



Anti-romantic issues and various characters in Arms and the Man by G.B.Shaw

Ramen Goswami

English dept, Magadh University, Bodh Gaya

Abstract: Unlike many of Shaw's other plays, there is no actual, separate preface to this particular play. However, there was a preface to the original volume of plays which contains this play and three others: The Pleasant Plays, 1898, revised in 1921. As Shaw mentioned elsewhere, a preface seldom or never concerns the play which is to follow the preface, and this preface is no exception. Instead, Shaw used this preface to comment upon the new style of drama (or simply what he calls New Drama). It is a name applied to dramas such as his or the Norwegian writer Ibsen's, plays which were not written to be commercial successes, but to be intellectual vehicles which would make the audience think about their life—plays of ideas. Shaw refuses to be influenced by popular demands for romantic, unrealistic situations. According to Shaw, theatre should become a place for the discussion of ideas in a way that is delightful to the audience.

Keywords: romantic, soldiers, blatantly, Chocolate Cream Soldier, discussion

ACT I

The play begins in the bedroom of Raina Petkoff in a Bulgarian town in 1885, during the Serbo-Bulgarian War. As the play opens, Catherine Petkoff and her daughter, Raina, have just heard that the Bulgarians have achieved a tremendous victory in a cavalry charge led by Raina's fiance, Major SergiusSaranoff. He is in the same regiment as Raina's father, Major Paul Petkoff. Raina is so impressed with the noble deeds of her fiance 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. Raina promises to do so later, and Louka leaves. But as Raina is reading in bed, shots are heard, there is a noise at the balcony window, and a bedraggled enemy soldier with a gun appears and threatens to kill her if she makes a sound. After the soldier and Raina exchange some words, Louka calls from outside the door. She says that several soldiers want to search the house and investigate a report that an enemy 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 impulsively decides to hide him. The soldiers investigate, find no one, and leave. Raina then calls the man out from hiding. She nervously and absentmindedly sits on his gun, 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. Furthermore, he is not an enemy; he is a Swiss, a professional soldier hired by Serbia. Raina gives him the last of her chocolate creams, which he devours, telling her 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

Act II begins four months later in the garden of Major Petkoff's house. The middle-aged servant Nicola 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 says, has the "soul of a servant." Major Petkoff arrives home from the war, and his wife Catherine greets him with two bits of information: she suggests that Bulgaria should have annexed Serbia, and she tells him that she has had an electric bell installed in the library. Major SergiusSaranoff, Raina's fiance 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 embrace the attractive 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 hails Bluntschli and greets him warmly as the person who aided them in the final negotiations of the war; the old Major insists that Bluntschli must their houseguest until he has to return to Switzerland.

ACT III

Act III begins shortly after lunch and takes place in the library. Captain Bluntschli is attending to a large amount of confusing paperwork in a very efficient manner, while 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 demeanor. 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 relating 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."

Character of Raina/Education of Raina

Raina is one of Shaw's finest creations. In the very beginning of the drama Raina is presented just as any other heroine from the romantic tradition: "On the balcony a young lady, intensively conscious of the romantic beauty of the night, and of the fact that her own youth and beauty are part of it, is gazing at the snowy Balkans" The romantic ambience is suddenly enhanced with her mother's breaking of the news that a great battle at Slivnitz has been won by none other than Sergius, to whom she is betrothed. After the momentary expressions of feminine joys are over, Raina confesses that she not only "doubted him", but also the romantic view of 'patriotism' and the "heroic ideals". Now that she has found that she was a "prosaic little coward", she comes to the conclusion that "the world is really a glorious world for women who can think see its glory and men who can act its romance".

But very soon the climax of joy is interrupted by a fugitive who enters her chamber. Raina here may be said to be acting wisely by following the instructions of the fugitive at the point of his revolver; but since she has remained too much preoccupied with her romantic fantasies, she throws those ideas on the face of the man who, to her utter displeasure, is found to be voicing contrary views. She decides to save the fugitive partly under the influence of the heroic act of saving the life of a fugitive in Ernani's opera.

