

# CHAPTER 6 ANALYSIS OF THE SELECTED ENGLISH PLAY

## GEORGE BERNARD SHAW'S *ARMS AND THE MAN*

### Playwright's Profile

George Bernard Shaw was born in Dublin on 26<sup>th</sup> July, 1856 to the family of George Carr Shaw. His father was a drunkard. This drunkenness and an unhappy mother made the son to rely on his own resources from an early age. Bernard Shaw received formal education first through his governess, Caroline Hill and later through his uncle-in-law, William George Caroll. He later attended Wesley College, Dublin. In 1869, he attended Central Model Boys' School, Dublin. He completed his formal education in 1871 at the Dublin English Scientific and Commercial Day School.

Shaw was a man of many parts. First, he worked for a firm of estate agents and after served as the Way – Leave Manager of a telephone company. In between these employments he did all sorts of literary works and wrote articles, and reviewed books. Many of his early novels failed to get published. Of the ones he wrote later, only a few were published.

Shaw established himself more as a man of the theatre. He wrote several plays. Among his collections of plays are *Plays Unpleasant*, *Plays Pleasant Volumes I and II*, *Three Plays for Puritans*, *John Bull's Other Island*, *The Doctor's Dilemma*, *Misalliance and Androcles and the Lion*. *Arms and the Man* is in the Collection *Plays Pleasant Volume II*.

Shaw was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature with a cash award of £8,000.00. He directed that the cash award be used to establish Anglo-Swedish Literary Foundation. He died on November 2, 1950. At his death, he left behind £367,000. Part of the sum was used to finance the enlargement of the English Alphabet. The remainder was willed to the British Museum and the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and the National Gallery of Ireland.

### Plot

There has just been a great battle at *Slivnitsa* between the Serbs and the Bulgarians. The latter win and the Serbs are running away from being killed. Bluntschli, a Swiss fighting on the side of the Serbs, survives in the war and runs for his life. He escapes into the room of a lady in Bulgaria. The lady is Raina, the daughter of Petkoff and affianced Major Saranoff, both of them majors in the war front.

Raina sympathises with the fugitive and hides him till the search for him is over. During the little time both share, she falls in love with him. With the help of her mother, she assists the man to escape, dressed in her father's old coat but leaves her photograph for him in one of the pockets of the coat. On the photograph she has written 'Raina, to her Chocolate Cream Soldier: a Souvenir'.

At the end of the war, the two sides sign a peace treaty. Bluntschli and Majors Petkoff and Saranoff meet and the two majors are impressed by the Swiss. Back home, the two majors speak of their meeting a Swiss in the Serbs

army and how he was assisted by two Bulgarian ladies to escape during the war. They state how the soldier stole away in an old coat belonging to the master of the house who was away at war.

The majors had not really finished their discussion on this escape when Bluntschli arrives at the gate and asks to see Madam Catherine Petkoff. The Swiss has come to return the coat and also to see Raina. Madam Petkoff fails in all her efforts to prevent him from being seen by the two majors. Eventually the two majors meet him and express how glad they are that he has called on them. They seek his assistance over a post-war problem and he helps out. Raina comes in then, sees him and becomes excited.

All along, Major Saranoff has been flirting with Louka, a maid in Petkoff's house. The maid wants to marry the major and so tells him of Raina's affair with Bluntschli. She announces that the soldier is back and that Raina will marry the man. Major Saranoff accuses Raina of infidelity and the lady tells him he has also been flirting with Louka. The accusations lead to a disagreement and break their relationship. Raina's love for Bluntschli becomes known and the relationship between Louka and Major Saranoff becomes open.

Raina and Bluntschli make up their mind to have a relationship. The parents of the lady object initially. To them, Bluntschli has an unromantic and humble origin. They discover soon enough Bluntschli's high social standing and quickly agree to the relationship. Raina turns the proposal down at this point and argues that the man's wealth means nothing to her. Then, Bluntschli proposes to her as 'the Chocolate Cream Soldier' and she agrees to the proposal. Major Saranoff and Louka also agree to marry too.

