

Arms and the Man

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Introduction

About the playwright:

Did you know that Bernard Shaw was a strong supporter of women's rights, a teetotaler, a great wit, a public speaker, a vegetarian, an amateur photographer, a 250,000 letter writer, a political activist, a critic of Shakespeare's plays, an advocate of simplifying the English alphabet and spelling, a Nobel Prize for Literature winner (1925), an Oscar winner (1938), and above all an outstanding playwright.

Shaw was born in Dublin in Ireland on July 26, 1856. He was the youngest of three children. His older siblings were girls. His mother, Lucinda Elizabeth Shaw, was a talented singer and his father, George Carr Shaw, an unsuccessful grain merchant and a drunkard was unable to support his family adequately. From his father Shaw inherited a sense of humor and from his mother, imagination and learned much about operatic music.



George Bernard Shaw

Taught at home by a governess and then an uncle, Bernard Shaw went to different schools till 1871. As a student he was a failure. He even kept a life-long hatred for schools and teachers, saying: "Schools and schoolmasters, as we have them today, are not popular as places of education and teachers, but rather prisons and turnkeys in which children are kept to prevent them disturbing and chaperoning their parents". But no matter what he said or felt then, still he gained something-- he became an avid reader.

Shaw wrote sixty-three plays. They were first performed in the 1890s. Examples

"Mrs. Warren's Profession" (1893), "Arms and the Man" (1894), "Man and

Superman”(1903), “The Doctor’s Dilemma” (1906), “Pygmalion”(1912-13), “Heartbreak House” (1919),etc.

In 1989 he married the wealthy Charlotte Payne-Townshend and lived happily together for 45 years till her death. In 1950, Shaw fell off a ladder while trimming a tree on his property in Hertfordshire, outside of London, and died a few days later of complications from the injury, at age 94. His ashes, mixed with those of his wife were scattered along footpaths in their garden. Shaw’s home, now called Shaw’s Corner is open to public since 1970.



Shaw’s Corner

About the play:

a- Plot Summary:

The play /Act I is set in the bedroom of Raina Petkoff in a Bulgarian town in 1885, during the Serbo-Bulgarian War. Catherine Petkoff and her daughter, Raina, have just heard that the Bulgarians have had a great victory in a cavalry charge led by Raina’s fiancé, Major Sergius Saranoff, who is in the same regiment as Raina’s father, Major Paul Petkoff. Raina is so impressed with the noble deeds of her fiancé that she fears that she might never be able to live up to his nobility. At this very moment, the maid, Louka, rushes in with the news that the Serbs are being chased through the streets and that it is necessary to lock up the house and all of the windows lest anyone seeking refuge gets in. Raina promises to do so later, and Louka leaves. But as Raina is reading in bed and is totally lost in her reverie when gun shots are heard. There is a noise at the balcony window, and a bedraggled and disheveled soldier –belonging to the enemy as his uniform shows- with a revolver appears and threatens to kill her if she makes a sound. He keeps her cloak with him as a guarantee to his safety but he gives it back to her. Louka calls from outside the door saying that several soldiers want to search the house and investigate a report that a Serbian soldier was seen climbing her

balcony. When Raina hears the news, she turns to the soldier. He says that he is prepared to die, but he certainly plans to kill a few Bulgarian soldiers in her bedroom before he dies. Thus, Raina impetuously decides to hide him behind the curtains. The soldier searches the room, finds no one, and leaves. Raina then calls the man out from hiding; she nervously and absentmindedly sits on his revolver, but she learns that it is not loaded; the soldier carries no cartridges. He explains that instead of carrying bullets, he always carries chocolates into battle. He explains that he is a Swiss, a professional soldier hired by Serbia. Raina gives him the last of her chocolate creams, which he devours, maintaining that she has indeed saved his life. Now that the Bulgarian soldiers are gone, Raina wants the "chocolate cream soldier" (as she calls him) to climb back down the drainpipe, but he refuses to; whereas he could climb up, he hasn't the strength to climb down. When Raina goes after her mother to help, the "chocolate cream soldier" crawls into Raina's bed and falls instantly asleep. In fact, when they re-enter, he is sleeping so soundly that they cannot awaken him.