In fact, Shaw dedicates Act I to shattering the feudal, nationalist and imperialist glorification of war. The first notion about bravery, shared by Raina, is mocked at by Bluntschli who tells her plainly that the ideal collapses under the constant threat of losing one's life and that it is prudent to save one's life by following the demands of instincts rather than heroic ideals. Raina tries to categorize and differentiate the Bulgarian people from the enemy people; she gets to know the real

story of Sergius's utter foolishness in leading a cavalry charge. At this she gets "deeply wounded" and tries to neutralize the by showing off the portrait of Sergius.

But as Bluntschli apologises and at the same time "stifles a laugh", she gets offended to the point of showing him the way out down the water-pipe. The mellow and tender aspects of her character are emphasised at the next moment when she takes pity on the worn-out soldier who surrenders his life. But while doing so, she also transforms him into "a chocolate cream soldier" and marks him for her own following the Shavian belief that men are pursued by women for producing higher forms of life. Here it must be noted that Raina saves him not just out of her romantic fancy created by Ernani's opera, and that nor all the romantic higher sentiments are mocked at by Shaw.

In Act II, Raina tries to behave in usual accustomed manner with Sergius, whom she finds somewhat changed partly by his experience in the front and partly by Bluntschli himself. She perceives somehow that just like herself Sergius is also pretending to be in higher love. Her words betray conscious irony of their relationship: "When I think of you, I feel that I would never do a base deed, or think an ignoble thought." As the entire scheme of fantasies gets crashed, she begins to express discontent. This is evident in her comment upon their relationship to her mother: "I always feel a longing to do or say something dreadful to him—to shock his propriety—to scandalise the five sense out of him."

In Act III Raina finds the opportunity to win Bluntschli. Here Raina may be said to be stooping to conquer the man she eyes for her and for this she comes out of the image of a conventional woman. For instance, she speaks of being "quite perfect with Sergius, no meanness, no smallness, no deceit" even after she spotted Sergius flirting with Louka and found the truth about the "one really beautiful and noble part" of her life. She does this intentionally to see whether Bluntschli can discover the person inside her. As soon as he does so, she leads him to acknowledge: "I'm your infatuated admirer."

Sergius as a Byronic character /Character of Sergius

From the very title 'Arms and the Man' we can guess about its theme---illusion about war and love. Bernard Shaw told that he was not against real love or the need of war, but what he was against was the romantic illusion about love and war. All his characters in the plays are his mouthpieces. The main character, no doubt, in Arms and the Man, in this respect is Bluntschli, the Swiss soldier, "bourgeois to his boot". But he has a counter character against whom his characters got prominence. This character's name is Sergius Saranoff, the betrothed to Raina Petkoff, who finally was not able to marry her. However, his character is portrayed deliberately on the basis of Byronic hero, in order to satirize these types of characters.

The Byronic hero is an idealised but flawed character exemplified in the life and writings of Lord Byron, characterised by his ex-lover Lady Caroline Lamb as being "mad, bad, and dangerous to know". The Byronic hero first appears in Byron's semi-autobiographical epic narrative poem Childe Harold's Pilgrimage (1812-1818). Byronic heroes are generally arrogant, cunning, suffering from troubled past, sophisticated and educated, self critical and introspective, self destructive in a way. Sergius is definitely conceived as Byronic hero is evident from the fact that at the time of giving description of Sergius, Shaw told, "The result is precisely what the advent of nineteenth century thought first produced in England: to wit, Byronism."

Sergius has an acute critical faculty which is the product of the western civilization in the Balkans. He particularly came under the influence of Byron and deliberately cultivated the Byronic mood and the poses and postures of the Byronic hero, especially Childe Harold who is identified with Byron. He tried to live up to high romantic ideals, but failed. This failure bred in him the cynical scorn for humanity. His cynicism comes out in his contemptuous remark on Bluntschli's business man like efficiency.

Sergius is introduced to us in person in Act II. We are told he is a major in the Bulgarian army and leads the foolish cavalry charge which causes him to be dubbed a "Don Quixote", a term in English literature to refer to someone who is foolhardy. The author describes him as a typical hero- a man with extremely good features, both facial and physical. He comes from an old aristocratic family.

From the way he greets his mother-in-law, we can say that Sergius is chivalrous and gallant. But, he is also a bit of a bore. Major Petkoff's reaction to his arrival tells us that Sergius tends to whine a lot and that he bores his future father-in-law. He is almost quixotic in his attempt to live up to this image, especially in battle, for it is hopeless to try to embody a myth. Thus, Shaw uses this character to show that these romanticized ideals were probably nonsense all along. Sergius is often referred to as the Byronic hero or as the Hamlet of this play because he has an underlying despair about life. He clings to his idealized image of himself because he is afraid to find out who he really is.

