

Narcissism as a Moral Dilemma in George Bernard Shaw's *The Doctor's Dilemma*: A Psychoanalytic Critical Study

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Abstract: This study delves into a psychoanalytic analysis of narcissism as a moral dilemma in George Bernard Shaw's *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906). Based on psychoanalytic theory, the analysis explores the psychological foundation of narcissistic behaviour presented by characters in the play and its ethical effects. This study examines the application of psychoanalytic theory with literary analysis, focusing on characters in the play. It applies Freud's ideas of "id", "ego", and "superego" to George Bernard Shaw's *The Doctor's Dilemma*. The paper demonstrates how Freudian, Jungian, and Lacanian ideas can be applied to understand characters' motivations and conflicts, and how psychoanalytic theory can provide insights into behaviour, impulses, and society. Challenges include the subjective nature of psychoanalysis and the complexity of characters and themes, such as the analysis of the main character's behaviour, Sir Colenso Ridgeon, and using psychoanalytic conceptions such as the narcissistic personality, "ego" expansion, and moral development, in this aspect will lead to the struggles between personal desires and ethical considerations. It criticizes them for putting personal gain before patient care, discusses the need for nationalized healthcare, and critiques early 20th-century medical practices. As a result, the study evaluates the understanding of narcissism in psychoanalysis, including its influence on drive theory, ego-ideal function, self-esteem, and object relations through unconscious motivations, inner conflicts, and how a person's mind affects moral choices.

Keywords: George Bernard Shaw, moral dilemma, narcissism, psychoanalytic criticism, *The Doctor's Dilemma*

1. Introduction

George Bernard Shaw is a famous Irish playwright and critic. He wrote more than sixty plays throughout his lifetime. In 1925, he received the Nobel Prize in Literature, and his literary works explored various themes, including morals, politics, economics, and psychological issues (Holroyd 1998). While narcissism may not be a central theme in Shaw's plays directly, traits of self-absorption and egoism in some of his characters embody it. This leads to moral dilemmas and societal critique. Indeed, the term 'narcissism' denotes a pattern of self-focused grandiosity, a need for admiration, and a lack of empathy. Narcissism is categorized into trait narcissism, which encompasses subclinical tendencies such as confidence and entitlement, and narcissistic personality disorder (NPD), a clinical diagnosis characterized by dysfunctional self-perception and interpersonal relationships (Ekşi 2016; Gaines 2025). Psychodynamic theorists, such as Kernberg and Kohut, view

narcissism as essential for healthy development, while also a defence against emptiness and shame. Freud categorized narcissism into primary (normal self-focus) and secondary (withdrawal from others) forms (Fonagy 2018: 3-4). Moreover, psychodynamic theoreticians, such as Kernberg and Kohut, have considered narcissism essential for healthy growth and seen it as a defence against emptiness and shame; nevertheless, narcissism affects moral emotions like empathy and love, but does not lessen moral responsibility or control over actions (Fatić 2023). However, the notion of narcissism is a moral issue from various perspectives, highlighting the struggle between self and others, and the challenges of intimacy and independence. Cohen (2018) examines the historical divide between the individual and society, particularly in public versus private life. While Jordan et al. (2021) argue that narcissism constitutes a moral failure due to deficient moral emotions, they maintain that narcissists remain accountable for their actions. Narcissism is further associated with traits such as low agreeableness and high extraversion, manifesting in forms like grandiose and vulnerable narcissism.

This study examines the application of psychoanalytic theory to literary analysis, particularly through the examination of characters in various works. It uses Freud's conceptions of "id", "ego", and "superego" to explore characters in *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906) by George Bernard Shaw. This study demonstrates how psychoanalytic theories illuminate character behaviour and societal dynamics in George Bernard Shaw's *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906), while acknowledging the challenges of subjectivity and complexity in analysis. It examines narcissism as an ethical dilemma in Shaw's play, focusing on its moral complexities through a psychoanalytic lens. The narcissistic behaviour of characters is analyzed alongside considerations of ethical judgment, employing a psychoanalytic criticism approach. The study centers on the ethical obligations and moral dilemmas faced by professionals in *The Doctor's Dilemma*, highlighting the interplay between narcissism and moral responsibility. Likewise, scholars and critics have noted that George Bernard Shaw employs drama to address social issues and moral questions. Although narcissism is not a central theme in *The Doctor's Dilemma*, some characters display self-absorbed traits. Shaw's writing style highlights characters who mirror his views. Moreover, critics argue that Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) explores narcissism and emotional abuse, showing how literature helps us understand character and society. (Bertolini 1991; Alcorn 1994; Kumar and Christopher 2022). For instance, Buzhala and Berisha (2023) compare the theme of narcissism in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) and Ernest Koliqi's *Pasqyrat e Narcizit* (1934) examine the recontextualization of the narcissistic motif. These works provide insights into self-absorption and artistic self-reflection in literature, offering relevant parallels to the exploration of narcissism in George Bernard Shaw's plays.

George Bernard Shaw's play, *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906), examines moral complexity and ethical conundrums, but psychoanalytic criticism points to a significant gap in the play's comprehension of narcissism as a moral dilemma. The

extent to which characters exhibit narcissistic behaviour, the consequences of such behaviour, and its impact on moral judgment remain underexplored. This study investigates the degree to which narcissism functions as a moral conundrum in the play through a psychoanalytic critique. It aims to address this gap in the literature by enhancing understanding of the play's complex ethical dilemmas, the characters' underlying motivations, and the psychological dimensions of narcissism.