Act II begins four months later in the garden of Major Petkoff's house. The middle-aged servant Nicola is introduced to us -as servile and submissive. He is lecturing Louka on the importance of having proper respect for the upper class, but Louka has too independent a soul to ever be a "proper" servant. She has higher plans for herself than to marry someone like Nicola, who, she insists, has the "soul of a servant." Major Petkoff arrives home from the war. His wife Catherine suggests that Bulgaria should have annexed Serbia, and she tells him that she has had an electric bell installed in the library. Major Sergius Saranoff, Raina's fiancé and leader of the successful cavalry charge, arrives, and in the course of discussing the end of the war, he and Major Petkoff recount the now-famous story of how a Swiss soldier escaped by climbing up a balcony and into the bedroom of a noble Bulgarian woman. The women are shocked that such a crude story would be told in front of them. When the Petkoffs go into the house, Raina and Sergius discuss their love for one another, and Raina romantically

declares that the two of them have found a "higher love."

When Raina goes to get her hat so that they can go for a walk, Louka comes in, and Sergius asks if she knows how tiring it is to be involved with a "higher love." Then he immediately tries to hug the seductive maid. Since he is being so blatantly familiar, Louka declares that Miss Raina is no better than she; Raina, she says, has been having an affair while Sergius was away, but she refuses to tell Sergius who Raina's lover is, even though Sergius accidentally bruises Louka's arm while trying to wrest a confession from her. When he apologizes, Louka insists that he kiss her arm, but Sergius refuses and, at that moment, Raina re-enters. Sergius is then called away, and Catherine enters. The two ladies discuss how incensed they both are that Sergius related the tale about the escaping soldier. Raina, however, doesn't care if Sergius hears about it; she is tired of his stiff propriety. At that moment, Louka announces the presence of a Swiss officer with a carpetbag, calling for the lady of the house. His name is Captain Bluntschli. Instantly, they both know he is the "chocolate cream soldier" who is returning the Major's old coat that they disguised him in. As they make rapid, desperate plans to send him away, Major Petkoff greets Bluntschli warmly for he was the person who aided them in the final negotiations of the war; the old Major insists that Bluntschli must accept their hospitality until he has to return to Switzerland.

Act III takes place after lunch in the Petkoffs' library. Captain Bluntschli is attending to a large amount of confusing paperwork necessary for moving the troops to Philippopolis in a very efficient manner. Meanwhile, Sergius and Major Petkoff merely observe. Major Petkoff complains about a favorite old coat being lost, but at that moment Catherine rings the new library bell, sends Nicola after the coat, and astounds the Major by thus retrieving his lost coat. When Raina and Bluntschli are left alone, she compliments him on his looking so handsome now that he is washed and brushed.

Then she assumes a high and noble tone and chides him concerning certain stories which he has told and the fact that she has had to lie for him. Bluntschli laughs at her "noble attitude" and says that he is pleased with her manner.

Raina is amused; she says that Bluntschli is the first person to ever see through her pretensions, but she is perplexed that he didn't feel into the pockets of the old coat which she lent him; she had placed a photo of herself there with the inscription "To my Chocolate Cream Soldier." At this moment, a telegram is brought to Bluntschli announcing the death of his father and the necessity of his coming home immediately to make arrangements for the six hotels that he has inherited. As Raina and Bluntschli leave the room, Louka comes in wearing her sleeve in a ridiculous fashion so that her bruise will be obvious. Sergius enters and asks if he can cure it now with a kiss. Louka questions his true bravery; she wonders if he has the courage to marry a woman who is socially beneath him, even if he loved the woman. Sergius asserts that he would, but he is now engaged to a girl so noble that all such talk is absurd. Louka then lets him know that Bluntschli is his rival and that Raina will marry the Swiss soldier. Sergius is incensed. He sees Bluntschli and immediately challenges him to a duel; then he retracts when Raina comes in and accuses him of making love to Louka merely to spy on her and Bluntschli. As they are arguing, Bluntschli asks for Louka, who has been eavesdropping at the door. She is brought in, Sergius apologizes to her, kisses her hand, and thus they become engaged. Bluntschli asks permission to become a suitor for Raina's hand, and when he lists all of the possessions which he has (200 horses, 9600 pairs of sheets, ten thousand knives and forks, etc.), permission for the marriage is granted, and Bluntschli says that he will return in two weeks to marry Raina. Succumbing with pleasure, Raina gives a loving smile to her "chocolate cream soldier."

