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The Individual Against the Void: Existential and Modernist Undercurrents in Ibsen's An Enemy of the People and Shaw's Saint Joan

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the representation of the isolated individual in *An Enemy of the People* and *Saint Joan* as a site of existential and modernist tension. Based on the hypothetical contention that *An Enemy of the People* and *Saint Joan* articulate early existential and modernist undercurrents through their representation of the isolated individual in conflict with society, the article examines the representation of individual resistance within destabilized moral and institutional frameworks in the plays under study. It argues that Henrik Ibsen frames individual isolation as a protoexistential response to the rejection of objective moral truth, while George Bernard Shaw situates it within a modernist framework shaped by historical contingency and institutional mediation of meaning. Grounded in a hybrid theoretical framework combining proto-existential dramatic theory, modernist epistemological critique, and late realist dramaturgical transition theory, the study explores how both plays construct authority, resistance, and alienation, and how these dynamics reconfigure the relationship between individual conviction and social legitimacy. It further contends that the texts anticipate existential concerns with responsibility and subjectivity, alongside modernist preoccupations with fragmentation, irony, and epistemic instability, thereby positioning them as transitional works between realist drama and twentieth-century philosophical modernism.

Index Terms: Modernist • Existential • Individual • Institutional • Resistance • Conflict

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The Individual Against the Void: Existential and Modernist Undercurrents in Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* and Shaw's *Saint Joan*

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Abstract

This study examines the representation of the isolated individual in *An Enemy of the People* and *Saint Joan* as a site of existential and modernist tension. Based on the hypothetical contention that *An Enemy of the People* and *Saint Joan* articulate early existential and modernist undercurrents through their representation of the isolated individual in conflict with society, the article examines the representation of individual resistance within destabilized moral and institutional frameworks in the plays under study. It argues that Henrik Ibsen frames individual isolation as a protoexistential response to the rejection of objective moral truth, while George Bernard Shaw situates it within a modernist framework shaped by historical contingency and institutional mediation of meaning. Grounded in a hybrid theoretical framework combining proto-existential dramatic theory, modernist epistemological critique, and late realist dramaturgical transition theory, the study explores how both plays construct authority, resistance, and alienation, and how these dynamics reconfigure the relationship between individual conviction and social legitimacy. It further contends that the texts anticipate existential concerns with responsibility and subjectivity, alongside modernist preoccupations with fragmentation, irony, and epistemic instability, thereby positioning them as transitional works between realist drama and twentieth-century philosophical modernism.

Keywords: *Modernist, Existential, Individual, Institutional, Resistance, Conflict*

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1 Introduction

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries stand as one of the most transformative and turbulent periods in human history, marked by sweeping and often disruptive changes across the globe. This era witnessed the profound reshaping of religious thought, as traditional belief systems were challenged by the rise of scientific inquiry, secular ideologies, and reform movements that sought to redefine spiritual authority and practice. To describe this period as merely one of change would be an understatement because it was an era of profound upheaval that fundamentally redefined the structures of religion, politics, and society, leaving an indelible mark on the modern world.

In the same light, there were significant dramatic changes in social life. Rapid industrialization and urbanization reconfigured how people lived and worked, breaking down long-standing social hierarchies while simultaneously creating new forms of inequality. Advances in communication and transportation connected distant societies more closely than ever before, accelerating cultural exchange but also amplifying tensions. In all parts of the world, prevailing norms came under scrutiny, resistance, and reassessment.

It is within this shifting intellectual horizon that *An Enemy of the People* by Henrik Ibsen and *Saint Joan* by George Bernard Shaw acquire particular critical significance. Despite being separated by decades and distinct theatrical contexts, both plays stage a confrontation

between an uncompromising individual and a social order unable to fully accommodate that individual's truth. More importantly, both works anticipate key philosophical concerns that would later be systematized in existential and modernist thought, particularly the problem of meaning in a world where traditional sources of authority no longer provide stable foundations. Recent scholarship has also reinterpreted *An Enemy of the People* within contemporary debates on public health, misinformation, and democratic crisis, emphasizing the continued relevance of Ibsen's dramatization of contested truth in the modern public sphere (Larsen).