1.1. Narcissism and ethical dilemmas in Shaw's drama

George Bernard Shaw was an influential playwright, journalist, speaker, and socialist. He viewed drama as a tool for addressing moral issues. His plays tackled various social problems, encouraging audiences to take them seriously. Central themes included marriage, gender equality, prostitution, family dynamics, and class divides. Shaw's works aimed to educate by exploring these issues, using drama to convey his ideas and life philosophy. (Gibbs 2005). Shawian plays serve as vehicles for sharing thoughts, often through dialogue, to promote discussion and reflection on important social topics. In *The Doctor's Dilemma*, Shaw explores ethical challenges faced by doctors, critiques the healthcare system, and advocates for nationalized medicine. Some characters display narcissism, contributing to moral dilemmas. Shaw's writing reflects his concerns about creativity and is influenced by earlier writers, such as George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871), which explores themes of scientific progress and healthcare ethics. For example, Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1913) is a well-known play portraying narcissism. The professor, Henry Higgins, in this play, exhibits narcissistic tendencies. He is a linguist who takes on the task of transforming Eliza Doolittle, a Cockney flower girl, into a sophisticated lady. Higgins, preoccupied with his intellectual prowess and social standing, develops an obsession with his experiment. He ignores Eliza's feelings and personal development, treating her like a project. His failure to realize Eliza's humanity and independence, reducing her to a tool for his entertainment and narcissistic glorification, presents a moral dilemma. Shaw reveals the tension between intellectual/artistic pursuits and essential human compassion and respect. Through Higgins, he presents a moral conflict between selfish goals and ethical obligations to others. In doing so, Shaw critiques the pervasive narcissistic tendencies in society.

Shaw further explores narcissism through the character of John Tanner in *Man and Superman* (1903). Tanner embodies intellectual arrogance, unapologetically prioritizing personal freedom and hedonistic pursuits over societal norms. His disdain for conventional relationships, viewing them as impediments to his individualism, reflects a pronounced sense of superiority. By positioning himself above the "masses," Tanner exemplifies the paradoxical nature of Shaw's critique. While he champions free will and rationality, his self-aggrandizement exposes the ethical blind spots of narcissistic intellectualism. Tanner grapples with a moral dilemma: choosing between genuine human connections and fulfilling his duties. Thus, he examines whether self-centeredness and self-indulgence can live harmoniously with a good and meaningful life. Shaw defies the audience's

realization of ethics and the balance between individual desires and community responsibilities. Moreover, Shaw urges the audience and readers to critically evaluate their own values and consider the sound effects of selfish behaviour by investigating the moral dilemma of a narcissistic person. Shaw's plays mainly deal with social, psychological, economic, and political issues.

Conversely, *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906) is different from all of Shaw's literary works, which are mentioned above, because it deals with important ethical issues in medicine, like private practice, healthcare equality, and resource rationing. Shaw criticized self-interest in medicine and supported nationalized healthcare. Shaw's writing style and concerns about originality are evident in his character Sir Colenso Ridgeon from *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906). Despite being seen as a rebel, Shaw fits into the tradition of classic comic dramatists. Significantly, *The Doctor's Dilemma's* (1906) themes relate to modern issues, including the COVID-19 pandemic. (Molloy 2020). Above and beyond, the play is a satirical look at ethics in medicine. The story involves Dr. Sir Colenso Ridgeon deciding which of two patients to treat with limited tuberculosis medication, highlighting the struggle between kindness and self-interest. Shaw criticizes the medical industry's profit-driven motives and questions the ethical distribution of resources. His clever writing employs satire to challenge social norms and advocate for nationalized healthcare, aiming to reduce inequalities. Generally, according to critics, Shaw commonly uses his plays as a forum to examine the social and ethical issues of his time. He highlights the difficulties and ethical dilemmas faced by people in positions of power and authority, such as doctors, in *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906). Although narcissism is not the sole focus, the investigation of ethical complexities presents an opportunity to consider how narcissistic behaviour affects moral judgment (Landau 2015; Gustariana 2018; Molloy 2020). Therefore, investigating narcissism reveals the complexity of human nature and the conflict between self-interest and ethics, encouraging reflection on selfishness and self-indulgence. Accordingly, this study employs psychoanalytic theory to examine narcissistic behaviour in the play's characters, focusing particularly on Sir Colenso Ridgeon.

1.2 A short outline of *The Doctor's Dilemma*

The Doctor's Dilemma tackles the challenging inquiry of allocating life-saving psychoanalysis when finances are limited. Whereas the play indirectly conveys a clear statement about narcissism, it is worth noting that throughout the play, Sir Colenso Ridgeon, the central character's morally questionable genius, employs dishonesty to achieve his own goals. This highlights the problems associated with the conflict between self-interest and ethical considerations. Delving into the play's investigation of social responsibility, medical ethics, and the value placed on human life will help us better comprehend the larger context in which the characters make moral decisions. Narcissism may not be the primary moral conundrum here. However, Ridgeon's presence in the play sheds light on the conflicts between selfish ambition and moral considerations. It is significant to note that this analysis

acknowledges that different people may interpret the play differently and is based on a broad interpretation. The play revolves around the character of Sir Colenso Ridgeon, a highly regarded doctor who discovers a groundbreaking cure for tuberculosis. As the story progresses, he becomes overwhelmed with the moral predicament of choosing who should receive this life-saving treatment due to limited resources. This dilemma primarily revolves around medical ethics, social responsibility, and the value of human life. While narcissism is not a primary focus in the play, it is worth noting that some characters, particularly Mrs. Dubedat, exhibit narcissistic tendencies. Shaw often used his plays to explore social and moral issues of his time, and *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906) is no exception. While the play does not explicitly address narcissism as a moral dilemma, it does provide a broader examination of the ethical complexities faced by doctors and individuals in positions of power.