He knows that he is a different person with Raina than he is with Louka, and Louka has pointed out his hypocritical behaviors to him. Sergius realizes that there must be more to himself than the idealized soldier the young ladies worship, but of the other selves that he has observed in himself he says: "One of them is a hero, another a buffoon, another a humbug, another perhaps a bit of a blackguard." Sergius is a flirt and as man, he is attracted to Louka though his sense of caste leads him to reject her often. Sergius himself contradicts his personality- he is two, almost-contrasting people

which Louka and Raina. He admits to Louka that there are many of them, as mentioned before, and he is yet to find himself, and that is the main problem. Sergius is ineffective as a soldier. His cavalry charge and inability to help out

In spite of having almost all the characteristic qualities of a Byronic hero, the character of Sergius has some different shade of meanings. He is a character who has romantic illusions, but he makes a more practical approach to his life. He has to find himself and accept it. In this way, his character becomes not only tolerable one, but also a memorable character.

Contrast between Raina and Louka

Shaw felt that a play should consist of a variety of types of characters to interest the audience and to provide dramatic contrast. In Arms and the Man there is a noticeable variety of characters. The play provides a social range, a spectrum of recognizable types of characters, and a variety of temperaments. Each character has a different personality, different ways of speech and dress and different attitudes towards a situation. This seems to be a correct estimate of Shavian character. Thus, while Raina and Louka are diametrically different, they have a curious resemblance that they are typical Shavian women.

There is no doubt that Raina is the most interesting character in the play. She is interesting because there is often a contradiction between what she says and what she feels. She criticizes the fleeing Swiss soldier for not being a gentleman, while, at the same time, she is attracted to his pitiful condition. She charges Louka with spying on her, while she herself had spied on Louka and Sergius. When she is freed from her engagement to Sergius and has Bluntschli's proposal of marriage, she rejects him for the time being. She, in fact, lies and pretends to emotion an idea that she does not feel.

She is not truly romantic in the sense of truly belonging in heroic and noble behavior, but she acts romantically in risking her social position to save the Swiss soldier. She also immediately falls in love with him and places her portrait in the pocket of the court with which she helps him to escape. She pretends to help her father make himself comfortable, while she removes his portrait from his court pocket before he will have to discover it. She does it with blatant dishonesty. She is often dreamy but when interested what is going on she became energetic and quick thinking.

In the very opening of the play we find Raina rapt in romance. She is dreaming of stars, of moonlight and of other fanciful things. She is intensely conscious of the romantic beauty of the night and of the fact that her own youth and beauty are a part of it. She reads Byron and Pushkin. She goes to Bucharest every year during the opera season. She adores the portrait of Sergius. This is a romantic girl's romantic conception of life. This romanticism, however, is false and artificial, and it receives a serious setback as she comes into contact with Bluntschli, and apostle of common sense. It is he who cures her of this romantic malady. She had imagined war as an exciting sport, now she sees it as a dreadful reality.

This is true of her attitude to love and marriage too. She formerly thought that marriage was the meeting of a beautiful heroine and a handsome hero in a lifelong romantic dream. But now she knows better and, instead of the ornamental and fickle Sergius, she takes as her husband the plain Bluntschli, whose commonsense and six hotels in Switzerland will give her stability and comfort. There is, thus, no doubt that Raina's romanticism is false and artificial as opposed to Bluntschli's, for all his common sense and hard practicality, is suffering all his life for an incurably romantic disposition. Bluntschli will not accept her pretences and cuts her down to size when he remarks that he does not believe a single word she says. This is the turning point of the play, from that point onward Raina realizes that Bluntschli takes her seriously and she needs not try to impress him with her worth as a human being.