From the vantage point of this cataclysmic change of status-quo, this research identifies a void which as employed in this study, refers not to a metaphysical absence in a strictly philosophical sense, but rather to a perceived erosion of stable frameworks of meaning. This includes the weakening of shared moral consensus, the fragmentation of epistemic authority, and the increasing awareness that institutional structures may not reliably correspond to ethical truth. Within this context, the individual emerges as a figure of heightened significance, not because of inherent autonomy alone, but because of the burden of meaning-making placed upon the self in the absence of secure collective validation. The "individual against the void" thus designates a condition in which subjective conviction must confront a world that no longer guarantees its recognition. Recent studies on modern drama and secularization further suggest that this erosion reflects a broader

cultural shift in which traditional religious frameworks are replaced by unstable, human-centered systems of meaning (Yu and Zhang).

In the context of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe, this void emerges from the gradual weakening of religious authority, the fragmentation of moral consensus, and the increasing distrust of institutional legitimacy. Within this framework, the void is expressed differently in each text. In Ibsen, it emerges as the failure of communal recognition and shared ethical values, whereas in Shaw, it appears as the structural limitation of institutional knowledge. In both cases, however, the void signifies a rupture between individual conviction and collective validation. It marks the point at which truth, rather than being socially affirmed, becomes contested, deferred, or rendered inoperative within dominant structures of power.

This destabilization of all these values found expression in the plays of the authors under study. Although neither Ibsen nor Shaw can be classified as existentialist or fully modernist in a strict philosophical or historical sense, their plays anticipate key tensions that would later define these movements. The existential dimension emerges in the emphasis on individual responsibility, isolation, and the necessity of choice under conditions of uncertainty. The modernist dimension, by contrast, is evident in the fragmentation of truth, the destabilization of institutional authority, and the pervasive use of irony as a means of exposing the limitations of coherent moral narratives. Such undercurrents indicate that both playwrights occupy an intermediary position in the development of modern drama, bridging the moral certainties of nineteenth-century realism and the epistemological skepticism of twentieth-century modernism.

2 Theoretical perspective

The study adopts a hybrid theoretical framework combining proto-existential dramatic theory, modernist epistemological critique, and late realist dramaturgical transition theory. It draws on existential philosophy, particularly the concepts of alienation, responsibility, and meaning-making associated with Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. Within this framework, the isolated individual is understood not as a purely metaphysical figure of freedom, but as a dramatic construction through which ethical responsibility is staged under conditions of epistemic uncertainty.

This existential orientation is clearly dramatized in *An Enemy of the People*, where Dr. Stockmann's discovery of the contaminated Baths becomes a catalyst for ethical isolation. His assertion that "the strongest man is he who stands alone" functions not merely as a rhetorical flourish but as a performative declaration of existential responsibility. It signals his acceptance of truth even in the absence of communal validation. The town meeting scene reinforces this condition dramatically: what begins as a rational forum for public deliberation collapses into collective hostility, revealing that truth cannot survive within a socially compromised epistemic environment. The crowd's refusal to engage with scientific evidence demonstrates what may be theorized as a breakdown of shared rationality, where truth is displaced by economic interest and majority sentiment. In this sense, Stockmann's isolation becomes a lived enactment of proto-existential subjectivity, in which meaning must be upheld without institutional support.

Complementing this existential framework, the modernist epistemological lens foregrounds the fragmentation and instability of truth as mediated through institutional and historical forces. In *Saint Joan*, this instability is dramatized through Joan's interrogation during her trial, where her claim to divine communication is rendered unintelligible within ecclesiastical discourse. When Joan insists that her authority comes directly from God, she disrupts the Church's monopoly on inter-

pretive legitimacy. However, Shaw does not present the Church simply as irrational or oppressive. Instead, figures such as Bishop Cauchon operate within a coherent institutional logic that prioritizes doctrinal stability and social order. Joan's condemnation therefore emerges not as a simple moral failure but as a structural incompatibility between the two epistemic systems of personal revelation and institutional authority.

This conflict is further intensified in the trial scene's dialogic structure. The fragmented exchange between Joan and her interrogators demonstrates that truth is no longer a singular, stable referent but a contested construct shaped by institutional language. Joan's inability to translate her experience into authorized theological discourse results in her exclusion, illustrating a modernist crisis of representation in which meaning cannot be fully stabilized within existing linguistic or institutional frameworks. The epilogue deepens this irony when Joan's posthumous canonization transforms her from heretic to saint, revealing how historical institutions reabsorb radical figures once their disruptive force has been neutralized. Meaning, therefore, is shown to be retroactively constructed rather than inherently fixed.