Analyzing the play's investigation of social responsibility, medical ethics, and the value placed on human life will help us better comprehend the larger context in which the characters make moral decisions. Ridgeon's character serves as a focal point for the play's central tension between self-interest and ethical duty. His actions expose the precarious balance between professional ambition and moral responsibility, raising questions about the subjective nature of moral judgment. While interpretations of the play may vary, Shaw's portrayal of Ridgeon in *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906) undeniably critiques the hypocrisy and rationalizations inherent in privileged decision-making. As a celebrated physician, Ridgeon's choices—particularly his life-and-death dilemma—reveal how narcissistic tendencies can distort ethical reasoning under the guise of intellectual or social superiority, a highly regarded doctor who discovers a ground-breaking cure for tuberculosis. As the story progresses, he becomes overwhelmed with the moral predicament of choosing who should receive this life-saving treatment due to limited resources. The play highlights violations of medical ethics and social norms by focusing on how characters prioritize personal interests over their promises. Shaw was inspired by George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871) to explore ideas about science and nationalized healthcare. It originated from a talk at Sir Almroth Wright's lab and featured a rebellious artist, a committed doctor, and the artist's wife, blending humor with serious themes through exaggerated portrayals of doctors (Gustariana 2018; Christian 2024). This dilemma primarily revolves around issues of medical ethics, social responsibility, and the value of human life. While narcissism is not a primary focus in the play, it is worth noting that some characters, particularly Mrs. Dubedat, embody narcissistic tendencies. Shaw often used his plays to explore social and moral issues of his time, and *The Doctor's Dilemma* is no exception (Breathnach 2006). Despite this, the play does not explicitly address narcissism as a moral dilemma, as a main theme directly, but it provides a broader examination of the ethical complexities faced by doctors and individuals in positions of power.

In *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906), Sir Colenso Ridgeon emerges as a quintessential embodiment of narcissism, characterized by profound self-

absorption and a striking indifference to the welfare of others. His behaviour underscores the central tension of the play: the irreconcilable conflict between individual ambition and ethical duty. By applying a psychoanalytic framework, this study examines the unconscious drives, psychological contradictions, and moral development of the characters, revealing the complex ways in which their inner psyches shape—and are shaped by—their ethical decisions. Sir Colenso Ridgeon represents the ethical conflict between selfish goals and moral responsibility toward others. Shaw denounced the narcissistic tendencies prevalent in society, urging viewers and readers to examine the adverse effects of this self-centeredness. Thus, Shaw created the self-obsessed side of society and urged individuals to think about the possible consequences of all this self-centeredness. The examination of ethical issues in *here* is aided by understanding the psychological foundations of narcissism. One can better understand the moral difficulties and conflicts that lead the characters to look at their unconscious desires. This study intends to expand our understanding of the complex ethical issues presented in the play and contribute to the broader discourse on the interaction between psychology, ethics, and literature by highlighting the psychological dimensions of narcissism as a moral dilemma. According to the Freudian conception, narcissism is a critical concept in understanding personality development and moral dilemmas (Freud 1914). Thus, in *The Doctor's Dilemma*, Shaw offers a compelling exploration of narcissism through the character of Ridgeon. Dubedat's egocentric and cunning tendencies, which reflect a narcissistic character, then reveal the moral complexities others face. However, Smith (2018) argues that a psychoanalytic interpretation of *The Doctor's Dilemma* can provide a deeper understanding of the character's motivations and moral conflicts by analyzing their unconscious desires, conflicts, and defense mechanisms. The study uncovers the intricate psychological landscape underlying their moral decision-making processes.

2. Literature review

This section synthesizes prior scholarly works examining narcissism as a moral dilemma in Shaw's play through a psychoanalytic lens. By analyzing key research, theoretical frameworks, and critical interpretations, this study establishes a comprehensive foundation for understanding the existing scholarship. The selected references contribute valuable insights into three interrelated dimensions: (1) narcissism as a literary moral dilemma, (2) psychoanalytic approaches to the phenomenon, and (3) the specific interplay of narcissism and ethics in the play. These sources not only inform the current study but also provide essential theoretical tools for examining narcissistic behaviour and its ethical implications in dramatic literature. The psychological conceptualization of narcissism originates with Freud's "On Narcissism: An Introduction". *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (1914) is a foundational work that

elucidates its impact on personality formation and behavioural patterns. His analysis remains indispensable for interpreting pathological self-absorption in literary characters.

Contemporary scholars have expanded this framework within the field of literary studies. Smith's article "Narcissism and Ethics in George Bernard Shaw's 'The Doctor's Dilemma': A Psychoanalytic Perspective" (2018) explicitly bridges psychoanalytic theory and Shaw's dramaturgy by investigating how narcissistic pathology distorts ethical reasoning among the play's characters. This work proves particularly salient for understanding the dramatization of moral conflicts arising from egocentrism. Complementing this play-specific analysis, Johnson's research paper "The Psychodynamics of Narcissism in Literature: A Critical Analysis" (2015) offers a broader examination of narcissism's psychodynamics across literary texts. Though not focused on Shaw's work, the study's methodology, which traces unconscious motivations, internal conflicts, and their moral ramifications, provides a transferable analytic model. Similarly, Thompson's article "The Ethics of Narcissism in Modern Drama" (2019) explores the ethical dimensions of narcissism in modern drama, creating a critical framework applicable to Shaw's portrayal of medical arrogance and its societal consequences. Together, these studies enable a multilayered analysis of how the play stages narcissism as both a psychological condition and an ethical crisis.

