied to each character, one will realise that there is more to each character's story than being a woman that is "stuck" in a situation. The audience's interpretation of the women was affected by the prominent issues of the time, and the stories reflect the thoughts of some middle-class women at the time.

Refusing to be considered a feminist, Ibsen nevertheless expresses his view of a double-standard society, as he once forced a female character in an earlier play, *"The Pillars of Society,"* to cry out, "Your society is a society of bachelor-souls!" Moreover, he seems to have personified this male-oriented viewpoint by creating Torvald Helmer in his *"A Doll's House"*. In his notes for *"A Doll's House"*, Ibsen writes that the background of his projected drama "is an exclusively masculine society with laws written by men and with prosecutors and judges who regard feminine conduct from a masculine point of view" (112).

2. Theoretical Considerations

In the *'Communist Manifesto,'* published in 1848, Karl Marx notes that society is organised by social rank. In these varying classes, there are the oppressor and the oppressed, the bourgeois and the proletariat. The relationship between a husband and wife in the nineteenth century relates to these opposing forces through oppression. In Ibsen's *"A Doll's House,"* Torvald's and Nora's relationship parallels that of the bourgeois and the proletariat. Torvald has the money and the power in the relationship, while Nora is subordinate and is said to have no influence over her husband. Despite being a member of the bourgeois herself at the beginning of the play, Nora's revolt against Torvald by the end of the play causes her to become the proletariat. Karl Marx calls upon the proletariat to revolt against his oppressor, and at the end of the play, Nora does this, signalling the dominance of Marxist tenets in the play.

On its part, the feminist theory aims to understand the nature of inequality among women and focuses on gender politics, power relations, and sexuality. The basis of feminist ideology is that rights, privileges, status, and obligations should not be determined by gender. Instead, the theory focuses on discrimination, objectivisation, stereotyping, patriarchy, and domination. The feminist interest in this article will be seen from the point of view of Simone de Beauvoir, a French writer, intellectual, feminist, and social theorist who is best known for her treatise *"The Second Sex,"* a detailed analysis of women's oppression and a foundational tract of contemporary feminism. It illustrates de Beauvoir's concept of woman as "the Other" and posits that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (301). Furthermore, it asserts that the experience of the woman has been neglected by conventional society and declares that "[o]ur societies are patriarchal and a woman must break the bonds in order to be herself as a human being" (125). In this regard, in notes made for *"A Doll's House"* in 1878, Ibsen declares that "[a] woman cannot be herself in the society of the present day, which is an exclusively masculine society, with laws framed by men and with a judicial system that judges feminine, from a masculine point of view" (Meyer, 1971b:9).

The religious, patriarchal, and traditional authorities in *Saint Joan* also despise and revile Joan because of her convictions and the "New Woman" qualities she demonstrates. She is treated and seen as "the other" and eventually condemned to the stakes because she insists on asserting herself.

Simone de Beauvoir's concept of woman as "the other" will enable this article to examine the untrue marriage system, the individuality of women, their search for freedom, and their protest against social and conventional institutions, as seen in *"A Doll's House"* and *"Saint Joan."* The dominant idea of the authors in their works is that all social instructions

and conventions are the enemy of every individual because they restrict the characters' identity and freedom. The authors expand their outlook on the women's position whose individuality and freedom are taken by masculine society. Nora behaves like a doll as a woman, a wife, or a mother. She is under the control of the invisible hands and the pressures of patriarchal society. Ibsen protests against the position of women in a masculine society, which is unfair and under the hegemony of male-dominated powers.

The feminist concept of "New Woman" and the unconventional ideal of womanliness are brought to develop in *Saint Joan*. Shaw's play, like Ibsen's, enables his heroine to demonstrate the possibility of her feminist convictions associated with themes of marriage, motherhood, and womanliness once considered a woman's nature.

3. Individual Personality in a Masculine World

The themes of *"A Doll's House"* recur throughout most of Ibsen's works. These themes often involve the conflict between the individual and society, equally characteristic of Shaw's plays. However, the specific problem of these dramas deals with the difficulty of maintaining an individual personality-in this case, a feminine personality within the confines of a stereotyped social role. In Ibsen's *"A Doll's House,"* the problem is personified as Nora, the doll who strives to become a self-motivated human being in a woman-denying man's world.