From the perspective of late realist dramaturgical transition theory, both plays illustrate a shift in dramatic form from stable moral realism to epistemologically unstable modern drama. In Ibsen, realism still anchors the narrative in the assumption that truth exists independently of social recognition, even if it is rejected. This is evident in Stockmann's unwavering belief in scientific fact despite public hostility. In Shaw, however, this assumption is destabilized: truth becomes historically contingent and institutionally mediated. Joan's multiple reinterpretations as saint, heretic, visionary, and political threat demonstrate that identity itself becomes fluid within shifting interpretive regimes.

Both plays can therefore be said to function as transitional texts in which dramatic form itself reflects philosophical instability. The stage becomes not a space for the revelation of truth, but a contested arena in which competing systems of meaning collide. Stockmann's isolation and Joan's execution both dramatize the limits of institutional validation, but they diverge in their philosophical implications: Ibsen retains a commitment to the existence of truth beyond society, while Shaw exposes truth as inseparable from the structures that define and regulate it.

In this sense, the theoretical framework of proto-existentialism and modernist epistemology is not merely applied externally to the texts but is materially enacted within their dramatic structures. The individual in both plays emerges as a site where epistemic breakdown becomes visible, and where the collapse of shared meaning produces what this study conceptualizes as "the void".

3 Proto-existential and modernist undercurrents in dramatic form

While Ibsen and Shaw are not conventionally classified within either existentialist or modernist traditions, it is important to observe that their dramatic works exhibit clear formal and thematic tendencies that anticipate the emergence of both movements as suggested in this article. Besides being philosophical in content, these tendencies are embedded within the structures of their plays, revealing a shift in how conflict, character, and meaning are constructed on the stage. In this respect, this study considers *An Enemy of the People* and *Saint Joan* as transitional texts that register the early formation of what may be termed proto-existential and modernist dramatic consciousness.

From a proto-existential perspective, both plays foreground the individual as a figure burdened with responsibility in a world where traditional structures of meaning are no longer secure. In *An Enemy of the People*, Dr. Stockmann's insistence on truth articulated in his declaration that "the strongest man is he who stands alone", signals

a dramatic reorientation toward individual conviction as the basis of ethical action. His isolation is not merely social but existential in the sense that he is forced to choose truth without the assurance of communal recognition. This anticipates later existential concerns associated with Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, particularly the emphasis on individual responsibility and the necessity of acting in conditions of uncertainty. Yet Ibsen does not abandon the notion of objective truth. Instead, he dramatizes the paradox of a truth that remains ontologically stable even as it is socially invalidated.

This tension is further reinforced through the play's dramatic structure. The town meeting scene in the play, which initially promises rational deliberation, devolves into chaos and hostility, revealing the fragility of democratic discourse. Stockmann's attempt to communicate scientific truth is overwhelmed by the crowd's allegiance to economic self-interest and majority opinion. According to a recent study, this scene anticipates modern tensions between scientific expertise and populist resistance, where public deliberation is shaped less by evidence than by economic and ideological pressures (Wambua and Mwangi). Here, dramatic form itself enacts a proto-existential crisis since the mechanisms through which truth should be recognized fail, leaving the individual isolated within a fractured public sphere.

In *Saint Joan*, Shaw complicates this proto-existential framework by embedding the individual within a more fluid and historically mediated conception of truth. Rooted in her inner conviction and her claim to divine voices, Joan's authority places her in conflict with established institutional frameworks. However, unlike Stockmann's relatively stable epistemological position, Joan's truth is never fully secured within the play. During her trial, her responses to ecclesiastical interrogation expose the limits of institutional logic, yet they also reveal the difficulty of translating personal conviction into publicly verifiable terms. When Joan insists on direct access to divine guidance, she disrupts the Church's monopoly on spiritual authority, thereby rendering herself unintelligible within its epistemic framework.

Shaw's play intensifies this instability through structural and tonal strategies. The trial scene does not present a simple opposition between truth and falsehood; rather, it stages a collision of competing rationalities. The Church officials are not portrayed as wholly corrupt but as operating within a coherent institutional logic that prioritizes order and continuity. Joan's condemnation, therefore, emerges not as a miscarriage of justice in a straightforward sense, but as the outcome of a system incapable of accommodating her mode of knowledge. The epilogue further complicates this dynamic by presenting Joan's posthumous canonization, which transforms her into a symbolic figure. This recognition is deeply ironic, as it occurs only after her radical challenge has been neutralized. In this way, Shaw introduces a distinctly modernist awareness of historical relativism and the instability of meaning.