### **Subject Matter**

*Arms and the Man* is about war and marriage. The play describes a war between two European nations and holds that war heroism is false. The war is between Bulgaria and Serbia. In the war, the Russians are fighting on the side of the Serbs and France on the side of the Serbs. Some mercenaries are taking part in the war too. A Swiss fights in the war on the side of the Serbs. The play shows that winning a war is a game of chance. It depicts that in a war one side may win not because it is the stronger of the two. It shows that the other may lose not because it is less strong. The Bulgarians win the battle the wrong way while the Serbs lose it the right way.

The play also deals with the question of marriage. It focuses on the love affairs between some ladies and certain soldiers who participated in the war. The play discusses the affair between Saranoff and Raina on the one hand and the one between Louka and Saranoff on the other. The play also examines the love affair between Bluntschli and Raina. Two marriages are expected at the end of the play.

### **Themes**

*Arms and the Man* is a satire on war. The play mocks the popular belief about war heroism and glory. It points out that many things are not fair about war. First, it reveals that the people who win a war are not better than the people who are defeated in a war. Secondly, the play suggests that some people lose war by ill-luck while others win it by chance. The Bulgarians win the war against the Serbs by chance; the Serbs lose the war by ill-luck. Both Paul Petkoff and Bluntschli confirm that the army that win the battle are not better than those that lose the war. Sergius Saranoff also confesses that he wins the battle the wrong way and that the Russian General loses it the right way.

The play also treats the theme of ambition for material convenience and the freedom to choose who to marry. The theme is treated clearly in the character of Louka. Louka is the maid servant to the Petkoffs but she is ambitious to rise above her social class. She works hard on the ambition. Louka works against every effort to keep her in the lower social class. When Nicola instructs her on the conduct with which she can remain the Petkoff's servants, she replies Nicola that she has a better ambition. She works on her relationship with Major Saranoff and is able to achieve what she wants.

Shaw describes Louka's freedom to marry Sergius as an ambition. The playwright gives the maid servant the freedom to be ambitious to marry above her social class. Louka pursues her ambition and freely chooses Sergius as her husband. The theme of freedom to choose who to marry is treated in relation to Raina too. Raina's parents are interested in their daughter marrying Sergius. The parents want the marriage for social reasons. They encourage Raina in many ways but it is clear that Raina is not convinced about the relationship. Eventually, Raina falls in love with the *Chocolate Cream Soldier* and chooses to marry him. Her parents give their consent to the choice.

## **Characterisation**

The characters who actively contribute to the events in the play are seven. These characters are Miss Raina Petkoff, Captain Bluntschil or the Man, Major Sergius Saranoff, Madame Catharine Petkoff, Louka, Major Paul Petkoff and Nicola. Some other characters come up in the discussion of the above major characters and contribute in some ways to the developments in the play. Among these minor characters are:

### **Miss Raina Petkoff**

Raina is the daughter of Major Paul Petkoff and Madam Catherine Petkoff. She is twenty-three years old. Raina is a beautiful and charming lady. Her father is conscious of this and she is too. These facts are presented when Sergius comes into the Petkoffs' house. Raina is educated and appears a scholar. She has a pile of books in her room and is preparing to read before the gunshots break the quiet of the night at the beginning of the play. She goes to Bucharest every year for the Opera season. She appears to know the world fairly.

Raina is a courageous, generous, hospitable and honorable lady. She displays these character traits in her first meeting with Mr. Bluntschli, the fugitive. She accepts and safeguards the Man. She provides him chocolate and bed. She hides the man and turns away an officer without allowing him to search her room for the fugitive. She assists Bluntschli to escape, dressed in her father's coat.

Raina is a very humane and sympathetic lady. While she is happy at the defeat of the Serb by the Bulgarians, she shows her dislike that Bulgarians are chasing the Serbs who are running for their dear lives after the battle. This feeling however shows that she is ignorant about one law of war: in war, foul is fair.

Raina is not a straight-forward character. She lies and admits it. She confesses to Bluntschli that as a child she lied to her nurse and she believed in it. She confesses also that she lies to her parents and Sergius and that they believe.

Raina is an intuitive character. By intuition she asks Sergius if he had been flirting with Louka. That question shatters the romance between Raina and Sergius. It also helps break the proposed engagement between them.