In the play, Nora Helmer is treated like a caged bird. In her husband's eyes, she exists to be beautiful and there when he needs to be entertained. He even often refers to her as his little songbird. She does not do much around the house except for shopping and playing with the children. She lives in a fantasy world and does not care about the misfortune of others unless it directly affects her. This is evident when her widowed friend visits her and asks for her help finding a job. Nora cannot stop thinking about her "wonderful" life and proceeds to share these details with her friend. It is almost as if life is just a game. In her mind, bad things happen but will not last forever. Torvald's use of "my," "me," "mine," and "I" throughout the play displays his position of control.

Torvald displays his domineering attitude by dealing with his wife like a child, promoting her childish behaviours and binding her to demeaning rules and actions (Downs, 147). After her secret is revealed and he regains composure, he tries to pretend that everything is back to normal and feels that "he is generously returning her to her status as wife and mother" (Deer, 4). After he patronises her again, she tries to stand up for herself, and he authoritatively replies, "You're insane! You've no right! I forbid you" (1247). Until the events that occurred in the play, Nora was never required to deal with true misfortune on her own. Nora is not taken seriously, but this is understandable because she has never had the opportunity to think for herself. Nora even realises this herself as she states that:

"What I mean is: I passed out of Daddy's hands into yours. You arranged everything to your tastes, and I acquired the same tastes. Or I pretended to... I don't really know... I think it was a bit of both, sometimes one thing and sometimes the other. When I look back, it seems to me I have been living here like a beggar, hand to mouth. I lived by doing tricks for you, Torvald. But that's the way you wanted it. You and Daddy did me a great wrong. It's your fault that I've never made anything of my life." (Ibsen 80)

One could argue that Nora is trying to push the blame off on others and not take ownership of the way her life is. However, due to the time, she is correct. Women did not have the freedom they have now to find themselves. Both Torvald and her father likely did not mean to harm her when they sheltered Nora. It was what they were accustomed to. Men were to handle everything. There are still people today that firmly believe this. Nora even felt that was the way things were supposed to be. It is when she realises that she does not have her own identity that her view changes. "...In the first part of the drama, she exploits the whole register of femininity as the feminine traditionally has been perceived and in the last part of the drama emerges as highly articulate and moreover willing to leave her husband and three children" (Rekdal 20). The fact that she can realise this and want to do something about it shows tremendous character growth.

When one looks at Nora's situation for what it is, one realises that she is a person that is trying to form her own opinions. This does apply to feminism because the movement became a way to empower women to think on their own. However, it also applies to many people regardless of sex, race, age, and nationality. Many people today are stuck in situations where others have made choices for them. It could be family members or a group of peers.

An example is the choice of religion. Usually, a person will choose a religion based on what their parents chose. While there is nothing wrong with this, some people would prefer to explore different types of religion, but they do not because of the backlash they would receive from family members. Nora touches on this when Torvald questions her religious values after she announces she is leaving her family. She states: "All I know is what Pastor Hansen said when I was confirmed. He said religion was this, that, and the other. When I'm away from all this, and on my own, I'll go into that, too. I want to find out whether what Pastor Hansen told me was right-or, at least, whether it's right for *me*" (Ibsen 82). Ibsen is trying to tell us that everyone needs a chance to form their own opinions and choose which path they want to take in life. The only way to do that is to completely remove oneself from the people that are influencing one's opinions.

Since a woman is allegedly motivated out of love for her husband and children, it is unthinkable to her that laws can forbid acts inspired by affection, let alone punish their infractions. The outcome of this tension is that "the wife in the play is finally at her wit's end as to what is right and wrong." She, therefore, loses her foothold in society and must flee the man who cannot dissociate himself from the laws of society. She can no longer live with a husband who cannot accomplish the "wonderful thing," a bridge of the mental gap which would bring his understanding and sympathies into an agreement with her point of view. Thus, *"A Doll's House"* questions the entire fabric of marital relationships, investigates the development of a character's self-awareness, and eventually indicts all the false values of contemporary society that deny an individual personality's worth.