This modernist dimension is also evident in the use of irony and fragmentation. While Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* retains a largely coherent realist structure, Shaw's *Saint Joan* adopts a more episodic form, moving across different social and political contexts without offering a unified resolution. Meaning is not fixed but shifts across temporal and institutional frames. This instability is reinforced in modern adaptation studies, which demonstrate how *Saint Joan* continues to be reinterpreted across changing historical and ideological contexts (Holt). Joan's identity, in particular, becomes a site of interpretive instability. Alternately, she is viewed as a saint, a heretic, a patriot, and a threat. This multiplicity reflects a broader modernist skepticism toward singular truths and authoritative narratives.

At the level of dramatic form, both plays register a transition from realist coherence to modernist uncertainty. In Ibsen, the persistence

of objective truth coexists with the breakdown of its social recognition, producing a tension that anticipates existential concerns without fully abandoning realist foundations. In Shaw, this tension is carried further, as truth itself becomes historically contingent and subject to reinterpretation. The stage is no longer a space where truth is revealed, but one in which it is contested, deferred, and reconfigured.

Conclusively, these proto-existential and modernist undercurrents transform drama into a site of philosophical inquiry. The individual is no longer simply a moral agent within a stable social order but becomes a figure negotiating the limits of knowledge, authority, and meaning. It is within this shifting dramatic landscape that the condition of "the individual against the void" emerges most forcefully. The void is not merely an absence, but a structural condition produced by the collapse of shared frameworks of meaning. Although in different ways, both Ibsen and Shaw bring this condition to the forefront of modern dramatic consciousness.

The two texts thus anticipate key existential and modernist concerns and occupy a transitional position between realist drama and twentieth-century philosophical modernism. They occupy a critical position within the trajectory of modern drama and do not fully abandon realist conventions, nor do they entirely embrace modernist fragmentation or existential indeterminacy. Instead, they inhabit an intermediate space in which these competing tendencies coexist, producing a dynamic and often contradictory dramatic form. It is precisely this hybridity that enables both plays to articulate the condition of the individual confronting the void, and to anticipate the philosophical and aesthetic developments that would come to define twentieth-century modernism.

4 Truth, authority, and the isolated individual in Ibsen and Shaw

In *An Enemy of the People*, Ibsen constructs a dramatic world in which truth initially appears stable, empirical, and socially actionable. Dr. Thomas Stockmann's discovery that the town's Baths are contaminated is grounded in scientific evidence, and his early optimism reflects a realist faith in rational discourse and civic responsibility. He assumes that once the truth is established, it will be embraced for the common good. However, this expectation is quickly undermined as the economic implications of his findings become apparent. The Baths, which serve as the town's primary source of income, cannot be closed without financial loss, and this reality transforms truth into a liability.

The shift is most dramatically realized in the town meeting scene, where Stockmann attempts to present his findings to the public. Rather than engaging with the substance of his argument, the townspeople, encouraged by figures such as Peter Stockmann and the press, reframe the issue in terms of economic survival and civic loyalty. Stockmann is silenced, interrupted, and ultimately declared an "enemy of the people." This moment marks a decisive collapse of the public sphere as a site of rational deliberation. Truth is no longer evaluated on empirical grounds but is subordinated to majority opinion and political expediency. As Stockmann himself observes, "the majority is never right," a statement that underscores his growing disillusionment with democratic ideals.

This transformation has profound implications for the figure of the individual. Stockmann's isolation is not merely social but epistemological. This is because he possesses truth, yet lacks any institutional or communal framework through which it can be validated. His famous assertion that "the strongest man is he who stands alone" signals a shift toward ethical individualism, in which truth must be upheld independently of social recognition. In this sense, Ibsen dramatizes a proto-existential condition in which the individual assumes responsibility for meaning in the face of collective failure. Yet the play stops short of epistemological relativism. Truth itself remains stable and verifiable but the social

capacity to acknowledge it collapses. Authority, therefore, is revealed to be contingent not on truth, but on power, consensus, and economic interest. Recent political studies further emphasize how authority operates through ideological and economic structures, reinforcing the extent to which truth is subordinated to institutional interests (Larsen).

In *Saint Joan*, Shaw reconfigures this relationship between truth, authority, and the individual in a more complex and historically mediated manner. Joan's authority derives from her inner conviction which places her outside institutional structures of validation. Unlike Stockmann's scientific truth, Joan's truth cannot be empirically demonstrated or universally verified. It exists as a form of subjective certainty that resists translation into the language of institutional authority.