b- Historical Background

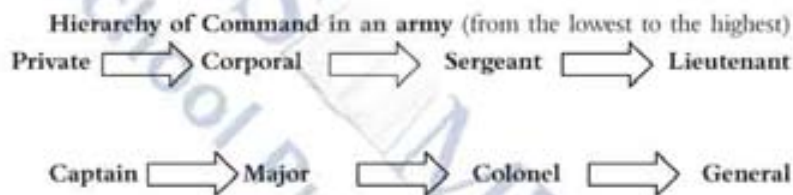
War in the 19th Century

Traditionally, an army was divided into three main combat units:

- a. The **infantry** where the soldiers fought on foot
- b. The **cavalry** who fought primarily on horseback
- c. The **artillery**, who operated an assortment of cannons

Success in battle often focused on the combination of the combat arms, with the artillery preparing the way for an attack by infantry, and the cavalry seeking intelligence, preparing a force for being surprised, charging on the battlefield, or pursuing a beaten enemy.

For command and distribution purposes an army would be divided into large **regiments**, which in its turn would be divided into large **brigades**, then into **battalions**, and finally into **companies**. A company would be made approximately of 221 officers and men.



A General would be in command of an army, a Colonel in command of a regiment, a Captain in command of a company. In "Arms and the Man", Serguis and Petkoff reached ranks of Major mainly because of social status and family wealth rather than military training or intelligence—hence Serguis' foolishness and disobedient cavalry brigade charge and Petkoff's inability to move troops.

Serbo-Bulgarian War



Serbian army

The play is set during the Serbo-Bulgarian War; Prince Alexander I the Regent of Bulgaria, led the Bulgarian army against the Serbs who had declared war in November 1885.



Prince Alexander I

by the Russians whereas the Serbs were led by Austrians. The Swiss supplied a large number of mercenaries.



The **Battle of Slivnitsa** took place in Slivnitsa, a town in western Bulgaria, 22 km away from Sofia, lying on the main road connecting the capital with the Bulgarian-Serbian border. It was the main factor in the victory of the Bulgarian army over the Serbian one.

A **peace treaty** was finally signed on 9 February 1886 in Bucharest ending up the war.



Prince Alexander Battenberg in the battlefield

c- Characters

The characters in "Arms and the Man" are clearly defined. Dialogue is more important than action, so, our judgment of characters depends on their speech. Unlike other playwrights Shaw gives elaborate stage directions which guide the judgment of the reader. The stage directions do not pertain only to movement or decor on stage but also a detailed description of the costume, appearance and nature of characters.

Raina Petkoff

Raina is the heroine of the play and the only daughter of Major Petkoff and Catherine Petkoff. She is a beautiful girl who gives Bluntschli the impression she is seventeen although she is twenty three years old. She is "romantic" and has romantic ideas of love and war.

In the first Act she is shown admiring the beautiful snowcapped Balkan mountain on a moonlit night.

Catherine Petkoff

Raina's mother is over forty. She has magnificent black hair and eyes. She looks like and acts like a peasant, but she wears fashionable dressing gowns and tea gowns all the time in an effort to appear to be a Viennese lady.

She is seen excited over the Bulgarian victory and especially in the triumph of Sergius. She scolds her daughter for keeping Sergius for a year before accepting his proposal for marriage.

Louka

Louka, a servant girl in the Petkoff household. She is proud. She looks down on Nicola's servility. She is ambitious and wishes to rise in life. Nicola wishes to marry her but she has other plans. The moment Sergius begins to flirt with her she makes up her mind to trap him.

Bluntschli

Bluntschli is described as a 35-year-old man with an "undistinguished appearance". He turns out to be a Swiss professional soldier that is a mercenary, fighting on the Serbian side for money.

When we first see him he is a fugitive -- tired hungry and sleepy. He is a bundle of nerves for he is being chased by the Bulgarian soldiers and firing can be heard in the streets.

He is a realist who believes in adapting to a situation in order to survive. For him it is better to be armed with chocolates than with ammunition on the battlefield. He has no illusions about war or heroism.

He is experienced with the actions and maneuvers that must be taken to win battles and if not, at least to stay alive. He impresses Sergius when he helps him to figure out the troop movements. He is also experienced in matters of the heart. He helps Sergius make the decision to be honest about Louka and to change his life.