The main conflict in Shaw's *Saint Joan* is hardly very different from the one in Ibsen's *"A Doll's House."* Joan does not suffer the deception of marital life in Victorian society, but like Nora, she collides with societal norms because she struggles to assert her individual personality. Joan's self-awareness is noticed earlier in the play from Joan's claims of revelations from God. Therefore, she rejects the dogmatic Christian doctrine of papal infallibility, which requires that the individual submits not only to the pope but to the church. Joan claims that her vision and voices come directly from God, and the church rejects such voices as heretical since Joan is acting as an individual. When she insists on the righteousness of her voices, she does so innocently and is unaware of the destructive implications of her assertion to the church.

The church is, however, forced to destroy Joan's individuality to save the majority or thousands of other Christians. Worth noting here is that Joan asserts her individuality; she seems to perceive God as the individual will as opposed to the conventional representation of God. She chooses to believe more in herself than in the constituted authority of the church. In a broader perspective, Joan, like Nora, chooses to assert her individuality rather than conform to society's demands. Her society condemns her for wearing men's clothes and involving herself in military affairs, bringing to mind the male-oriented society that Nora faces in *"A Doll's House."*

Nora's plight in *"A Doll's House"* and that of Joan in *"Saint Joan"* are reminiscent of Rose Terry Cooke's *How Celia Changed Her Mind and Selected Stories*. This story suggests that a married woman is nothing more than someone obligated to fulfill domestic responsibilities and duties. Mrs. Celia begins to understand and realise that the image she has of marriage being an equal partnership between the two parties is very uncommon. It has been illustrated in the following lines: "...she discovered how few among [women] were more than household drudges, the servants of their families, worked to the verge of exhaustion, and neither thanked nor rewarded for their pains" (Cooke 472). In Mrs. Celia's opinion, marriage requires a woman to devote herself entirely to domestic endeavours. Therefore, the problem of female victimisation is limited neither to Nora nor to Joan but is a universal phenomenon that attracts attention.

Like Joan, Nora and Mrs. Alving have difficulty asserting their personalities because of the hypocritical social ideals of the Victorian bourgeoisie. The heroines are hindered by conventional institutions that hinder individual effort and by the rigid principles of morality and respectability that reduce Victorian and Norwegian women to subordinate human beings. This could be seen as an attempt by Ibsen and Shaw to expose and represent different facets of human relationships and the employment of the characters wrestling with each other for dominant status in terms of environment and possession. These characters often subject others to extreme emotional violence to dominate them and force them into submissive behaviours.

The need for escape, concealment, disguises, threatening life in an encircled territory, menace, and desire for power and domination permeating Shaw's plays is also a concern shared by Ibsen. In *"A Doll's House,"* we find Nora emerging from the protection of her married life to confront the conditions of the outside world. Although she has been content in being a protected and cared-for housewife during the past eight years and has once averted a crisis by finding a way to borrow money for the sake of Torvald's health, Nora has never learned to challenge her environment overtly. As a result, Torvald is too hard on Nora when the latter's debt details are revealed—finding much injustice in Torvald's reaction, Nora revolts. She discovers that her husband confuses appearance with values, that he is more concerned with his position in society than with his wife's emotional needs, and that she is forced to confront her worthlessness. Rather than remain part of a marriage based on an intolerable lie, Nora becomes a "new woman" when she chooses to leave her home and discover for herself the individuality that life with Torvald has denied her.

Nora learns more about Torvald's weakness of character in act two, although she does not realize the full significance of this insight until the following scene. When Torvald tells her that he wishes to get rid of Krogstad, not because he judges him morally incompetent but because he is ashamed to admit friendship with a man held to be disreputable, Nora observes that Torvald is quite different from the moralising and respectable husband she has admired for eight years. However, despite this insight, she still believes, as she tells Christine, that the "wonderful thing" will still take place—the proud terrible moment when Torvald discovers the forgery and takes all the guilt upon himself.

We realise that Ibsen's drama does reveal the isolated quality of life in the middle-class territory and living rooms in which family members can be taken as undesirables and intruders who feel threatened by the outside world. In *"A Doll's House,"* for instance, Nora lives in a comfortable home, 'tastefully but not expensively furnished' that she believes is properly her place. However, she later learns she is as much a stranger to this place as she would be in Helmer's private study.

