

## Arms and the Man Study Guide

Set in the aftermath of the Serbo-Bulgarian War of 1885, *Arms and the Man* challenges romantic ideas about war and love. Captain Bluntschli, a fleeing soldier, climbs through a Bulgarian lady's bedroom window, triggering a series of events that push the characters towards realism and pragmatism. The lady Raina and her fiancé Sergius naively view war and life as little more than a stage on which to make grand romantic gestures. By the end of the play, Raina is engaged to the infinitely practical Bluntschli and Sergius to Raina's servant, the beautiful and grounded Louka. George Bernard Shaw wrote the play primarily as a vehicle to promote realism and disabuse audiences of their romantic notions of heroism, warfare and marriage.

George Bernard Shaw's first popular play, *Arms and the Man* opened on April of 1894 to an enthusiastic reception. Yet Shaw brooded about audience and critical interpretation of the play, which he felt was at odds with his authorial intentions. Having penned a political play designed to disturb and enlighten, Shaw was appalled when audiences misunderstood and embraced his work as a light-hearted comedy. He considered the play a "ghastly failure" (Satran 11) and spent months exchanging furious op-eds with theater critics in the London papers on the proper interpretation of *Arms and the Man*. When confronted by a single booing man and otherwise strong applause at one of the play's showings, he famously responded, "I assure the gentleman in the gallery that he and I are of exactly the same opinion, but what can we do against a whole house who are of the contrary opinion?" (Satran 12). Despite Shaw's hostility toward the play's reception, *Arms and the Man* helped launch his career as a playwright and ran for a remarkable fifty-some performances.

## Arms and the Man Characters

### Raina

Raina, a young woman from an upper class Bulgarian family, begins the play clinging to romantic delusions about both war and love, worshiping her fiancé Sergius' brave feats in war and cherishing the pure love they share. She self-consciously attempts to live up to these romantic ideals; Catherine reveals that she always listens outside doors, waiting for the most dramatic moment to enter. Yet Raina has doubts about the realism of the notions that she and Sergius share. She also shows significant compassion, cringing at the cruelty of hunting down fleeing troops and ultimately saving Bluntschli's life. By the end of the work, Raina has, with Bluntschli's prompting, abandoned her romantic posturing and embraced a more pragmatic viewpoint. The play ends with her engagement to the practical Bluntschli.

### Bluntschli

Bluntschli, a Swiss mercenary who clambers through Raina's bedroom window as he flees Bulgarian troops, best represents the qualities promoted by the play: realism and pragmatism. Bluntschli is unconcerned with romantic ideas about heroism or conduct in war; he is concerned with professional conduct, efficiency and survival. Yet Bluntschli has a romantic heart and returns to see Raina, whom he has become taken with. During his visit he learns of his father's death, resulting in his inheritance of a large sum of money. Eventually Bluntschli overcomes Raina's posturing and asks for her hand in marriage, using his newly inherited wealth to win Major Petkoff's approval.

### Sergius

Sergius is Raina's somewhat foolish fiancé. Believing in the romantic ideals championed by poetry and opera, Sergius leads a doomed cavalry charge, and is saved only by dumb luck. His ignorance of the science of warfare makes him an inept officer; he struggles to coordinate troop movements and must appeal to Bluntschli for help. Despite grandly proclaiming his love for Raina, he finds their relationship exhausting. He flirts heavily with Raina's more practical maid Louka, whom he feels at ease with. In the end Sergius demonstrates courage and embraces his true feelings and asks Louka for her hand in marriage.

## Louka

Louka, the Petkoffs' beautiful and somewhat insolent maid, has trouble accepting her place in the household. Engaged to Nicola, an older servant who often lectures her on her inappropriate conduct, Louka resents her socio-economic position. Though initially shocked by his flirtatious behavior, Louka engages with Sergius, both teasing and confronting him about the gap between his ideals and conduct. She declares her love for Sergius, unembarrassed by their difference in social standing. At the end of the play Sergius proposes to her and they are engaged.

## Catherine

Raina's mother Catherine shares many of her daughter's illusions about love and warfare, as well as her class pretensions. Catherine feels the need to wear Viennese clothing and imitate Western customs, installing an electric bell in the library when she learns Western Europeans do not shout for their servants. Despite her illusions, she proves competent and business-like, securing the house during the aftermath of the battle and even helping Major Petkoff instill discipline in his troops. She proves a more pragmatic counterbalance to the bumbling Major.