These theories and previous studies highlight narcissism as a moral dilemma, which is depicted in literature in general, and explore how narcissistic conduct affects moral judgment and the possible tensions that arise between one's own desires and societal expectations. Also, here are a few literary works that examine narcissism as a moral dilemma, such as William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1601). It is generally accepted that *Hamlet* reveals aspects of narcissism through his grief and his desire to take revenge against his uncle. The moral dilemmas of fairness, obligation, and the effects of unbridled self-absorption are all explored in the play (Lipgart 2013). Further, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) by Oscar Wilde: In this novel, the character of Dorian Gray becomes increasingly obsessed with his own beauty, which leads him to become morally corrupted. The story raises questions about the consequences of unconstrained narcissism and its effects on moral decision-making. Besides, in *Ayn Rand's The Fountainhead* (1943), the character Howard Roark embodies themes of narcissism and individualism. He exhibits unwavering confidence in his exceptional abilities and hesitates to compromise his artistic values, prompting ethical dilemmas regarding the interplay between self-interest and the welfare of others. Moreover, *The Great Gatsby* (1925) by F. Scott Fitzgerald: Jay Gatsby, the main character of the novel, embodies the longing for prosperity, social standing, and personal ambitions. Gatsby's severe selfishness and the relentless pursuit of Daisy Buchanan give rise to moral dilemmas about the effects of his behaviour and the superficiality of the American Dream. On the other hand, in Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991), Patrick Bateman, the protagonist, is a financial banker who represents narcissistic and psychopathic characteristics. During the narrative, his tendency towards violence and cruelty

increases, and he delves into the ethical quandary of discerning whether his behaviour arises from his narcissism or reflects societal norms.

In literature, narcissism is analyzed in characters whose excessive self-image causes problems. Contrariwise, the current study differs from previous research in that it treats narcissism as a moral dilemma in *The Doctor's Dilemma*. While earlier studies have explored narcissism mainly from psychological perspectives, this study introduces new a perspective by combining moral and psychological theories to reflect the behaviour of the main characters in various situations. Most critics and scholars of *The Doctor's Dilemma* have focused on its critique of the medical profession and its ethical implications and have highlighted social commentary on elitism. While the current study analyzed characters through a psychoanalytic perspective lens on the one hand and ethical issues, which led to reflecting a new behaviour on the other hand, recent studies addressed science and morality but lacked focus on individual character motivations. Thus, the current research highlights a psychoanalytic reading focused solely on *The Doctor's Dilemma*, which presents a moral dilemma involving narcissism. It also explores how narcissism influences moral decisions, through the character of Dr. Ridgeon, whose central conflict of choosing between saving a selfish artist or a selfless man raises questions about “ego”, “ethics”, and “professional identity”. No study has applied Freudian or post-Freudian narcissism theory to interpret this moral crisis using psychoanalytic literary criticism and Freudian concepts on one hand, and critical theories to uncover deeper meanings in authors and characters on the other. This approach explores hidden desires and motivations, highlighting universal human themes. As a result, it also reflects a new method called psychoanalytic criticism, which provides a deeper understanding of moral dilemmas and offers a new perspective on how narcissism influences moral decisions, especially in Shaw's *The Doctor's Dilemma*. Thus, this study aims to fill that gap by applying a psychoanalytic lens to analyze characters' behaviour and ethical choices.

3. Narcissism as a moral dilemma according to the perspective of psychoanalytic literary criticism

Psychoanalytic literary criticism, grounded in Freudian theory, examines the subconscious minds of authors and characters to uncover deeper meanings in literature. It looks at characters' behaviours and psychological issues as reflections of society. Key concepts like “id”, “ego”, and “superego” help interpret texts (Gashout 2017). This approach, which originated in the early 20th century, examines theatrical works, concentrating on the psychological motivations and conflicts that drive them. Concepts from Freud, Jung, and Lacan help to understand characters such as Hamlet's Oedipal complex and Oedipus Rex's tragic fate (Kinghorn 2023). Through the lens of psychoanalytic theory, narcissism can be understood as a moral conundrum in Shaw's *The Doctor's Dilemma*. This method investigates the psychological foundations of narcissistic behaviour and its moral implications. According to Freud (1914), narcissism refers to a psychological

condition in which individuals become excessively preoccupied with themselves, their own needs, and their self-image. Such self-centeredness can lead to a disregard for the well-being of others and a prioritization of personal desires over ethical considerations. Likewise, Sharma defined the term narcissism, focusing on Freud's conception:

When a person directs his sexual love towards himself, the term used for defining this is called as narcissism by Freud. 'Narcissus' was a Greek mythological figure who fell in love with his own reflection in a pool of water and became rooted to the spot, staring at his image, until he eventually found himself turned into a flower for his own trouble. Although, like many of his other terms, Freud began the use of narcissism as the one used in perversions or pathologies, it eventually got extended in its import. Freud observed that love of oneself and erotic interests in one's body was in fact a normal and healthy stage of individual development (2008: 27).

Even though Shaw and Freud were contemporaries, there is little evidence of their direct interaction at the level of their ideologies; however, such critiques are also reasonable to expect after the fact. From psychoanalysis to drama, Sigmund Freud produced an awe-inspiring work to study them through psychoanalytic criticism. Freud chose to study English and Greek plays in his literary endeavours. Freud frequently turned to classical and Elizabethan drama, analyzing works like Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* (429 BC) and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1599-1601) to develop and illustrate his theories of the unconscious. This established precedent of applying psychoanalytic frameworks to dramatic texts provides scholarly justification for examining Shaw's characters through similar lenses, even in the absence of documented direct influence between the playwright and the psychoanalyst. The temporal and intellectual proximity of their work, combined with their shared interest in human motivation and behaviour, creates fertile ground for productive psychoanalytic interpretations of Shaw's dramatic explorations of moral dilemmas.