Louka, on the other hand, is diametrically opposite to Raina. Although just a maid-servant, she early impresses us as an energetic defiant and proud woman, who will either succeed in raising her position in life or will be dismissed from job after job for disobedience. She is afraid of Catherine but rude towards Raina, whose air of superiority she very much detests. She is engaged to Nicolla, but she thinks that Nicolla is immensely inferior to her for he has the soul of a servant which she was not. Her aim is to marry above her rank and make a lady of herself. Louka's difference from Raina lies in the fact that she is not sentimental like her. She does not understand the 'higher love' of Sergius and Raina. But she understands what real love is. She has no romantic illusion about love, as Raina had at the beginning of the play. When Sergius calls her name, she replies with great scorn "Whatever clay I'm made of, you're made of the same".

Arms and the Man: Shaw's Plot Construction/ Action and discussion play

The opening of the play is conventional and melodramatic. There is news of war and heroism, sound of shooting in the streets, a fugitive from the field with soldiery at his heels, a lone maiden in her bedroom and the entrance of the fugitive with a pistol aimed at her head. The purpose of the dramatist is to get attention of the audience after which the melodramatic thrills subside and the dramatist settles to more serious purpose. Shaw often expressed himself against the use of chance and accident. He regarded it as a fake device and a serious fault of the conventional drama. It is a sheer chance that Bluntschli enters the room of the betrothed of the 'hero' of Slivnitz and tells her the truth about his cavalry charge.

The confrontation of Bluntschli and Raina is the confrontation of the romantic and the realistic and is of great psychological interest. Shaw has succeeded in making discussion as interesting as action itself. The discussion ends after the psychological change in Raina. Bluntschli falls asleep as soon as he becomes Raina's "poor darling". There is no superfluity, no long speeches or philosophical discussions. There is no dull moment throughout the Act I, suspense is well-maintained through little surprises. Discussion, though psychologically essential, in no way comes in the way of the play's theatrical effectiveness.

Act I introduces us directly to the principal characters of the play as Raina, Bluntschli, Catherine and Louka and indirectly, through conversation between Catherine and Raina, to Sergius and Major Petkoff. The two basic themes of the play, war and love, are also introduced and it is suggested that it is the romance of war which feeds the romance of love. Act I is built round the conflict of the romantic and realistic attitudes towards war; Act II is built round the conflict between romantic and realistic attitudes towards love. In Act I, it is Bluntschli who shatters Raina's romantic notions of war and makes her realize the truth about war; in Act II, it is the practical Louka who exposes the hollowness of romantic love. The love scene between Sergius and Louka is a parody of the scene of higher love between Sergius and Raina. Similarly, Raina's conversation with her mother soon after reveals the state of her heart.

Numerous hints and suggestions bring out the vital importance to the plot of Petkoff's old coat. It is this coat in which Bluntschli is smuggled out of the house by Raina and Catherine. It provides Bluntschli an excuse for a second visit to Petkoff's. His arrival with the coat is one of the major complications of the play. Catherine gets into a difficult situation. Raina's arrival and hasty exclamation, "Oh! My chocolate cream soldier" brings in a minor crisis. Yet, the situation is saved by the tact and wits of Catherine, and Raina, too, acts her part well. Discourse is again in danger as Nicola arrives with the bag of the Swiss but his tactfulness saves the situation.

In Act III Shaw introduces three important conversations – between Bluntschli and Raina, Nicola and Louka, Louka and Sergius – which are of great psychological and theatrical interest. There are witty retorts and repartees. The dialogues are quick and lively with characters trying to uphold his or her opinion. The conflict is not of characters or of wills but of ideas. Finally the romantic mask is turned off Raina's face and she is made to realize the truth about romantic love. Sergius is equally disenchanted. Their romantic ideals are punctured and they come out through the "conflict of ideas" much sadder and wiser. The play revolves round a double love-triangle – Sergius engaged to Raina but flirting with Louka, Louka engaged to Nicola but ambitious to marry Sergius and Raina turning to Bluntschli away from Sergius, her betrothed. In the resolution of this love-triangle, Raina's photograph plays a crucial role. Failing to find in his pocket the photograph, the Major utters: "Raina, to her chocolate cream soldier."

The technical novelty of the play lies in its wide use of bathos. Bluntschli and Louka do not rise to the romantic heights of Sergius and Raina; instead Sergius and Raina drop down to the level of Louka and Bluntschli. Sergius is shown as a romantic fool; Raina is proved as hypocrite and liar, and the realist Bluntschli is shown to have a romantic nature. Bluntschli "is shown an enchanted soul whom nothing will disenchant". This is resolution by anticlimax which raises the play to the heights of pure comedy despite pure farcical elements. Those who criticize "Arms and the Man" for lack of action, forget that it is a play of idea, unlike traditional theatre. There is enough action in it but this action is internal rather than external indicated by the clever verbal-exchanges between characters.