## Major Petkoff

Raina's father Major Petkoff cuts a ridiculous figure. Like Sergius, Major Petkoff is unable to coordinate basic troop movements and relies on Bluntschli to do his work for him. He is the butt of several of the play's more farcical jokes, serving as comic relief. He represents the opposite of competency; in one scene he asks his wife to accompany him to inspect his troops, as she will prove more intimidating than he.

## Nicola

Nicola serves the Petkoff family and is engaged to Louka at the outset of the play. A very practical man, Nicola understands and embraces his social position. He dreams of opening a store and approaches his goal in a pragmatic way. He worries that Louka does not understand how to be a good servant, repeatedly lecturing her. When Louka and Sergius' relationship comes to light he gracefully withdraws his engagement to Louka, claiming she would be better as a new store customer than as a wife. Toward the end of the play Bluntschli announces his intention to hire Nicola to help run one of his inherited hotels.

## Arms and the Man Themes

### Ignorance vs. Knowledge

*Arms and the Man* is concerned foremost with the clash between knowledge and ignorance, or, otherwise stated, between realism and romanticism. Raina and her fiancé Sergius are steeped in the romanticism of operettas and paperback novels. Bluntschli uses his superior knowledge to disabuse Raina of her military delusions, while the experience of war itself strips Sergius of the grand ideals he held. The couple's idealized vision of warfare deflates in the face of additional information.

In the realm of love, the couple's pretensions are defeated by the thoroughgoing pragmatism of their respective new matches: Bluntschli and Louka. Both the Swiss Captain and Bulgarian maid confront their lovers about the gap between their words and their true selves, exposing their hypocrisy. When faced with reality, both Raina and Sergius are able to abandon their romantic delusions and embrace their honest desires.

### The Realities of War

When Catherine and Raina imagine war they picture brave and dashing officers fighting honorable battles. The reality of war falls far from this romanticized vision. In the play's opening scene Bulgarian soldiers hunt and kill fleeing Serbians in the streets of a quiet mountain town. Once Captain Bluntschli, a career soldier, appears, he becomes an eloquent messenger for the horrors of war. He describes conditions of starvation and exhaustion at the front lines. Moreover, having been under fire for three days, he seems to be suffering from some form of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, jumping nervously when Raina squeals. What first appears to be the most glorious moment in the war, Sergius' cavalry charge, is revealed to be an absurd case of dumb luck. Later in the play Captain Bluntschli helps Major Petkoff and Sergius coordinate the return routes of surviving troops so as to prevent starvation. Since the play begins in the aftermath of the Serbo-Bulgarian War, the reader doesn't experience any titillating battles, only a grinding post-war reality where hunger and death loom in the background. This picture successfully deflates any romantic notions the characters or audience may hold.

### The Realities of Love

Raina and Sergius are as delusional about love as they are about war, seeming to have derived their understanding of romance primarily from Byronic poetry. They celebrate each other with formal and pretentious declarations of "higher love", yet clearly feel uncomfortable in one another's presence (25). The couple, with their good looks, noble blood and idealistic outlook, seem to be a perfect match, but in

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George Bernard Shaw's world love does not function as it does in fairy tales. Instead Raina falls for the practical and competent Swiss mercenary that crawls through her bedroom window and Sergius for the pragmatic and clever household maid. Love does not adhere to conventions regarding class or nationality. Moreover, love is not some abstract expression of poetic purity. Love in *Arms and the Man* is ultimately directed at those who understand the characters best and who ground them in reality.

## Incompetent Authority

Throughout the play competence and power do not align with established authority. Louka, the insolent but charming maid, repeatedly flouts social rules. By violating traditional ideas of authority and power, she is able to win marriage to a handsome and wealthy war hero. Her manipulation of Sergius, who is privileged both in terms of wealth and gender, demonstrates that control does not necessarily derive from social authority. Likewise, Catherine manipulates her husband Major Petkoff, withholding information and shepherding him about. Major Petkoff, as the oldest wealthy male, should be the most powerful character according to contemporary social hierarchy. Yet Petkoff proves to be a buffoon; he is, in fact, the character least able to control outcomes, as he rarely understands what is unfolding before him.

## Class

Class has a large and continuous presence in *Arms and the Man*. The Petkoffs' upper-class pretensions are portrayed as ridiculous and consistently played for laughs. The family's pride in their so-called library (a sitting room with a single bookshelf) becomes a running joke throughout the play. Shaw praises the family's more local and humble roots: admiring the oriental decorations in Raina's bedroom and describing Catherine's earthy local beauty. In contrast he condemns and mocks their attempts to conform to romantic notions of what nobility means. Raina's outdated Viennese fashions and Catherine's tea gowns are treated as ridiculous.