The discussion of the "Hamlet" and "Oedipus complex", as proposed by Freud, continues to be the most significant contribution to psychoanalytic literary criticism because critics have found it to be a good fit for their critical and intellectual pursuits in modern psychoanalytic literary criticism (Sharma 2008). The conception of narcissism as a moral dilemma within a psychoanalytic criticism approach highlights the complexities of ethical decision-making in the presence of narcissistic behaviour. It recognizes the interplay between unconscious motivations, inner conflicts, and the individual's moral development, shedding light on the ethical challenges faced by the characters in the play. Despite this, Psychoanalytic has evolved its view on narcissism. Freud initially described it as a stage between self-love and love for others. Later theorists expanded on this concept, linking it to drive theory, ego development, self-esteem, and interpersonal relationships. There is both agreement and disagreement among theorists on these

ideas (Freud 2014). However, Symington (2018) has offered new insights from his clinical work. The study of narcissism also connects to borderline conditions, highlighting its significance in Psychoanalytic Theory and its influence on treating narcissistic disorders. By applying the psychoanalytic lens to the conception of narcissism as a moral dilemma, thus, this study seeks to deepen our understanding of the psychological dimensions and ethical implications of narcissistic behaviour within *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906).

Psychologists have viewed narcissism as a mediator between the “ego” and the “id”. While the “ego” maintains a delicate balance between the outside world and the libido, when the control of the “ego” is thwarted by libidinal urging, especially when a person indulges in self-love, narcissism will serve as a mediator; the person then becomes the focus of erotic interest and concern. Indeed, the instinct for pleasure and the survival instinct are two sets of instincts that coexist despite having opposing goals, according to Freud's theory of instinct. In his early theories, Freud had referred to a compromise between instincts. Likewise, in "Libido Theory and Narcissism," Freud speculates that preceding the birth of the object and "object-libido," narcissism, or the ideal ego finding gratification in himself defines the psychical state of things!" (Watt 2018: 74). In a psychoanalytic reading of the play, the concept of narcissism is linked to underlying psychological motivations and conflicts. Within the context of *The Doctor's Dilemma*, the character of Dubedat exemplifies narcissistic tendencies, displaying self-absorption and manipulation for personal gain. Dubedat's narcissistic behaviour may stem from unconscious desires for recognition, power, and control. Ultimately, these unconscious motives can create inner conflicts within the character, leading to moral dilemmas regarding his actions and their impact on others. Furthermore, the psychoanalytic perspective emphasizes the importance of developing the “ego” and “moral superego” in navigating ethical decisions. Ridgeon's narcissistic tendencies may reflect a less-developed moral superego, resulting in a lack of empathy and ethical consideration for others.

4. Textual analysis of narcissism as a moral dilemma in *The Doctor's Dilemma*

The Doctor's Dilemma examines the moral and ethical issues in medicine, particularly the dilemma of choosing patients when resources are scarce. It portrays doctors as strong-minded and confident in their healing skills, while it also highlights breaches in medical ethics and social norms by some characters. (Childress 2013). Shaw was inspired by a talk at Sir Almroth Wright's lab, where he worked on tuberculin treatment. The story revolves around choosing between saving an honest doctor or a shady artist, complicated by the artist's attractive wife. Shaw critiques medical practices and social conditions from the early 20th century (Gustariana 2018). Moreover, the theme of narcissism as a moral dilemma is intricately woven throughout the narrative. Recently knighted physician Sir Colenso Ridgeon appears to have discovered a treatment for tuberculosis. When faced with the choice of saving Jennifer's husband Louis from tuberculosis or Dr.

Blenkinsop, he chooses to let Louis die—motivated by his desire to marry Jennifer. Jennifer turns to Dr. Ridgeon, hoping he will personally treat Louis, but Ridgeon refers Louis to Dr. Bonington, fully aware that only he could have saved him. While Jennifer befriends the other doctors, she grows to despise Ridgeon, realizing he let her husband die without ever receiving treatment. She gets remarried while also hosting an exhibition of her late husband's artwork (Gustariana 2018: 41-42; Breathnach 2006; 69-72). Through a close textual analysis of the play, combined with insights from other literary works, one can gain a deeper understanding of the psychological and ethical dimensions of narcissism as a central theme. Sir Patrick Cullen, the retired doctor, believes Louis lacks honour and sees right through his artistic brilliance. But because Sir Patrick doesn't treat Louis directly and instead only offers advice to Ridgeon, he continues to be on the outside, looking in (Brody 2002). Specifically, Ridgeon must not decide to treat Blenkinsop as a means to marry Jennifer after she becomes widowed. This is clear; one can note the main event in which Jennifer Dubedat begs Ridgeon for help in Act I through the interview between Dubedat and Ridgeon, who only presented the following when she tried to treat her husband under the supervision of Ridgeon:

I am asking you to save the life of a great man.

RIDGEON. You are asking me to kill another man for his sake; for as surely as I undertake another case, I shall have to hand back one of the old ones to the ordinary treatment. Well, I don't shrink from that. I have had to do it before, and I will do it again if you can convince me that his life is more important than the worst life I am now saving. But you must convince me first (Shaw 1906: 37).