The situation assists Raina to evaluate her chance to marry Bluntschli. She is finally proposed to by Bluntschli, and she gladly accepts the marriage proposal.

### ***Captain Bluntschli – The Man***

Captain Bluntschli is a thirty-four year old man. He has spent about fifteen years of his life in barracks and battles. He is a Swiss and a mercenary who fought on the side of the Serbs against the Bulgarians. He becomes a fugitive when the Bulgarians win the war. He takes shelter under Raina's protection during the chase of the Serbs by the Bulgarians. That particular night, he is dirty with mud, blood and snow.

Bluntschli is a professional soldier. He shows his competence in different ways in the play. He sees the incompetence of Sergius and his men. He correctly assesses the charge by Sergius and his regiment as highly unprofessional. His assessment agrees with Petkoff's description of same charge. He settles the exchange of prisoners with Bulgarians to favour the Serbs and himself. Both Sergius and Petkoff agree that Bluntschli is every inch a soldier.

The Swiss soldier has a good knowledge of horse-dealing. This knowledge he seems to have gotten from his father. His father keeps horses. The soldier uses the knowledge to free Serbs soldiers captured by the Bulgarians. He exchanges two hundred worn-out horses for fifty able-bodied Serbs. The horses are neither useful nor eatable in the end.

Bluntschli is a practical but funny man. He carries chocolate rather than cartridges in battle. He knows chocolate is the more difficult to get of the two in battle. He tells Raina the truth in every circumstance. One is when he tells her that Serpius and Louka are expected to defend themselves against her (Raina).

The Swiss soldier is the most conical of all the characters. He makes humour out of several moments. He states *that he is wealthy* by listing things such as: bed sheets, blankets, quilts, spoons, and so on. The list makes up things in a hotel that his father has left him. He mentions as part of his wealth *that he speaks* these native languages.

Bluntschli is Bernard Shaw's mouthpiece. Through him, the playwright mocks war and war heroism. Shaw ridicules many characters through the Swiss. The soldier is held up as an experienced soldier who understands that all must work more for peace.

Bluntschli is a character who also is critical of himself. He recognizes that he has lost all his chances in life, because he made some wrong decisions. He admits he ran away from home twice when he was a boy. He regrets going into the army instead of into his father's business. At the end of the play, he has come to his senses. He admits he loves Raina and has come back not only to return the coat but to see her. He proposes to her and is to marry the lady but decides to go immediately home to attend first to the business his father has left him.

### ***Major Sergius Saranoff***

Major Sergius Saranoff is a Bulgarian army officer. He leads a regiment in the battle at Slivnitz and wins. In that battle he led a cavalry charge on his own responsibility. He disobeys Bulgarian's Russian commanders, scatters the Serbs and the Austrians and wins. Thus, he is the hero of that war.

Sergius is a tall ‘romantically handsome man’. He wants to marry Raina and works towards this. He gave her his portrait as a souvenir. Sergius is a flirt. He flirts with Louka whenever Raina turns her back at him. He can be self- critical. He speaks of many of his bad character traits. He admits he is a buffoon and humbug.

Sergius is not a professional soldier. He leads the charge against the Serbs wrongly. His regiment would have been killed. They escape death only because the Serbs have wrong bullets and so cannot fire the Bulgarians. Sergius admits the grave error. He laments that the mistake puts an end to his soldiering.

Sergius has low intelligence. He is more brawn than brain. Bernard Shaw says he has ‘the physical hardihood’ and ‘susceptible imagination of an untamed mountaineer chieftain’. Sergius’s intelligence is low compared with that of Bluntschli. Sergius knows this accepts it and orders on the three regiments. Sergius does the simplest assignment of signing the orders.

Sergius is a bore. Major Petkoff complains how he (Sergius) bores his life. He brags of his wealth and material comfort. He does this to Bluntschli but is humbled by the Swiss. He is least respected by other characters, even the ones below his class. Nicola suggests that he is a fool; Louka calls him a coward. Sergius breaks his engagement to Raina and gets engaged to Louka at the end of the play.