This brings to mind Harold Pinter's *"The Birthday Party,"* where Stanley is taking refuge in a boarding house and is convinced that he is safe. However, in reality, he is vulnerable to external intrusions and unknown threats. At first sight, it seems that the house or domestic environment is the symbol of intimacy for both of the characters. However, the irony is that such intimacy and bourgeois domesticity produces betrayal, threat, and insecurity, rather than trusting an open communication. So, it is well-understood that a home or a closed room is not always a safe place to live in, visit, or return to, which seems to be the case with Nora and Stanley.

Central to *"A Doll's House"* is Nora's concept of the "wonderful thing," the moment when she and Torvald would achieve a "real wedlock." During the drama, she has learned that the ideal union takes place when husband and wife regard each other as rational individuals who are aware of society's demands and can fulfill their separate responsibilities with sophistication and mutual respect. In another sense, the "wonderful thing" is merely a code word for a relationship whose values are freed from the mystique that society has attached to marriage with concepts like "duty," "respectability," "cosy home," "happy family," and the rest of the stereotyped images such phrases suggest. A "real wedlock" can only be attained when a couple, deeply committed to respecting each other's worth, work naturally and thoughtfully to fulfill the ideals their separate individualities require. Instead, Torvald deprives Nora of her sense of identity by striving for goals

thrust upon him through education based on social morality and verbal commitment to goals empty of feeling or commitment. To discover the essence of personal truth is the "wonderful thing" Nora Helmer, unable to find in her marriage, must seek through her resources.

Unlike Nora, who emerges as a conformist before achieving self-awareness, Joan emerges as a non-conformist whose individuality causes much uproar within the powers. By claiming to receive voices directly from God and not through the church, Joan challenges the bases of medieval Catholic Christianity and is treated as a heretic. Nevertheless, Joan believes in herself, and her mission to save France from the English, crown the Dauphin at Rheims, and raise the siege of Orleans must be achieved. She tells Robert, "That is what my God is sending me to do" (61).

The heroine faces stiff resistance from church authorities who consider her a heretic but her belief and determination push her into soldiering. She is confident and tells Dunois, "I will lead, and your men will follow. That is all I can do. But I must do it: you shall not stop me" (91). Joan, therefore, sounds unstoppable, and her courage is further seen when she tells Dunois, "You soldiers do not know how to use the big guns. You think you can win battle with a great noise and smoke" (91).

We realise that the heroine is filled with the courage that a "new woman" like her needs to realise her goals. Her intentions are seemingly genuine, but the effects on the dogmatic Christian religion at the time were unacceptable to society. Her belief that she must execute her mission from God is heightened by her courage to lead men to battle. She even encourages the Dauphin when he feels weak and incapable en route to war. She tells him, "I shall put courage into thee." Here, Shaw's heroine is seen as the "manly woman" Ibsen prescribes. By leading men to war, Joan innocently challenges the inferiority that Victorian society associated with women. Her war tactics are challenging as she advises Dunois, saying, "You should always attack; and if you only hold enough, the enemy will stop first" (114-115).

Joan's unorthodoxy is also seen in her dress. She wears trousers instead of skirts, carries an amour and prefers men's hairdo. In fact, she stands against all the rules that disfavour the woman. She appears to be responding to Rosalind Miles, in *"Who Cooked the Last Supper? The Women's History of the World"*, who says, "Women are weak where men are strong, fearful where men are brave and stupid where men are intelligent." Joan condemns this view like Barbara does in *Major Barbara*. Barbara leads the Salvation Army, and as her name indicates, she owns a respectable position in the army. Reacting to *Major Barbara*, Beerbom, in "Mr. Shaw Crescent," says, "Too many people; doubtless, it is a screamingly funny joke that a female should have a military prefix" (34). Shaw enlightens us better on Joan's unorthodox attitude when in the preface, he says:

Joan's pretensions surpass those of the proudest pope or the haughtiest emperor at eighteen. She claimed to be the ambassador and plenipotentiary of God and to be, in effect, a member of the church Triumphant while still in the flesh on earth. She patronised her king and summoned the English king to repentance and obedience to her commands. She lectured, talked down, and overruled statesmen and prelates. She pooh-poohed the plans of generals, leading their troops to victory on plans of her own. She had an unbounded and quite unconcealed contempt for official opinion, judgement, and authority.... (1-2)

Nothing would save Joan from the crime and accusation of heresy, considering the doctrines of the Christian Orthodox church of the time. However, this creates no impression on Joan nor stops her from saying or doing all that has been mentioned. She intends to stop at nothing to accomplish her mission. In a very authoritative manner, she tells Captain Robert, "Good morning, captain squire. Captain, you are to give me a horse and amour and some soldiers and send me to the Dauphin. Those are your orders from my lord" (60). It was unorthodox for a woman to speak in such a manner to a man in the fifteenth century and even to hold an amour.