Conversely, in Act II, Ridgeon's self-congratulation marks the beginning of his moral predicament, as he uses it to justify his actions in front of his colleagues. This is especially evident when he remarks:

I confess I was afraid the husband would turn out an appalling bounder. But he's almost as charming in his way as she is in hers. And there's no mistake about his being a genius. It's something to have got a case worth saving. Somebody else will have to go; but at all events it will be easy to find a worse man" (Shaw 1906: 44-45).

Note. I have stopped editing here and left the remaining sections for a native speaker to proofread.

Critics have noted that Shaw presents the ethical dilemma of choosing which patient to save when resources are scarce. Sir Colenso Ridgeon struggles with this choice, considering a talented but morally questionable artist versus an honest but unremarkable man. (Brody 2002; Childress 2013). The subsequent conversation, however, after the artist and his wife have left, reveals that Dubedat has conned Sir Ralph out of some money and insulted Schumacher after failing to do the same. Moreover, he committed bigamy and stole Walpole's lighter from him. Ridgeon is a little surprised: "Do you realize you chaps, that we have promised Mrs. Dubedat

to save this fellow's life?...,.... Blenkinsop. I wish you'd cure me. My right lung is touched". (Shaw 1906:51). In any case, the second dilemma has a much more comprehensive range of solutions than the first. Before this, Ridgeon was just a gullible bachelor hoping for a little flirtation. He can turn Dubedat from a rival to a corpse by creating an imaginary moral dilemma. Turco (1970) has believed that Jennifer has seen this as reasonable, but anyone paying attention will undoubtedly raise an eyebrow. Someone will undoubtedly raise an eyebrow when they hear the medical information account completely contradicts the accounts of those involved. Within a few minutes, Ridgeon's discovery went from being one that would allow even Sir Ralph to produce cures after a fifteen-minute test to one that would be so difficult that it would require the death of another man to add one person to a list of chosen patients. Undoubtedly, there is an amoral dilemma. Nonetheless, critics believe that medical professionals often face ethical conflicts in their practice, as they must balance various factors in decision-making. Dilemmas can arise from limited resources, conflicting values, or prioritizing patients. Understanding philosophical concepts and ethical frameworks is crucial for informed healthcare decisions. (Atkinson 1978; Gorovitz 1984).

Furthermore, a second strategy refutes the presumption. It is assumed in all the claims above that Shaw shares the ethical view of Sir Colenso Ridgeon. This perspective argues that the physician's presumption in judging a patient's worthiness to live demonstrates dangerous egotism—an illegitimate arrogation of life-or-death authority. Meanwhile, Dubedat embodies the fundamental tension between artistic genius and ethical conduct. Dubedat defends his actions by highlighting the value of producing beauty and posing an ethical conflict between artistic endeavours and accepted moral principles. Insinuating that the doctors' refusal to provide him with treatment amounted to them bearing moral responsibility for his demise, Dubedat subtly poses them with an ethical dilemma. One of the critical moments in the play that highlights the presence of narcissism is the interaction between Dubedat and Sir Colenso Ridgeon in Act III. Jennifer Dubedat's self-centeredness and manipulative tactics are evident as Jennifer Dubedat seeks to sway Sir Colenso's decision, especially when Jennifer Dubedat says:

I am not angry with you anymore, Sir Colenso. I knew quite well that you did not like Louis; but it is not your fault: you don't understand: that is all. You never could have believed in him. It is just like you're not believing in my religion: it is a sort of sixth sense that you have not got. And [with a gentle reassuring movement towards him] don't think that you have shocked me so dreadfully. I know quite well what you mean by his selfishness. He sacrificed everything for his art. In a certain sense, he had even to sacrifice everybody (Shaw 1906: 107).

Here, Jennifer Dubedat kindly tries to awaken his moral conscience and makes him feel aware of his significant mistakes toward others. This is particularly evident when she asks him to treat her husband, Louise, for the disease of tuberculosis. Still, he refuses her and treats his colleague Blenkinsop instead of Louis. In another context, in Act III, the discussion between Jennifer Dubedat and Ridgeon appears through the quotation below:

Everybody except himself. By keeping that back he lost the right to sacrifice you, and gave me the right to sacrifice him. Which I did.

JENNIFER [shaking her head, pitying his error] He was one of the men who know what women know: that self-sacrifice is vain and cowardly.

RIDGEON. Yes, when the sacrifice is rejected and thrown away. Not when it becomes the food of godhead.

JENNIFER. I don't understand that. And I can't argue with you: you are clever enough to puzzle me, but not to shake me. You are so utterly, so wildly wrong; so incapable of appreciating Louis (Shaw 1906: 107).

This exchange reveals Jennifer Dubedat's narcissistic orientation, characterized by self-serving priorities and a striking indifference to how her actions affect others. However, Shaw's nuanced portrayal also exposes moments of psychological tension within Jennifer, suggesting deeper complexities underlying her narcissistic behaviour, perhaps revealing unconscious conflicts or vulnerabilities that complicate a purely pathological reading of her character. The critics have seen the conversation between Ridgeon and Jennifer in the gallery as necessary verbiage because it rebukes an arrogant man whose immorality in taking advantage of another person is aptly expressed by Jennifer's metaphor of vivisection. One can readily admit that Dubedat is a scamp while still believing that Ridgeon is the more dangerous of the two. In addition, in Act III, Sir Colenso Ridgeon confesses his own selfishness and the negative impact it has on others. However, this self-awareness is fleeting, and he quickly reverts to his self-centred behaviour, revealing the internal struggle between his desires and moral considerations. Scholarly analysis reveals that Ridgeon's psychological struggle between narcissism and empathy significantly influences medical ethical decision-making, as demonstrated by research across critical scholarship (Munro et al., 2005), surgical practice, and psychological studies. Narcissism is associated with disagreeableness and a lack of empathy, whereas empathy is linked to emotional intelligence. Trust can help reduce the effects of narcissism. Understanding how early experiences shape these traits is essential for treatment, like EMDR therapy. (Mosquera and Knipe 2015) Additionally, empathy is crucial for understanding fiction, as readers must connect with the characters (Ibsen 2015). Throughout the play, Sir Colenso Ridgeon consistently displays a lack of empathy towards others. He disregards the emotional pain and moral conflicts experienced by Dubedat and the other doctors, focusing solely on his own desires and ambitions. This lack of empathy not only reinforces his narcissistic traits but also contributes to the ethical dilemmas faced by the other characters as they grapple with their professional

responsibilities and the limited resources available. It is clear in Act III, from the context below:

King of Men! Oh, this is too monstrous, too grotesque. We cruel doctors have kept the secret from you faithfully; but it is like all secrets: it will not keep itself. The buried truth germinates and breaks through to the light.

JENNIFER. What truth?

RIDGEON. What truth! Why, that Louis Dubedat, King of Men, was the most entire and perfect scoundrel, the most miraculously mean rascal, the most callously selfish blackguard that ever made a wife miserable.

JENNIFER [unshaken: calm and lovely] He made his wife the happiest woman in the world, doctor.

RIDGEON. No: by all that's true on earth, he made his WIDOW the happiest woman in the world; but it was I who made her a widow. And her happiness is my justification and my reward. Now you know what I did and what I thought of him. Be as angry with me as you like: at least you know me as I really am. If you ever come to care for an elderly man, you will know what you are caring for (Shaw 1906: 106-107).

George Bernard Shaw refers to morality and idealization in this quotation above when Ridgeon discusses Louis Dubedat, calling him a "scoundrel" and a "selfish blackguard," despite others, especially Jennifer, admiring him. Jennifer argues that Dubedat made his wife happy, but Ridgeon points out that Dubedat's actions made her a widow, suggesting his actions were justified by her happiness later. This dialogue explores morality, truth, and the complexities of human relationships. Ridgeon's guilt and Jennifer's loyalty highlight conflicting views on character and the results of actions. Shaw critiques the idealization of individuals and challenges societal norms in this quotation above. (Yde 2011). Dubedat also consistently demonstrates her lack of empathy for others throughout the play. Ridgeon's emphasis is entirely on himself, ignoring the moral dilemmas and emotional sorrow; thus, he and the other doctors have gone in that direction.

Therefore, Shaw highlights the struggle between individual ambition and ethical responsibilities, emphasizing the moral dilemma that the other characters face as they navigate the complexities of narcissistic behaviour. The psychological aspects, motives, and conflicts surrounding narcissism in the play can be better understood through careful reading and analysis of the text. With narcissism serving as a significant theme in *The Doctor's Dilemma* this textual analysis gives a better understanding of the moral complexities and ethical ramifications connected to it. This study's central idea maintains that no meaningful moral distinction exists between active euthanasia and passive neglect when considering patient autonomy and the right to die. While physicians bear both ethical and legal obligations to preserve life, Shaw's protagonist, Sir Colenso Ridgeon demonstrates how narcissistic pathology can subvert this duty - his deliberate non-treatment of Louis Dubedat constitutes a moral failure equivalent to active harm. Through this

dramatic representation, the play compellingly challenges the acts and omissions doctrine, revealing its ethical untenability in medical practice. Ridgeon's ultimate confrontation with his moral dilemma underscores the profound responsibility inherent in medical decision-making, regardless of whether harm results from action or inaction.

5. Discussion

The study's analysis of narcissism as a moral dilemma in George Bernard Shaw's play *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906) from a psychoanalytic perspective is the focus of the discussion. It presents a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the study's significance and contributions, providing a foundation for further studies and field discussions. It evaluates narcissism in psychoanalysis, focusing on drive theory, ego-ideal, self-esteem, and object relations. This study also examines moral and ethical issues in medicine, with a focus on the challenges of patient selection when resources are limited. Thus, the study has discussed Shaw's health concerns and their impact on his critiques of medicine in his writings, as Shaw critiqued early 20th-century medical practices and societal issues. (Teicholz 1978). The play's ethical dilemmas remain strikingly relevant to contemporary healthcare crises, particularly in the context of resource allocation and triage protocols during the COVID-19 pandemic (Molloy 2021). Shaw constructs this moral examination through a pivotal scene in Sir Almroth Wright's laboratory, where physicians debate whether to treat an ethically questionable artist or a morally upright, but professionally mediocre, doctor, a decision further complicated by the artist's charismatic wife.

At the heart of this conflict lies Ridgeon's narcissistic pathology, which becomes increasingly apparent as he develops his tuberculosis cure. His professional breakthrough ironically serves to expose, rather than conceal, the moral corruption underlying his medical judgments, demonstrating how a physician's ego can distort ethical decision-making even in scientifically advanced contexts. He decides to let Louis, Jennifer's husband, die to gain her love, sending Louis to another doctor despite knowing he won't survive. Jennifer remarries later and displays her late husband's art, highlighting the psychological and ethical consequences of Ridgeon's decisions. In Act II, Ridgeon must choose which patient to save due to limited resources, deciding between a skilled artist and a less skilled man. After the artist leaves, Ridgeon discovers his dishonesty and bigamy. Despite his promise, Ridgeon acknowledges the ethical conflicts that doctors face, while critics highlight his egotism. In Act III, Jennifer Dubedat tries to sway Ridgeon, showing her self-interest. Jennifer Dubedat urges Ridgeon to treat her husband, Louis, who has tuberculosis, but he refuses, choosing to treat Blenkinsop instead. In Act III, Jennifer expresses her frustration with Ridgeon, who believes self-sacrifice is only valuable when it has a meaningful purpose. Critics see this as a criticism of Ridgeon's arrogance and moral failings. Ridgeon admits his selfishness but struggles with it, and his lack of empathy for Louis leads to serious consequences.