Theme of Arms and the Man/ Love and war theme in Arms and the Man

The themes of "Arms and the Man" are love and war and these two themes have been welded into a single whole with great skill. Shaw has shown that it is the romance of war that leads to the romance of love. As the play opens, we are introduced to Raina, a pretty, young lady with romantic views of love and war, the result of her reading Byron and Pushkin. She stands on the balcony of her bedroom admiring the beauty of the night, and dreaming of her fiancée, Sergius, who is out on the front fighting the Serbs. Soon her mother enters the room to inform her that Sergius has become the hero as a result of his splendid victory in the battle. On his own initiative ignoring the orders of his Russian commander, he made a heroic charge on the artillery of the Serbs and put them to flight. Raina, in ecstasy, raptures kisses on the photo of her lover and her knight. She feels that she has been a 'prosaic little coward' in her doubts about Sergius' heroism and is unworthy of him. Sergius' heroism in war feeds her romantic love of him.

Shaw's views on war are uttered through the mouth of fugitive Bluntschli. He is blunt in everything he says, as is suggested by his name itself. First she is told the truth about Sergius' cavalry charge. It was something foolish and rash, and Sergius ought to be court-martialed for it. He and his regiment nearly committed suicide, only the pistol missed fire. Her heroic ideals of war, thus receive a rude shock. "And there was Con Quixote flourishing like a drum major, thinking he'd done the cleverest thing ever known,

whereas he ought to be court-martialed for it. Of all the fools ever let loose on a field of battle, that man must be the very maddest. He and his regiment simply committed suicide – only the pistol missed fire."

She is told that the horseman did not really want to attack; they pulled hard at the horses, but the horses ran away with them. The conclusion is that most soldiers are born fools and are cowards at heart. "Nine soldiers out of ten are born

fools." Further, we are told that it is the duty of a soldier to live as long as he can, and that he must run away to save his life. He bluntly tells her that all soldiers are afraid to die: "Some soldiers, I know, are afraid of death." And further that is it their duty to live as long as they can. "All of them, dear lady, all of them, believe me. It is our duty to live as long as we can."

Bluntschli himself runs away and enters the bedroom of Raina. He uses Raina's cloak as a shield to save himself and thus directs a rude shock to her. He demands chocolate to eat and says that he carries chocolates to the front instead of cartridges. In other words, food is more important than ammunition in war, and the truth of this view has been amply proved by the experiences of the two World Wars. "What use are cartridges in battle? I always carry chocolate instead." In Bluntschli, Shaw has presented a realistic portrait of an average soldier who is ready to fight when he must and is glad to escape when he can. Also, that a soldier is an ordinary creature of flesh and blood, who suffers from hunger and fatigue and is roused to action only by danger. As Sergius puts it, war is a trade like any other trade; it is the coward's art of attacking the enemy.

"Soldering, my dear madam, is the cowards' art of attacking mercilessly when you are strong, and keeping out of harm's way when you are weak. That is the whole secret of successful fighting. Get your enemy at a disadvantage; and never, on any account, fight him on equal terms." War is to be fought when necessary, but there should be no praise of war. War is a brutal affair and we should not sing songs of it. The cruelty and horror of war are highlighted through the horrible death of the twelve soldiers burnt alive in a farm-house. In this way idealistic notions of war are punctured.

Both Sergius and Raina are disillusioned in their romantic ideas of war and love. Raina glorified Sergius as a hero and his heroism fed her love for him. On his return from the war, there is "higher love" between them. Sergius calls her his "Queen" and "goddess" and she calls him her "King" and "hero". He is the medieval knight, and she is the source of his inspiration and heroism. They glorify each other and are blind to the faults of each other. They forget that the other is an ordinary creature of flesh and blood with common human perfections. This is the fault of all romantic love and Shaw has focused the searchlight of truth and reason on this fallacy. He has shown the imperfections of both Sergius and Raina.