This tension is most fully articulated in the trial scene, where Joan is interrogated by ecclesiastical authorities who demand that she submit her visions to the judgment of the Church. Joan's refusal and insistence that her voices come directly from God undermine the hierarchical structure upon which the Church's authority depends. Yet Shaw complicates any straightforward alignment of Joan with truth and the Church with falsehood. Characters such as Bishop Cauchon and the Inquisitor are portrayed not as villains, but as rational agents operating within a coherent institutional framework. Their concern is not simply to suppress truth, but to preserve social and theological order. From their perspective, Joan's claims represent a dangerous challenge to the very foundations of institutional authority.

As a result, Joan's execution emerges not as a clear-cut injustice, but as the outcome of an epistemological impasse. Her truth cannot be accommodated within the existing structures of knowledge and power, and is therefore excluded. This marks a significant departure from Ibsen's model. In Shaw, truth is not a stable entity that is merely rejected but contingent, mediated, and historically situated. The individual, rather than embodying a fixed moral truth, becomes a site of interpretive instability.

The epilogue further complicates this dynamic. Joan's posthumous canonization transforms her into a symbolic figure, suggesting that her truth has finally been recognized. However, this recognition is deeply ironic. It occurs only after her death, when her capacity to disrupt institutional authority has been neutralized. The same structures that condemned her now absorb her into official memory, reinterpreting her significance in ways that no longer threaten their legitimacy. Shaw thus reveals a cyclical process in which radical individuals are first excluded and later assimilated when they no longer pose a threat. Truth is both affirmed and denied through the same historical process, depending on the shifting needs of institutional power.

These contrasting representations highlight fundamentally different philosophical orientations. Ibsen presents a dramatic universe in which truth retains its ontological stability, even as it is socially rejected, positioning the individual as a figure of ethical resistance. Shaw, by contrast, situates truth within historical and institutional processes, transforming the individual into a figure whose meaning is contingent and subject to reinterpretation. While both plays dramatize the isolation of the individual in relation to a destabilized social order, they diverge sharply in their understanding of truth, authority, and the conditions under which meaning can be sustained.

Through this comparison, it becomes clear that the isolated individual functions not merely as a social outsider, but as a critical site through which broader tensions between knowledge, power, and legitimacy are exposed. In Ibsen, the individual stands against a society that fails to uphold truth while in Shaw, the individual reveals the limits of any system that claims to define truth absolutely. The result is a shift from a realist framework grounded in moral certainty to a more modernist and proto-existential awareness of epistemological instability. Here,

authority is no longer guaranteed, and truth itself becomes a contested and evolving construct.

5 Comparative analysis: the individual, the void, and the crises of meaning

Placing *An Enemy of the People* alongside *Saint Joan* reveals not simply two representations of individual resistance, but two distinct philosophical orientations toward the crisis of meaning in modernity. While both Ibsen and Shaw stage conflicts between the individual and dominant social structures, the nature of that conflict and the resolution differ in ways that illuminate a broader transition from late realist moral inquiry to proto-modernist and proto-existential skepticism.

A close reading of both plays reveals the figure of the isolated individual, yet the conditions and implications of that isolation diverge significantly. In Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, Dr. Stockmann's isolation emerges as the direct consequence of his unwavering commitment to truth. His discovery of the contamination of the Baths, which should function as a public good, instead exposes the fragility of communal ethics when confronted with economic self-interest and political expediency. Stockmann's alienation is thus epistemological and moral because he possesses truth, yet finds himself rejected by the very society that ought to uphold it. The "void" he confronts is not the absence of truth itself, but the collapse of any collective capacity to recognize or sustain it. Consequently, his isolation becomes an assertion of ethical autonomy. The individual stands alone not because meaning has vanished, but because society has abdicated its responsibility to uphold truth.

In contrast, Joan's isolation in Shaw's *Saint Joan* is not grounded in a stable conception of truth that is merely rejected by society. Rather, it reflects the incompatibility between individual vision and the historical structures of the society in which it must operate. By claiming to interact directly with God, Joan's actions pose a threat to institutional mediation and also places her at odds with both ecclesiastical and political systems. The tribunal that condemns Joan is not portrayed as simply corrupt or malicious. Instead, it operates according to an internally coherent logic that prioritizes order, continuity, and institutional respect. Joan's destruction, therefore, does not signify the triumph of falsehood over truth in a straightforward sense. Rather, it reveals a more unsettling dynamic: truth, if it exists, is temporally contingent and structurally mediated. The "void" here is not merely social failure, but the inability of any given historical moment to fully accommodate disruptive forms of insight. A recent study on Ibsen and the modern drama situates this incompatibility within a broader crisis of modernity, in which the fragmentation of authority and meaning renders both individual conviction and institutional validation unstable (Yu and Zhang).