### ***Major Paul Petkoff***

Major Paul Petkoff is the husband of Madame Catherine Petkoff and the father of Raina Petkoff. He is an officer in the Bulgarian army. He participates in the battle at Salvnitza. He is a man of importance in local society and the war has given him the military rank of ‘a major’. His patriotism, and not his professionalism, helps him survive the war.

Major Petkoff is a well-to-do man and is well known in that country. He is about fifty years of age. He is interested in education. He provides his house with a library. He is a homely person. He is excited to be home after the war. He tells his wife he misses her greatly. He appears contented about country values and views civilized ones with suspicions. He learns and embraces some *city values eventually*. One, according to him, is that ‘civilized people do not hang out their washing to dry where visitors can see it’.

Major Petkoff is a good judge of people. He acknowledges the professionalism of Captain Bluntschli. He also tells Nicola that he (Major) knows Raina is capable of saying things that are not true. He has low opinion about the professional competence of Major Sergius.

### ***Madame Catherine Petkoff***

Madame Catherine Petkoff is the wife of Major Paul Petkoff and the mother of Raina. She is over forty years of age and looks a very good specimen of the wife of a mountain farmer. The woman is conscious of her social status and is materialistic. She speaks of her family and that of Saranoff as the richest and most important in the country.

Catherine Petkoff is not a firm and disciplined mother. She always plays along with her daughter. For instance, Catherine supports Raina’s care of the fugitive and allows the fugitive to go away in Major Petkoff’s coat. When she suspects Raina’s affection for the fugitive she does not scold her daughter. When Catherine knows

Bluntschli's social status, she supports Raina's affair with the fugitive and agrees to their engagement. This proves the woman's love for material things and social status.

Madame Catherine Petkoff is firm in managing her servants. Louka is quick to obey the woman's order that the shutters in Raina's room be fastened. Nicola confirms further Catherine's firmness in the management of her domestic servants. He warns Louka to mend her manners that the mistress is so grand that she never dreams any servant could dare disrespect her. The man also adds that if Catherine suspects that Louka is defying her that Louka will be sacked.

Madame Catherine is fond of her husband. She calls him 'My dear Paul' or simply 'Paul'. She is eager to tell her husband everything she has learnt while he was away at the battle front. She thinks she is more civilized than her husband. Her ambition is for material convenience for her daughter.

### ***Louka***

Louka is the maid servant of Major Paul Petkoff's family. She is a handsome peasant. She is introduced by the playwright as 'a handsome proud girl'. Sergius also describes her as 'witty as well as pretty'.

She is an assertive girl. She knows what she wants from Sergius and she works for it. She requests Sergius to make her hurt well by kissing her hand. She aims at and goes on with it till she gets it done.

Louka is an ambitious girl. She desires to marry above her station and she works tirelessly towards this. Nicola fails to stop her. She gets Sergius to propose to her, and by so doing she lifts herself from the peasantry into the nobility.

Louka is confident in herself in all circumstances. This confidence helps her in her relationship with Sergius as well as with Raina. The confidence helps her to relate well with Raina and see through her character and lies. Louka has native intelligence. She knows many secrets of the Petkoff family and such them to her advantage. She exploits the affair between Raina and Bluntschli to turn Serguis' attention to herself (*Louka*).

### ***Nicola***

Nicola is one of the servants of the Petkoffs. He is a middle-aged man. He has been working for the Petkoffs for ten years and he is dutiful and loyal to the family. Nicola has a cool temperament and wants to make the most of his position as a servant in the Petkoff's house. He maintains his position as a servant in his relationship with every member of the Petkoffs. It is his dream to set up a shop in Sofia one day and make the members of Petkoff's family his customers.

Nicola understands the domestic life of the Petkoffs and believes in the goodness of the family. He speaks of the goodwill of the family. Though he knows so many secrets of the family he keeps them to himself. According to him, 'that is the secret of success in service.' To be a good servant, he acts a fool.

Nicola appears concerned more about money and material things than all else. He wants Louka to be one of his grandest customers later and not his wife. According to him, if Louka marries him she will cost him money. He is after the tips that he gets from people who come into the house. He agrees with Louka and both lie to the Petkoffs

that they are engaged. They got twenty-five *levas* from Major Petkoff for their betrothal. He appears to be saving the moneys to set up a shop after leaving the service of the Petkoffs.