Title of Arms and the Man

As Bernard Shaw himself tells us, the title of the play, "Arms and the Man", has been taken from Dryden's translation of the opening lines of the Roman poet; Virgil's Aeneid. The opening lines of Dryden's translation run as follows: "Arms and the Man I sing, who forced by fate,/And haughty Juno's unrelenting hate."

The phrase used by the Roman epic is Arma Virumque cano, and Chesterton rightly points out that for Virgil it is a mounting and ascending phrase. But Bernard Shaw reverses the process and changes the significance of the phrase. The technical originality of the play is that it is built not on pathos, but on bathos, and this technical peculiarity is indicated by the title itself.

Virgil's Aeneid is an epic of war and adventure. It narrates the heroic deeds of the Greek hero, Aeneas. Aeneas took part in the war of Troy. After Troy was burnt, he left the city with his old father, wife and children. After facing numerous difficulties and dangers, he reached Italy, and conquered it. Thus Virgil in his epic sings of the glory of war and heroic valour. The phrase Arms Virumque in Virgil is a heroic expression which puts us in mind of the stir and thrill of war and heroic exploits of great warriors. War is glorified and man is shown to be a creature of heroic proportions. Aeneas is exalted as a great hero, he uses arms with heroic valour and in the end emerges triumphant, towering head and shoulders both above his enemies and his associates. There is a mounting upward movement with the hero gaining in stature with each successive deed of valour he performs. Thus men, as well as, the arms which he uses are both extolled.

In the play, Bernard Shaw has reversed the process; Virgil's phrase receives an ironic treatment at the hands of the dramatist. He does not glorify war or the profession of a soldier; rather he strips them of their romantic glamour. No doubt the play opens with a tale of heroism and military alarms. Catherine tells Raina of the heroic cavalry charge of the, betrothed Sergius and the young lady is in raptures. "Of course, they just cut us to bits. And there was Con Quixote flourishing like a drum major, thinking he'd done the cleverest thing ever known, whereas he ought to be court-martialled for it. Of all the fools ever let loose on a field of battle, that man must be the very maddest. He and his regiment simply committed suicide – only the pistol missed fire."

He is the hero of the hour. Then there is the fugitive from the field of war, with soldier in arms close at his heels. He too, has, his own arms, a pistol and later on he uses Raina's cloak as a shield. There is the search in Raina's room by the brave soldiers of the Bulgarian army. The entire atmosphere resounds with war cries and the clang of arms. The action evolves out of the background of war and deals with men in arms. But very soon, as the action develops, the hollowness and sham of war is exposed and the romantic idealization of war is given a shattering blow. It is known that soldiering is a "coward's art of attacking you enemy when he is at a disadvantage".

That most soldiers are born fool is convincingly proved by the fact that the Bulgarian officer, who leads the search, fails to notice the revolver which has been staring him in the face all the time. 'Nine soldiers out of ten are born fools.' Thus Shaw, contrary to Virgil, shows that the glory of war and the heroism of soldier are mere illusions. War is a ridiculous, horrible affair in which people are mercilessly burnt alive. Sergius, instead of emerging as a heroic figure at the end, is exposed, ridiculed and shown to be a mere fool, a man of clay, easily entrapped into marriage by a mere servant girl.

The supremacy not of the arms or of heroic valour, but of the essential humanity of man is asserted. Man is essentially a creature of instincts and impulses, and his basic instinct is one of self-preservation. A soldier's staple fare is not arms of heroism, but food, and his chief concern is not military glory, but away from the battlefield, and instead of cartridges he carries chocolates to the front. Man is not at all heroic, but a pathetic creature of Bluntschli and then is nervous and frightened like a mouse. It is danger alone which can rouse him to action.

Thus the title of the play *Arms and the Man* is a suitable one. It is indicative of the dramatist's satiric intention of exposing the illusion regarding both the glory of war and the heroism of soldiers. He has shown the falsity of such romantic ideas. He has emphasized that man is a creature of instincts and impulses which are supreme – of greater importance than arms.