Louka's struggle demonstrates many of the effects of class in Bulgarian society. She feels restricted by her station, which condemns her to a life where reading books is considered presumptuous. Using her wit, Louka manages to escape these boundaries, achieving equality with the wealthy Sergius.

## Bravery

At the beginning of the play Sergius, like both Catherine and Raina, imagines bravery as the will to undertake glorious and theatrical actions. This belief leads the young Bulgarian Major to lead a regiment of cavalry against a line of machine guns. Despite his dumb luck, the action identifies him as an incompetent and somewhat ludicrous figure, halting his advancement in the ranks. When he returns at the end of the war Louka challenges his romantic notions of bravery. Sergius admits that "carnage is cheap": anyone can have the will to inflict violence (45). Louka submits that the subtle bravery required to live

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outside social rules and constraints is more worthy of praise. At the play's end Sergius demonstrates this particular kind of bravery when he embraces Louka in front of the others and agrees to marry her.

Like Sergius, Captain Bluntschli also undermines traditional understandings of bravery. He tells Raina that there are two types of soldiers - young and old - not brave and cowardly. The young are too inexperienced to know true fear, and the old have reached their age by championing survivalism over heroics. The Swiss mercenary is willing to face danger when necessary but he does not act in ways that court death and is always relieved to avoid combat.

## **Personal Honesty**

It is through personal honesty that all the play's major conflicts are resolved. Raina abandons her indignant posturing and admits that Sergius exasperates her, allowing her to pair up with Bluntschli. Likewise, Sergius overcomes his overly romantic understanding of the meaning of love and bravery, opening himself to an engagement with Louka. It is only when the couple confronts and accepts their true desires and feelings that they find happiness with their ideal partners. Pretending to share noble love makes both Raina and Sergius miserable; Raina fantasizes about shocking her fiancé's propriety and Sergius cannot wait for Raina's departure so he can complain about their tiring relationship to a pretty young maid. In the end, even Bluntschli embraces his inner romantic self, asking for the hand of the girl he is smitten with. Each character gives in to his honest desires and is rewarded with an optimal outcome.

## Arms and the Man Quotes and Analysis

*It proves that all our ideas were real after all.*

*Raina, Act I pg. 2*

Hearing about Sergius' heroic cavalry charge, Raina expresses relief because the event confirms the couple's romantic ideas of war and love. The theatrical gesture apparently leads to a glorious victory, seemingly reinforcing traditional notions of bravery and heroism. Raina, despite her almost constant posturing, has serious doubts about the realism of the ideals she shares with her fiancé. These doubts reveal that Raina's romantic delusions are a veneer and that she is capable of rational and unprejudiced thinking. This explains her seemingly rapid change of heart and eventual love for Bluntschli. The characteristics she demonstrates at the end of the play were always within her, only hidden.

*I've no ammunition. What use are cartridges in battle? I always carry chocolate instead.*

*Captain Bluntschli, Act I pg. 11*

Captain Bluntschli upends many of Raina's and the audience's assumptions about war. Instead of focusing on the ability to harm enemy soldiers, the Swiss mercenary focuses on the ability to survive, knowing that starvation is a very real and painful possibility in extended battles. The audience is later informed that, due to a logistical error, the cartridges Bluntschli was issued were of the wrong size. In this light, Bluntschli's choice to carry chocolate rations is even more logical. The Captain's decision reveals that he is unconcerned with traditional notions of bravery or machismo, embracing efficiency and pragmatism instead of romantic ideals. Raina misunderstands the meaning of Bluntschli's choice, assuming the chocolate is a luxurious sweet and not the gritty, brittle field rations it actually is.

*You never saw a cavalry charge, did you?*

*Captain Bluntschli, Act I pg. 13*

When Raina enthusiastically asks Bluntschli to describe Sergius' heroic cavalry charge, he reacts by questioning her knowledge of war. Someone who understood the brutal realities of battle would not applaud such theatrical and useless gestures. The Captain's superior knowledge clashes with Raina's obvious ignorance. Bluntschli quickly disabuses her of her delusions, explaining that Sergius' charge was a poor decision that succeeded solely out of dumb luck. Many of the delusions held by the characters in *Arms and the Man* are the result of a lack of information. Once confronted with knowledge and realism, the fragile romanticisms yield to more robust pragmatism. Raina, having never been allowed to

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participate in war, clings to impractical notions, but once given new information, begins to question her beliefs.