Nicola is Louka's confidant. He acts sometimes as her counselor. He appears to know about the relationship between Louka and Sergius. He suggests that he hopes Raina is out of the way and that Louka and Sergius will marry and become his customers later on.

Nicola is a loyal and sincere servant. He serves Bluntschli and the Swiss obviously discovers these virtues in the man. Nicola's goodness earns him the offer to be a manager in one of Bluntschli's many hotels.

Nicola occasionally gets tired of being a servant. He is ready to pay Louka ten *levas* if she will remind him that he is a human being. He requests that Louka should remember him if any luck comes to her.

### **Setting**

*Arms and the Man* is set in a small town in Bulgaria. The actions in the play largely take place in the small town near the Dragoman Pass during a war between Bulgaria and Serbia. The actions occur after the battle at Slivnitz. The events cover a period of about four months. They happen between late November 1885 and 6th March, 1886. The war between the two countries is in late November 1885. Bulgaria and Serbia signed a treaty ending the war on the fourth of March. The decree to demobilize Bulgarian army is issued the following day. Major Petkoff arrives home on the 6th March, 1886.

The small town is largely rural. It is far from modern civilization. The town has only one house with two rows of windows and a flight of stairs. Major Petkoff suggests the rural nature of the small town in his words: 'I don't believe in going too far with these modern customs.' The town has no theatre or artiste. Its people go to Bucharest for the opera season. The town has no library except the one in Major Petkoff's house.

Few other places are mentioned in connection with the actions in the play. These places are Pirot, Philippopolis, Sofia and Lom Planka. Sophia is the commercial city close to the home of the Petkoffs. Catherine can order jewellery from there. Nicola hopes to start a shop there. The exchange of prisoners with the Bulgarians is done at Pirot. Three cavalry regiments are to be sent by the Bulgarians to Philippolis. They are to be sent by way of Lom Palanka.

The house of the Petkoffs is on a mountain. It appears to be a part of the Balkan mountains. Also from the garden in the house, one can see anyone who approaches from the gate. This explains why Petkoff and Sergius are able to see Bluntschli come into the yard. The remaining part of the little town lies in a valley.

### **Language and Style**

Shaw employs dramatic devices other than the ones looked at above. Important in the play are elements of dramatic irony, euphemism, paradox, allusion, and surprise and suspense. These elements contribute to the meaning of the play in different ways. However, they work one way or another to state that the play is a comedy.

Elements of surprise and suspense are central to *Arms and the Man*. Two instances are associated with the entry of Bluntschli into the actions in the play. The entry of the Man into Raina's room fills the audience with suspense. They wonder what will happen; they wait to see somebody hurt, killed or exposed. The suspense heightens when

an officer appears and conducts a search for a fugitive. The audience relax immediately Raina succeeds in deceiving the officer and the Man is not found.

The return of Captain Bluntschli to Major Petkoff 's house is also filled with surprise and suspense. The audience are breathless and afraid for some of the characters. They are breathless that certain secrets will be revealed and some harm many come to Bluntschli, for instance. The anxiety of the audience is cleared immediately Bluntschli's visit is read by Petkoffs as a friendly call.

In an instance, Shaw alludes to a literary work in *Arms and the Man*. On the occasion, allusion is made to Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. In his description of the cavalry charge to Raina, Bluntschli compares Sergius to Don Quixote. Don Quixote is the hero of Cervantes'novel. The novel is a satire on chilvary, and its hero is presented as a fool. This allusion describes Shaw's concern with satire in this play. It also develops the idea that Sergius is a fool.

*Arms and the Man* has many dramatic ironic moments and events. The events in the Raina's room after the search is full of ironies and humour. Take two instances when Raina sits on the Man's pistol and jumps up a shriek. First, it is ironic that the Man, a soldier gets frightened by her shriek. Secondly, it is ironic to learn from the Man that he carries chocolate and not cartridges in battle.