Wit and Humour in Arms and the Man

"Arms and the Man" is not merely a farce but a true comedy. The purpose of a comedy is to ridicule and expose human or social folly or weakness and to drive that folly out of courts. Though there is ample of farcical, loud laughter in the play, but the laughter has a serious purpose and this differentiates the play from a mere farce. Shaw laughs, but his laughter has a serious purpose. Besides provoking mirth he also provokes thoughts. Shaw is one of the greatest humorists in English literature the other humourist are Shakespeare and Dickens. However, Shaw's is different from both Shakespeare and Dickens as his humour arises from the difference between instinctive conduct, or social institutions and social codes of conduct. This is Shaw's contribution to the art of comedy.

"Arms and the Man" is rich in humour. There is enough of humour of character in the play. Major Petkoff, Catherine Petkoff, Sergius and Captain Bluntschli are all humorous as in their thoughts, words and actions they are below the normal level. Catherine Petkoff's pride in the electric bell, in two staircases and library is the rich sources of humour. The confusion of Catherine amuses us, as Bluntschli decides to stay with them as their guest while Catherine wants him to go away, at once, to avoid a disclosure of their sheltering Bluntschli. There is much fun and humour in the play, with Bluntschli's craving for chocolate creams and shying like a frightened horse and nervous like a mouse. He creates loud laughter when he judges Raina to be a "school-girl of seventeen", or when he lists the various items of his enormous wealth.

Nor is humour of situation lacking in the play. There is the very first scene in the bedroom of Raina. The humour arises from the conflict of the natural conduct of Bluntschli with the conventional conduct of Raina. He is an intruder, a fugitive and an enemy, whereas Raina is the daughter of one of the most influential man in Bulgaria. It is expected that he would be perturbed, while she would remain self-possessed. But the contrary happens. The instinctive Bluntschli, is self-possessed, while the lady, who has nothing but romance, is perturbed. Finally, the intruder converts the lady to her own point of view. Numerous other examples of the humour of situation may be easily cited from the play.

Shaw's humour often verges on the farcical. The coat-episode, the photograph-episode, and the chocolate-cream episode are all sources of farcical humour. Shaw's habit of deflating big names or giving people nicknames is another source of broad humour in his plays. Raina nicknames Bluntschli as, "chocolate-cream soldier", because he loves to eat chocolates. "The higher love of Raina and Sergius, the military heroism of Sergius, the servility of Nicola and his looking a fool and taking all the blame on himself are overdone and verge on the farcical".

He has great skill in of saying fine sparkling things. Sometimes, Shaw's wit is light and innocent, and at other times it has rapier-like thrust and is sharp and biting. When Petkoff returns from the front, Catherine proudly tells him that she has got fitted an electric bell in their home, because civilized people do not shout for their servants. At this Petkoff resorts, "Civilized people do not hang out their washing to dry where visitors can see it so you would better have all that part somewhere else." But it is Petkoff, who gets the worst of it for Catherine silences him with her clever repartee, "I do not think really civilized people notice such things". When Sergius asks Louka, "If you were in love with me, would you spy out of windows on me", Louka wittily replies, "Well you see, Sir, Since you are half a dozen gentleman all at once, I shall have a great deal to look after", And Sergius is obliged to praise her, "Witty as well as pretty".

Louka's wit is sharp and biting when she retorts to Sergius, "whatever clay I made of, you are made of the same". In *Arms and the Man*, Shaw's intentions are comic and through the use of bathos or anti-climax he attains his intention. Sergius and Raina become comic figures, as the hollowness of their romantic love, and their romantic attitudes and poses are exposed and the essential inner self is revealed. Both come down to the level of Louka and Bluntschli.

Shaw shows that war is not heroic, but something horrible and brutal; soldiers are not heroes but fools and cowards, who fight only because they are bound to fight. Sergius' heroic victory appears in a comic light, when it is discovered that he could win only because that Serbian gunmen had the wrong ammunition with them. "...he ought to be courtmartialled for it.... He and his regiment simply committed suicide – only the pistol missed fire."

Comment on the subtitle of the play “An Anti-Romantic Comedy in Three Acts”? Or Discuss Arms and the Man as a “drama of ideas”.