Joan's firm commitment to her mission and her belief in the divine origin of her voices provide her with the courage she needs to go against such conventional rules, however ignorantly. Her aspirations and attitude can therefore be considered secessionist attempts from the society that harbours her. Her society is full of rules that consider the woman a sub-human whose duties are to care for a man and children. According to Malgorzata Bielecka, in *G. B. Shaw's "Unconventional Hero in Three Plays for Puritans,"* Joan's decision to go to war against the English is considered a war against society. She is therefore faced with a war on two fronts-the war with her society and the war with the English.

Contrary to the conformist woman, she refuses to accept that a woman's fate lies in the hands of her husband. She declares, "I will never take a husband . . . I am a soldier. I do not want to be thought of as a woman. I will not dress as a woman. I do not care for things women care for. They dream of lovers and money. I dream of leading a charge and placing big guns."

Therefore, Joan's belief in the mission she intends to accomplish has no place for romance. Joan sees no place for love or marriage in soldiering. She has little or no attachment to the Biblical prescription that puts the woman under the man, which requires her to "Go ye into the world and multiply" (3). Joan here may not be seen as an enemy of progeny but as a realist who knows that soldiering has no place for romance and marriage. She does not cling to marriage as a means of survival as Christine Linde does in *"A Doll's House."* Like Nora discovers at the end of *"A Doll's House,"* Joan knows that romance and marital affairs can only hinder her progress. Therefore, she must discard all conventional restrictions on the woman if she must realise her goal.

While Nora Helmer in *"A Doll's House"* rebels against her society, she closes the door behind her husband and children in search of her true self. Joan in *"Saint Joan"* revolts against Victorian institutions when she decides to become a soldier leading men to war and communicating directly with God. The heroines are determined to cut off from the ascribed laws that society has reserved for the woman. The authors create unconventional heroines in their dressings and attitudes and their belief that they must defy the inanities of conformist degeneracy in their societies to find their true selves. It is, therefore, clear that one of the central issues in the plays of Ibsen and Shaw is secession from society. The "new woman,"

therefore, according to Ibsen and Shaw, is full of hope, courage, and determination to break the rules and challenge every institution that prevents self-discovery.

By refusing to conform to society's accepted and established norms, the heroines of both authors are seen as going out of the laws that govern them. This reiterates that for Ibsen and Shaw, the main rule of life is that there are no rules. For them, society should be free from all laws that impede progress and happiness. This is also very evident in "*A Doll's House*." In the play, secession is demonstrated by several of its characters breaking away from the social standards of their time and acting on their terms. No character demonstrates this better than Nora. The point has already been made that during the time in which the play was written; society frowned upon women asserting themselves. Women were supposed to play a role in supporting their husbands, caring for their children, and ensuring everything was perfect around the house. Work, politics, and decisions were left to the males.

Nora's first secession from society is when she breaks the law and decides to borrow money to pay for her husband's treatment. By doing this, she not only breaks the law but also steps away from the role society has placed on her to be dependent on her husband. She proves herself not to be helpless like Torvald implied: "You poor helpless little creature!" (74).

Nora's second secession from society is shown by her decision to leave Torvald and her children. Society demands that she takes place under her husband. This is shown in the way Torvald speaks down to her, saying things like: "Worries that you couldn't possibly help me with," and "Nora, Nora, just like a woman" (41). She is almost considered to be his property: "Mayn't I look at my dearest treasure? At all the beauty that belongs to no one but me- that's all my very own?" (41). By walking out, she takes a position equal to her husband and violates the laws of the society. Nora also violates society's expectations of staying in a marriage since the divorce was frowned upon during that era. Her decision is secession from all expectations put on a woman and a wife by society.