The story that is told of the Swiss being hid by two Bulgarian women is also ironic. When it is told to Majors Petkoff and Saranoff, it is ironic. The irony there is that the Bulgarian women in the story are their wife and fiancé respectively. It is also ironic when Sergius, on the instruction of Major Petkoff , relates the story to Raina and Catherine. It is ironic that the Majors do not know that the women in the story are Raina and Catherine. The women know but Petkoff and Sergius do not. The irony thickens when Catherine says Raina and herself should be spared the knowledge of women like that.

Shaw employs paradox and euphemism in *Arms and the Man*. It is a paradox that the battle at Slivnitza is the cradle and grave of Sergius's career. The battle makes Sergius a hero. So, it is the birth of his military career. But Sergius wins the battle the wrong and that is the end of his career. Sergius accuses Bluntschli of making love to Raina behind his back. He puts the accusation mildly in the instances. There is thus euphemism in Sergius's words to Bluntschli: 'You have enjoyed the privilege of being received in her own room, late at night.'

*Arms and the Man* is a comedy. The play pokes fun at war. Its concern with war is suggested in the synecdoche, *Arms*. The mockery of war is done mainly from the point of view of The Man. This point is made in the second part of the title of the play. The play mocks the popular belief about war and heroism. Also, it treats the themes of ambition for material convenience and the freedom to choose who to marry. Most dramatic elements in the play are deployed to develop its comic spirit.

### **Revision Questions**

1. Discuss Bernard Shaw's use of surprise and suspense in *Arms and the Man*.
2. Examine two humorous episodes in *Arms and the Man*.
3. How has Bernard Shaw presented the use of portrait in *Arms and the Man*?
4. Compare Bluntschli's first presence in Petkoff's house and his second presence there.
5. Discuss Bernard Shaw's treatment of war heroism.

## **Objective Questions**

1. The Bulgarians and the Serbs exchange their prisoners of war at -----  
(A) Pirot (B) Vienna (C) Bucharest (D) Balkan (E) Switzerland
  
2. The number of able-bodied Serbs captured as prisoners of war by Bulgaria is \_\_\_\_\_.  
(A) fifty (B) sixty (C) eighty (D) ninety (E) one hundred
  
3. The battle that brought the Serbs to their knees was fought at -----  
(A) Slivnista. (B) Philipopolis. (C) Bucharest (D) Sofia. (E) Russia.
  
4. The business that brought Sergius to Petkoff's house immediately after the war is to
  - (a) finalize wedding plans with Raina.
  - (b) discuss his promotion with Petkoff.
  - (c) decide with Petkoff how some three regiments are to get back to Philipopolis.
  - (d) plan how to sign the peace treaty with the Serbs.
  - (e) discuss the new treaty.
  
5. The name of the Serbian currency is -----.  
(A) Levas (B) Dollars (C) Francs (D) Pounds (E) Yen
  
6. The soldier who told Petkoff and Sergius at Pirot how the fugitive escaped is.....  
(A) Stolz (B) Sofia (C) Switzer (D) Slivnista (E) Venice
  
7. Raina is \_\_\_\_\_ years of age the time the story in *Arms and the Man* takes place  
(A) seventeen (B) twenty-three (C) thirty-one (D) twenty-five (E) twenty-seven
  
8. Before taking refuge in Raina's room, Bluntschli has not slept for \_\_\_\_\_ hours.  
(A) 24 (B) 12 (C) 36 (D) 48 (E) 72
  
9. The inscription on Raina's photograph given to the Swiss is
  - (A) 'Raina, to her Chocolate Cream Soldier: a Souvenir.'
  - (B) 'Raina, to Bluntschli, Chocolate Cream Soldier.'
  - (C) ' Raina, a Souvenir to her Chocolate Cream Soldier.'
  - (D) 'Raina, to Bluntschli, my love.'
  - (E) 'Raina, to her love Bluntschli.'
  
10. The officer who enters Raina's room to search for the fugitive is a .....  
(A) Bulgarian (B) Serbian (C) Swiss (D) Austrian (E) Russian
  
11. One commercial town in Bulgarian mentioned in *Arms and the Man* is \_\_\_\_\_.  
(A) Stolz (B) Sofia (C) Lom Palanka (D) Pirot (E) Ploka

## **Answers to the Objective Questions**

- (1) A (2) A (3) A (4) C (5) A (6) A (7) B (8) D (9) A (10) C (11) B