Set during the four-month-long Serbo-Bulgarian War that occurred between November 1885 and March 1886, Arms and the Man is called as an anti-romantic comedy. This play is a satire on the foolishness of glorifying something so terrible as war, as well as a satire on the foolishness of basing your affections on idealistic notions of love. These themes brought reality and a timeless lesson to the comic stage. In the very beginning of the play, a romantic picture is set. Raina, a romantic girl, stands on her balcony to enjoy the beauty of the Bulgarian night. When Raina is told by her mother Catherine that Raina's fiancee Sergius who has gone in the battle-field has made a heroic cavalry charge and has won a splendid victory against the Serbians, Raina becomes very excited and tells her mother that her romantic ideas about war have been proved true. Afterwards, when Sergius returns from the battlefield, Raina adoringly calls him her 'hero' and 'king'. Sergius also addresses Raina as his 'queen' and his 'inspiration'. So, both Raina and Sergius are living in a romantic world of "higher love".

However, Raina's romantic outlook of life changes with the appearance of Bluntschli. After winning the battle, Bulgarian cavalry are now in search of the Serbian fugitives. Bluntschli, a Serbian fugitive, enters into Raina's bedchamber in order to take shelter there. In the conversation with Raina, Bluntschli exposes the real fact about Sergius' cavalry charge. Bluntschli tells Raina that the charge ordered by Sergius could be suicidal for them if the Serbian army had right kind of ammunition in their machine-guns. So, Sergius should not be awarded for the charge, rather he should be court-martialed for the blunder. Bluntschli also exposes the real fact of soldiering to Raina. He says that the duty of a soldier is to live as long as he can. He says that nine out of ten soldiers are fools and that experienced soldiers carry chocolates in their pockets while young and inexperienced soldiers carry only weapons. This remark of Bluntschli comes as a shock to Raina's romantic notion of soldiering and war. Before meeting Bluntschli, Raina thought that to be a soldier was something great, but now after hearing the real facts from Bluntschli, she is totally surprised.

Sergius's romantic notion of war also changes when he faces the harsh reality of life. He has won a great victory for the Bulgarians, but he is not promoted to a higher rank. All these days he thought that a soldier's duty was to fight and attack enemies in all circumstances, but now he learns that soldiering is a trade like any other trade. It is not heroism but a coward's act of attacking enemies when the enemies are weak and keeping away from enemies when the enemies are strong. The dramatic shift occurs in the play when the two romantic idealists (Raina and Sergius) reject their original decision to marrying each other and become engaged to a practical realist—Sergius to the practical and attractive servant, Louka, and Raina to the professional realist, Captain Bluntschli.

Throughout the drama Shaw denounces idealism and insists on realism. He does it through humor of character and humor of situation at the same time. The anti-romantic elements of the play begins with his ironic use of the opening line of Virgil's great epic Aeneid, which reads as follows: "Armavirumque cano", meaning "Of arms and the man I sing" as the title of the play. He uses a work that romanticizes war in order to attack the romantic ideals of war and love. In Arms and the Man the dramatist's intention is to expose romantic ideals of love and war as being impractical and pointless which will eventually fail. He shows this failure with the use of anti-climax through which the play achieves its comic element. Sergius and Raina become comic figures as the insincerity of their romantic love and their romantic attitude is exposed. Raina and Sergius come down to the level of Louka and Bluntschli.

The dramatist has succeeded in his comic intention. He shows that war is not heroic but something horrible and brutal because soldiers are not heroes but fools and cowards who fight only because they are compelled to fight. Sergius's heroic victory appears in a comic light when it is discovered that he could win only because the Serbian gunmen had the wrong ammunition with them. Sergius makes love to Louka as soon as Raina's back is turned, soon after "the higher love scene". This way Shaw has shown the flaw of romantic ideals of love and war, his purpose in writing the play. The conflict between the romantic and the realistic is another means through which Shaw brings in the anti-romantic element in the play. For this purpose the dramatist contrasts the various characters as romantics and realists. The romantic ideal of war as a glorious opportunity for a man to display courage and honor is dispelled when Sergius admits that his heroic cavalry charge that won the battle was the wrong thing to do. His notable action does not get him his promotion and Sergius learns the realism. Much of Bluntschli is made of realism—i.e., keeping chocolates instead of ammunition in his cartridge belt, showing contempt for sentimentality, and reacting in a practical manner to his father's death. Raina, the idealist is placed opposite Louka the practical servant. However, Nicola is the consummate realist in the play. Nicola's message is: adapt, and survive. Bluntschli proves to have a romantic side, after all, and thus is the most balanced

character in the play in that he seems to know when to temper his romanticism with realism and when to stick to his ideals.

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