This distinction becomes particularly evident when examining the ultimate fate of the individual in each play. Stockmann, despite his ostracization, survives. His famous assertion that "the strongest man is he who stands alone" encapsulates Ibsen's investment in a model of defiant individualism. The play concludes without reconciliation, yet it preserves the possibility of moral resistance. Stockmann's position, though precarious, retains a degree of existential coherence since he chooses truth, accepts isolation, and affirms his role as a moral agent. In this sense, Ibsen anticipates later existential concerns, particularly the emphasis on individual responsibility and authenticity, while stopping short of endorsing a fully absurd or meaningless universe.

On the other hand, Shaw denies the individual even this limited form of resolution. Joan is executed, and her death initially appears to confirm the destructive power of institutional authority. Yet the situation changes in the epilogue when Joan is posthumously vindicated, even canonized by the same society that once condemned her. Certainly,

this very ironical situation occurs in the epilogue because Joan no longer poses a threat. Shaw thus exposes a cyclical process in which radical individuals are first eliminated and later absorbed into the symbolic order. The individual does not persist in opposition to the void; rather, she is transformed into an artifact within it. This transformation undermines the possibility of sustained resistance, suggesting instead that history neutralizes what it cannot immediately assimilate.

The differing tones of the two plays further underscore this divergence. Ibsen's work, though critical of democratic institutions and public opinion, retains a serious commitment to moral clarity. Its dramatic tension arises from the conflict between truth and falsehood, even if the latter temporarily prevails in the social sphere. Shaw's tone, on the other hand, is markedly more ironic and self-reflexive. *Saint Joan* resists any straightforward moral binary, inviting the audience to recognize the legitimacy and limitations of multiple perspectives. This multiplicity aligns with modernist tendencies toward fragmentation and ambiguity, as well as with a growing awareness of the instability of grand narratives.

What emerges from these contrasts is that both plays engage with the theme of "the individual against the void," though they define both the individual and the void differently. For Ibsen, the void is a social and moral failure that the individual confronts through steadfast resistance while for Shaw, it is a historical and structural condition that ultimately reshapes and recontextualizes individual action. The movement from Stockmann's defiant isolation to Joan's ironic canonization marks a significant shift in the belief in the enduring power of individual truth to a recognition that it is shaped and limited by historical forces.

In this light, the two plays can be read as occupying adjacent but distinct positions within the broader trajectory of modern drama. Ibsen's work gestures toward existential isolation while maintaining a commitment to objective truth, whereas Shaw's drama anticipates a more fully modernist sensibility in which truth itself becomes subject to reinterpretation. The individual, in both cases, stands against a void but the nature of that void, and the possibility of overcoming it, remains profoundly undetermined.

6 Conclusion

The comparative analysis of *An Enemy of the People* and *Saint Joan* reveals two distinct yet related responses to the condition of the individual confronting a destabilized world. Henrik Ibsen presents a model in which truth remains stable despite social rejection, positioning the individual as a figure of ethical resistance. George Bernard Shaw, by contrast, situates truth within historically contingent and institutional processes, rendering it unstable and subject to reinterpretation. This divergence reflects a broader shift in modern drama from moral certainty to epistemological uncertainty.

Together, the plays mark a transitional moment between realist and modernist dramaturgy. The individual no longer occupies a secure moral position but becomes a site where competing claims to truth and authority intersect. In Ibsen, the persistence of truth allows for a degree of ethical coherence, even in isolation. In Shaw, however, Joan's fate reveals that truth is inseparable from the structures that interpret it, and her posthumous recognition underscores the paradox by which radical challenges are absorbed once they lose their disruptive force.

Within this context, the "void" emerges as a defining condition rather than a temporary crisis. It signifies the erosion of shared frameworks of meaning and the limits of both individual conviction and institutional authority. While Ibsen presents this void as a failure of collective recognition, Shaw exposes it as a structural and historical condition.

By and large, both plays derive their enduring significance from their ability to stage this unresolved tension. They do not resolve the conflict

between the individual and the void, but instead reveal it as central to modern experience. In this sense, both plays remain critically relevant, continuing to illuminate contemporary struggles over truth, authority, and the place of the individual within increasingly unstable social and epistemic frameworks [4]. The plays therefore anticipate key existential and modernist concerns, presenting a world in which meaning is not secured but continuously contested and redefined.

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