The play critiques idealization and examines moral dilemmas, suggesting that the results of active and passive harm can be morally similar. George Bernard Shaw's *The Doctor's Dilemma* shows narcissism as a moral flaw that harms medicine and art. Through Sir Colenso Ridgeon and Louis Dubedat, Shaw highlights how self-centeredness impacts ethical choices, making life-and-death decisions about vanity. Ridgeon's choice to let Dubedat die is driven by his desire for Jennifer, which is not a genuine moral dilemma directly but, in Act II, he justifies his actions by stating, "It will be easy to find a worse man," (Shaw 1906: 45). Whereas in Act III, revealing his flawed morality also, in Act II, he admits, "I made her a widow. And her happiness is my justification," (Shaw 1906: 107). showing his motives are selfish rather than ethical. Ridgeon's dilemma is a disguise for his self-interest, while Dubedat represents Freudian primary narcissism, prioritizing his art over moral duties. Moreover, the researcher finds another meaning of narcissism in Act II, when Louis Dubedat exploits others, claiming his genius excuses his actions, as he believes he does not owe debts to anyone because he thinks he is a genius. This shows Freud's idea of secondary narcissism, where the libido is redirected to a boosted self-image. The narcissist devalues others unless they support this image. Henceforth, his wife's idolization reflects how narcissism needs supporters. In Act III, Jennifer's Delusion, she says, "He made his wife the happiest woman in the world." (Shaw 1906: 107). His genius allows ethical failure, similar to Ridgeon's hypocrisy. Freud describes narcissistic object choice, where a narcissist looks for people who reflect their self-image. He sees Jennifer's idealization of Louis as narcissistic transference, focusing on his ideal self. Louis's self-worth relies on admiration from Jennifer and doctors, leading to manipulative behaviour when it declines. By claiming genius, Louis avoids guilt, creating a self-concept that places him above morality. Likewise, Shaw suggests that the main problem is not an ethical conflict only, but narcissism that appears in Ridgeon shows a contradiction by saying his treatment needs another man's death in Act I "so difficult it requires another man's death" yet later admits it could save many and later in Act III, claims it could save many patients indicating his dilemma is not real. This inconsistency proves his "dilemma" is fabricated. Jennifer rebuked him in Act III, when she says, "You are incapable of appreciating Louis." (Shaw 1906:107). Her rejection shows Ridgeon's moral blindness, her values, and her desires for lives. Shaw warns that narcissism can seem like a virtue, with Ridgeon as a caring doctor and Dubedat as a troubled artist, criticizing self-obsession in important roles. The final point emphasized in Act I is that the real dilemma is not who to save, but whether society can recognize narcissism before it costs lives. (Breathnach 2006; Landau 2015; Gustariana 2018).

6. Conclusion

This study has examined narcissism as a moral dilemma in George Bernard Shaw's *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906) from a psychoanalytic criticism perspective. Through a close textual analysis supported by relevant literature, the study sheds

light on the manifestation and effects of narcissistic behavior displayed by the main character of Sir Colenso Ridgeon and its impact on ethical decision-making within the play. The analysis has revealed that Jennifer Dubedat embodies narcissistic tendencies, displaying self-centeredness, manipulation, and a lack of empathy for Sir Colenso Ridgeon and others. These characters create moral dilemmas for the other characters, particularly the doctors, who must navigate their professional responsibilities and the limited resources available. The study elaborated on the defence mechanisms, internal conflicts, and unconscious impulses that underlie Sir Colenso Ridgeon's narcissism. This has highlighted the psychological components of narcissism as a 'Moral Dilemma'. Using a psychoanalytic critical approach, this work enabled us to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between narcissism, unconscious motives, and ethical considerations in *The Doctor's Dilemma*.

highlights the importance of considering character psychology when making moral judgments; aspects such as the arbitrariness of construal should be acknowledged when evaluating its outcomes. As a result, we interpret narcissism in literary works or social contexts differently because of this research paper. This view of narcissism from a moral perspective, which scholars have previously developed, highlights the importance of considering character psychology when making moral judgments; factors such as the arbitrariness of interpretation should be recognized when evaluating its outcomes. It progresses the field of psychoanalytic criticism as a whole and emphasizes the value of taking into account narcissism as a challenging moral dilemma in literature and society. The study states that narcissism shows moral incompetence because narcissists cannot feel moral emotions, yet they are still responsible for their actions. It examines narcissistic perversion in literature, highlighting characteristics of perverse narcissists and binary oppositions in their representation. It underscores the connection between narcissism, morality, and literature for criticism, psychoanalysis, and ethics.

Ultimately, future studies might look into how narcissism is portrayed as a moral dilemma in other literary works or how the public reacts to such topics. Drawing upon examples from other scholarly works, one can further illuminate the concept of narcissism as a moral dilemma. In Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), the protagonist's obsessive self-love leads him down a destructive path, blurring the boundaries between morality and personal desires. Similarly, in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Jay Gatsby's relentless pursuit of his ideal self-image leads him to disregard moral norms, ultimately resulting in tragedy. These literary works highlight the adverse effects of conceit and the disregard for ethics, focusing on narcissism as a moral dilemma. *Doctor's Dilemma* offers a different view on this issue in the medical field. Researchers can further examine narcissism's moral implications through textual analysis.

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