*You have the soul of a servant, Nicola.*

*Louka, Act II pg. 23*

Louka spits the following insult at her fiancé Nicola during an argument about adhering to class expectations. Though Louka means to wound with her comment, Nicola is not wounded by it. He pragmatically understands and accepts his position in society. The older servant's thorough pragmatism proves his strongest trait and eventually wins him a job managing one of Bluntschli's hotels. The comment reveals Louka's discomfort with her station. She chafes against the restraints put on her life and is indignant when treated as an inferior. The strength of the effects of class on local society can be seen in Louka's experience: she is prevented from expressing herself, reading, and calling her employers by their first names. Ultimately, Sergius makes her his equal by agreeing to marry her.

*Soldering, my dear madam, is the coward's art of attacking mercilessly when you are strong, and keeping out of harm's way when you are weak.*

*Sergius, Act II pg. 29*

Sergius hands down the above indictment on warfare when he returns from the field. The realities of war have shattered his romantic ideals and left him bitter. The traditional notions of honor and bravery that he carried with him to the battlefield resulted in actions that would have caused widespread and needless death if not for a small coincidence. Consequently, his advancement through the ranks is halted and he resigns from his post. Sergius deeply resents the more pragmatic and efficient methods championed by modern armies, attacking them as cowardly or morally weak. Yet the young Major's cynicism indicates that Sergius, like Raina, will eventually be able to drop the façade of romanticism and lead a more practical and happy life.

*Louka: do you know what higher love is?... Very fatiguing thing to keep up for any length of time, Louka. One feels the need of some relief after it.*

*Sergius, Act II pg. 32*

Sergius explains to Louka that he finds his romantic pretensions with Raina exhausting. Sergius' romanticism is making him miserable. The pure and unattainable ideals he aspires to only ensure that he fails. These defeats accumulate, creating a gap between his ideas of what a romantic relationship should be and his actual actions and desires. His relationship with Raina is more akin to a performance than an actual romance. Sergius seeks to escape the pressures of his engagement with the more grounded Louka. Likewise, Raina is fatigued by having to put on a constant romantic performance and is drawn to the



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Swiss captain. The couple only finds happiness and comfort once they abandon their pretentious notions of higher love and embrace more pragmatic relationships with practical people: Louka and Bluntschli.

*It is not much of a library.*

*Stage direction, Act III pg. 45*

The Petkoffs' class pretensions become a running joke throughout *Arms and the Man*. Each family member proudly speaks of their library, supposedly the only one housed in a private home in all of Bulgaria. The beginning of the third act reveals that the so-called library is merely a sitting room with a single bookshelf. The Petkoffs' desire to embrace romanticized notions of wealth and nobility drives their pretentious behavior and consistently makes them ridiculous. By contrast, Captain Bluntschli's wealth, articulated in amounts of silverware and blankets, is eminently practical. It is not wealth that George Bernard Shaw skewers, but the romanticism and sense of superiority that can accompany it.

*When you get into that noble attitude and speak in that thrilling voice, I admire you; but I find it impossible to believe a single word you say.*

*Captain Bluntschli, Act III pg. 51*

With this comment Bluntschli finally succeeds in deflating Raina's pretensions. Her posturing and manufactured indignation are only a façade; by refusing to fall victim to her deceptions, Bluntschli is able to see Raina as she really is. Raina retorts that Bluntschli is the first man who does not take her seriously, but the captain counters her, saying he is the first man who *does* take her seriously. Bluntschli is somewhat charmed by her performance but realizes that it is only that: a performance, and he is attracted to what she keeps hidden. This moment represents the climax of a trend that has been building since the Swiss captain and Bulgarian lady met: Bluntschli confronts Raina's romantic delusions and deflates them. These confrontations generate intimacy and mutual attraction. After Bluntschli's accusation of posturing Raina admits her predilection for being theatrical and engages in perhaps the most honest and self-reflective conversation of her young life.