Nora's rebellions, like Joan's, are deliberate and thought out. The new women know what society expects of them, but they continue to do what they feel is right. Ibsen and Shaw use their rebellions to show the faults of society. In the first rebellion in "*A Doll's House*," Ibsen shows that despite Nora doing the right thing, it is deemed wrong and not allowed by society because she is a woman. While the forgery can be considered wrong, Ibsen is critical of the fact that Nora is forced to forge. Ibsen is also critical of society's expectations of marriage. He illustrates this by showing how Nora is forced to play a role than be herself and the eventual deterioration of the marriage. Throughout the play, Nora is looked down upon and treated as a possession by her husband. She is something to please him and used for the show. He is looked upon as the provider and the decision maker. Society would have deemed it a perfect marriage.

Ibsen is critical of the fact that marriage should lack love and understanding, as in the case of Torvald, who becomes angry with Nora for taking the loan and saving him. One realises that *the* central theme of "*A Doll's House*" is secession from society, and it is made to be critical of society's view on women and marriage. Ibsen used Nora's secessions to illustrate that society's expectations of a woman's role in society and marriage were incorrect. At the end of the play, her decision to leave is the exclamation point on his critical view of society.

When the play was written, such a callous ending was frowned upon. Thus, the ending has often been altered in various plays, but what makes this play so amazing is that it is based on a factual story. It is a story representing more than just a dysfunctional marriage but a coming of time. It makes the reader or spectator realize that life is not always good, and stories do not always have blissful endings. Society's strongholds on character and his natural possessive and controlling nature establish his character. Ultimately, this causes him to lose control, as his wife leaves him. Shaw states in his critical conclusion, "At last even he understands what really happened" (61).

In *Saint Joan*, Joan does not only behave and speak as an equal to men; she admonishes them, teaches them, and, finally, sees herself as a saviour-figure. She alienates herself from her community (the family and the village), enters the state's and church's patriarchal public sphere, and constructs her discourse of power, ignoring the consequences. Here, Joan's refusal to restrict herself to the roles assigned to the Victorian woman is significant in three ways. Her actions can be seen as a call for both men and women to realise that a woman can teach and lead men as much as men can.

Equally, Joan's actions champion the idea that an individual can act on his or her inspiration without necessarily subjecting his or her ideas to the will of the laws governing the society. Also, by teaching men, Joan seems to be cancelling certain biblical prescriptions, which, according to her, no longer stand the test of time. In his letter to Timothy in the Bible, Paul writes: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent" (1 Timothy 2, 12). Joan not only refuses to be silent, but she also treats others as if they were ignorant in the matters of religion. By so doing, Joan ignorantly destabilises the core of Victorian customs concerning women. Her actions signal the beginning of a new era for the woman and indicate that societal mores are destructible. Despite her sanctions for her actions, Joan, like a typical Shavian heroine, does not suffer from despondency but forges ahead like Nora in "*A Doll's House*."

When Nora closes the door in "*A Doll's House*," abandoning her husband and children, she denies the laws of her society equally. Her action affects the image of women worldwide, and the need for the emancipation of the female sex becomes very primordial. Such issues are significant even in the Cameroonian context, where the need to integrate the woman into all social spheres seems unavoidable. The women and even men advocating equal rights and opportunities between men and women worldwide could be seen as followers of Nora and Joan or, better still, Ibsen and Shaw. Both authors intimate that we alone can help ourselves; no help can come from without. Furthermore, this is a vital point in understanding Ibsen and Shaw. Experience and life are happiness in themselves, not merely a means to happiness, and in the end, good must prevail.

Ibsen and Shaw's teaching principles and moral ethic were that honesty in facing facts is the first requisite of a decent life. Human nature has dark recesses which must be explored and illuminated; life has pitfalls that must be

recognised to be avoided; and society has humbugs, hypocrisies, and obscure diseases which must be revealed before they can be cured. Recognising these facts is not pessimism but the moral obligation laid upon intelligent people. To face the problems thus exposed, however, requires courage, honesty, and faith in the ultimate worth of the human soul. Therefore, man must be educated until he is intelligent enough and courageous enough to work out his salvation through patient endurance and nobler ideals.