He is blunt in everything he says, blunt as is suggested by his name itself.

Major Petkoff

It is Major Petkoff's wealth - not ability or expertise that acquired him his position in the army. As a military man, he is inefficient. This is made clear to us when Bluntschli comes along Major Petkoff happily hands over the respon-

sibility of planning the mobilization of the army. After Bluntschli has finished writing the orders, he congratulates himself as if he has planned them himself. He is, however a good father and husband.

Sergius Saranoff

Before we see Sergius, he is introduced to us by Catherine who praises him and Bluntschli who laughs at him. We learn he is handsome from Bluntschli who has seen him at the battlefield and then through the description of his photograph. He is a good-looking man with glowing eyes and a lovely moustache but he is like Don Quixote charging against the windmills.

Sergius is the personification of what every romantic hero should be: he is brave, handsome, idealistic, wealthy, aristocratic and the hero of a recent victory in a recent cavalry charge which he led. He has the noblest ideas about war. Later, however, he discovers that wars are not conducted by bravery and courage; they are more often won better by practical planning than they are won by chivalric deeds. For Sergius, then, war is only fit for sons of hotel keepers, who have something of the tradesman about them. For that reason, Sergius has resigned from the army in complete disillusionment.

Sergius becomes doubtful about his relationship with Raina. He tells Louka, it is tiring to live up to Raina's "ideal of the higher love." When Louka reveals all of Raina's flaws — Raina lies, she pretends, and she has entertained another man in her bedroom — Sergius then feels free to leave her — into marriage with the attractive and seductive Louka.

Nicola

Nicola is a faithful old servant of the household. He does not talk

much to the members of the family. He believes he must please his superiors and displays a lot of discretion in dealing with them as well as their guests.

He believes that the poor can only come up in life with the support of the rich.

He is ambitious. He plans to open a shop in future after he marries Louka who shuns him as she disapproves of his servility.

d- Significance of Title:

Shaw chose as his title the opening lines of Virgil's Aeneid, the Roman epic which glorifies war and the heroic deeds of man in war, and which begins,

"Of arms and the man I sing. . . ."

However, as Virgil highly praises war as described by its heroes, Shaw's aim in writing "Arms and the Man" is to provide a more realistic picture of war and to remove all pretensions of the nobility from war. In fact, he makes a satire of the perception people from the Romantic period had of soldiers. The Romantic period saw war as the opportunity for a man to show courage and bravery.

e- Themes:

Glorification of War & Concept of Heroism

Line after line, Shaw satirizes the romantic notions about war that glorify a gruesome business.

To create this satire, when the play opens, we hear about the glorious exploits which were performed by Major Sergius Saranoff during his daring and magnificent cavalry raid, an event that turned the war against

the Serbs toward victory for the Bulgarians. He thus becomes Raina Petkoff's ideal hero; yet the more that we learn about this raid, the more we realize that it was a futile, ridiculous gesture, one that bordered on an utter suicidal escapade.

We are made to realise that Sergius, who is the representation of the traditional heroism in war, is only a caricature that desperately clings to his romanticised ideal of a hero. Sergius, first is presented as being the hero, proves to be a man full of vanity and an obstinate fool. He is seen as incapable of helping Captain Bluntschli with troop movements and flirts with Louka, Raina's maid, whenever they are alone.

In contrast, Captain Bluntschli is presented as a Swiss, a professional soldier fighting for the Serbs. He has escaped from a horrific battle after three days of being under fire. He is exhausted, starving, and being pursued. Such is the experience of a real soldier.

His actions in Raina's bedroom strike us, at first, as being the actions of a coward. He climbs up a water pipe and onto a balcony to escape capture, he threatens a defenseless young lady with his gun, he takes her cloak as a weapon against her "present undress", allows her to hide him behind the curtains, and then he reveals that he carries chocolates rather than cartridges in his cartridge box because chocolates are more practical on the battlefield. Yet, as the play progresses, Bluntschli's unheroic actions become reasonable when we see that he survives, whereas had the war continued, Sergius' absurd heroic exploits would soon have left him dead.

It is also Bluntschli who proves to be able to deal with the business of dispensing an army to another town with ease, while Majors Petkoff and Saranoff completely baffled. He did it all by himself whereas they both kept on watching him leisurely.

It is noteworthy that Shaw's critics accused of trying to destroy the