

# CRITICAL AWARENESS

AN APPROACH TO LITERARY CRITICISM AND THEORY

**Critical Awareness: An Approach to Literary Criticism and Theory** is a study guide to revisit the basic tenets of Literary Criticism and Theory. It is a re-studying and analysis of Classical Literary Criticism and Modern Literary Theories by some of our contemporary literary scholars, who have, through their understanding, redefined and simplified the basic elements of Criticism and Theory in Literature.

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ANTHOLOGY AND REFERENCE BOOK OF  
RESEARCH ARTICLES ON LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM

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LITERARY THEORY

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**IN LOVING MEMORY  
OF  
DR. MURSALIN JAHAN**

The driving force behind this work.

In her, knowledge met kindness, and strength wore the robe of humility.

You are not gone; you will live on, softly etched into the  
soul of every heart you helped awaken.



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# Evolutionary Ethics of George Bernard Shaw

Dr. Sana Haider

## ABSTRACT

This chapter explores George Bernard Shaw's emergence away from the then prevalent Victorian aestheticism. It discusses his uniquely Shavian dramaturgy and the concept of Life Force as both a philosophical framework and a critical tool in his dramatic works. Rooted in evolutionary ethics and idealist thought, the Life Force embodies Shaw's vision of humanity's potential to advance intellectually, morally, and socially. Through plays such as *Man and Superman* and *Saint Joan*, Shaw dramatizes the tension between societal stagnation and evolutionary progress, using characters who either channel or resist this metaphysical drive. The chapter examines how the Life Force functions as a unique method of literary criticism—judging institutions, ideologies, and behaviors against their capacity to evolve. It argues that Shaw's theory remains profoundly relevant today, offering a hopeful, future-oriented model for addressing systemic injustice, ecological crisis, and ethical paralysis. By revisiting Shaw's teleological critique, the chapter suggests that the Life Force provides a vital framework for achieving justice and sustainability in the 21st century.

**Keywords:** Literary criticism, Shavian criticism, Life Force, Bertolt Brecht

## INTRODUCTION

Shavian style deviated from 'art for art's sake' ideology to a biting critique of the society. His texts are emblems of his urge to bring forth struggles of the people, ironies of social norms and false aspirations of the whole mass. Shavian style is of social criticism expressed in high comedy, setting him apart from his Victorian contemporaries.

Although during the first half of the twentieth century, Shaw was one of the most celebrated, commented on, and quoted literary figures, this did not remain true for his place in the critical circles. He was regarded as a major contributor to the English drama, such as playwrights like Ibsen, Wilde, Chekhov, and Pirandello. In the theatrical tradition, they could be considered as creators of some of the classics of modern drama. Yet, it is hard to find Shaw mentioned in the dominant critical discourses of the mid-twentieth century.