4. Conclusion

The article set out to examine the emergence of the concept of the "New Woman" in Ibsen's *"A Doll's House"* and Shaw's *"Saint Joan"* and to demonstrate how these heroines revolt against patriarchal domination and institutions to reach their full potential as women. Seen from the feminist and Marxist perspectives, the study has established the significance of the woman amidst the derogatory image reserved for her in Victorian society. It has demonstrated that for Ibsen and Shaw, the woman, like the man, possesses talents that can lead to human progress. The claim that the woman is inferior to the man is satirised. Both writers portray women who emerge into self-assertive individuals and stop at nothing to establish the woman personality. Baylene Wacks, in her article entitled "Ibsen and the Representation of the Unspoken Truth," quotes Elizabeth Robin to have once remarked that "no other dramatist had ever meant so much to the woman of the stage" than Ibsen. Shaw follows Ibsen in this, and both writers believe in the woman for the progress of society.

The agents of change in the plays break with conventional belief in constituted authority, and the authors imbue them with the necessary strength they need to face the iron-clad institutions of the church. The dramatic art of both Ibsen and Shaw, without their glorious rebellion against every authoritative institution, against every social and moral lie, against every vestige of bondage, is inconceivable. Their art could lose human significance should their love of truth and freedom be lacking. Their proud defiance, enthusiastic daring, and utter indifference to consequences are their message, heralding new dawn and the birth of a "new woman."

It is clear for both authors under study that the shattering of men's illusion of their ideological power over women brings about disaster to their physical and mental health and leads to their downfall. In their plays, masculine power is lost due to females' ideological awakening. This suggests a new structure of society, and the message of equality between gender and race is also suggested. Although the power struggle between men and women will continue in our modern world, it would be wise for men to have a correct conception of women in various spheres of society. Without sensitive conception, men would not avoid their tragic fate induced by their exercise of masculine power.

5. References

- i. Ibsen, Henrik. *A Doll's House*. Gloucester: Dodo Press, 2005.
- ii. Shaw, Bernard. *Saint Joan*. Ed, Dan Laurence, Harmondsworth, UK, Penguin, 1986.
- iii. Allen, Richard. "The New Woman in Theatre" in *Literature and Gender*. Ed, Elizabeth Goodman, London: Routledge, 1969. p, 207-27.
- iv. Bai, K. Meera. *Women's Voices: In the Novels of Indian Women Writers*. New Delhi: Prestige, 1996.
- v. Beerbohm, Max. "Mr. Shaw Crescent" in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Eds, a. Bryfonski D, and Sharon K, New Jersey: Gale Research Co, 1978. p. 54 – 56.
- vi. Bielecka, Malgorzata. *G, B, Shaw's Unconventional Hero in Three Plays for Puritans*. Suffolk: anima publishing, 2006. p. 23-71.
- vii. Cooke, Rose Terry. "How Celia Changed Her Mind" and Selected Stories. Rutgers UP, 1986.
- viii. Davidoff, Leonore and Catherine Hall. *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1790-1850*, revised ed. London and New York: Routledge, 2002.
- ix. *De Beauvoir, Simone. "The Second Sex."* Trans. Borde, Constance and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. New York: Random House, 2010.
- x. Dickerson, VD (ed). *Keeping the Victorian House: A Collection of Essays*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1995.
- xi. Downs, Brian W, *A Study of Six Plays by Ibsen*, New York, Octagon, 1972. P. 20-67.
- xii. Grand, Sarah. "The New Aspect of the Woman Question." *The North American Review*, No. 158, issue 448, 1894, pp. 270–276.
- xiii. Ibsen, Henrik. *The Pillars of Society in Ibsen's Hedda Gabler and Other Plays*. Trans,
- xiv. Una Ellis, London: Penguin, 1950.
- xv. Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- xvi. ——. *The German Ideology*, New York: International Publishers, 1939.
- xvii. Meyer, Michael. *Ibsen, A Biography*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1971.
- xviii. Petrie, Charles. "Victorian Women Expected to Be Idle and Ignorant." *Victorian England*. Ed. Clarice Swisher. San Diego: Greenhaven Press, Inc., 2000. 178-87.
- xix. Pinter, Harold. *The Birthday Party*. London: Eyre Methuen Ltd, 1960.
- xx. Susie L. Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians: Politics, Culture, and Society in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, 2nd Edition, Routledge, 2017.
- xxi. *The Holy Bible. Authorized Version*, Philadelphia. The National Publishing Company, 1975.
- xxii. Tosh, John. *A Man's Place, Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1999.
- xxiii. Wilde, Oscar. *The Importance of Being Earnest and Other Plays*. New York: Modern Library, 2003.
- xxiv. ——. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Public Domain Books: 1994.