*If I loved you, though you would be as far beneath me as I am beneath you, I would dare to be the equal of my inferior. Would you dare as much if you loved me?*

*Louka, Act III pg. 58*

Sergius' initial ideas on the meaning of bravery are simplistic: he imagines dashing soldiers clashing in great and honorable battles. Yet in talking with Louka he admits that the ability to inflict violence on others does not require great bravery. Louka's challenge requires a distinct kind of bravery, one that enables someone to disregard social rules and follow their personal desires. Sergius embraces this more nuanced understanding of bravery by proposing to Louka at the play's end. By acting courageously in

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this way, the young Major demonstrates the degree to which he has changed. Instead of embracing old romantic ideals, he has adopted more grounded ideas and finds happiness as a result.

*I'm a professional soldier! I fight when I have to and am very glad to get out of it when I haven't to. You're only an amateur: you think fighting's an amusement.*

*Captain Bluntschli, Act III pg. 63*

After being challenged to a duel, Captain Bluntschli brusquely explains the difference between his own professional attitude and Sergius' romantic attitude towards fighting. In proposing a duel Sergius believes he can win or demonstrate honor. Bluntschli approaches the duel from a practical standpoint, calculating how best to keep both participants unharmed. Fighting holds no romance for the captain; it is a business and a brutal one at that. Though Sergius interprets his reluctance as a sign of moral weakness, Bluntschli is not cowardly, unwilling or unable to fight. He only knows the destruction fighting can cause all too well. On the other hand, Sergius has faced far fewer battles and fights and is still largely ignorant of the meaning and consequences of violence.

## Arms and the Man Act I Summary and Analysis

### Summary

The play begins November of 1885 in a lady's bedchamber in small-town Bulgaria at the end of the Serbo-Bulgarian War. The room is a confusing mixture of Bulgarian and Viennese decorations and furniture; the native pieces are rich and beautiful, but the occidental pieces are cheap and paltry. Between the door and the bed sits a chest of drawers covered with a pile of paperback novels, a box of chocolate creams and a photo of a handsome officer. A beautiful young lady, Raina Petkoff stands on the balcony admiring the "romantic beauty of the night" and knowing that "her own youth and beauty are part of it" (2).

Raina's mother Catherine Petkoff enters looking for her daughter. Though beautiful in an earthy way, Catherine's class pretensions - always wearing a fashionable tea gown - make her a somewhat ridiculous figure. She informs Raina that her fiancé Sergius headed a daring cavalry charge, winning a major battle. Raina and her mother become ecstatic, rapturously contemplating the Bulgarian maneuver. Yet Raina admits that as Sergius was leaving for war she had doubts as to whether all their ideas about heroism and love would be borne out in reality. She explains that she suspected their ideas were only the product of plays and operas, but she happily asserts that hearing news of Sergius' exploits confirms that their ideas were real and correct.

Louka, the Petkoffs' beautiful and insolent female servant, enters the room and explains that the windows should be closed and locked, as retreating Serbians are being hunted down in the streets. Raina is appalled by the violence and cruelty of war but Catherine is only concerned with securing the house, demanding that Raina lock her windows. After Catherine departs, Louka suggests leaving the window unlocked and is immediately scolded by Raina who is insistent that one must do as one is told. Before climbing in bed to read a romance novel, Raina holds Sergius' portrait above her, as if in prayer, murmuring "My hero! My hero" (5).

Outside a distant shot and then two nearer ones ring out. Raina turns off all her lights and jumps in bed. The window is forced from outside and a shadowy man clambers into the room. Raina cries out in the darkness and is answered by a threatening and commanding voice that warns her that screaming will be answered with shots. At the voice's command, Raina lights a candle and sees a blood- and mud-splattered, haggard-looking Serbian soldier.

The man explains that if he is found he will be killed and he does not yet intend to die. He notices that Raina is dressed in a skimpy nightgown and cunningly snatches her cloak, explaining that if she is to allow Bulgarian soldiers into her room she must do so in her undressed state. Raina is disgusted both that

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the Serbian soldier is unwilling to die nobly and that he would resort to using such an ungentlemanly tactic to save his life.

Louka begins knocking furiously on Raina's door, explaining that the Bulgarian army is demanding to search her room. The intruder realizes his defeat and hands Raina her cloak. Overwhelmed with compassion, Raina pulls him into a hiding place behind her curtains before opening the door. A polite Russian officer in the Bulgarian army enters asking to search the room. Raina throws open the shutters, revealing an empty balcony while standing in front of the soldier's hiding place, blocking it from sight. A bullet shatters one of her windows from outside but she holds her position. The Russian officer, satisfied that the room is empty, yells at the men in the street to cease fire and bids the family farewell. As she is leaving, Louka glances at a gun lying on the ottoman and then towards the hiding place, smirking.

The Serbian soldier reveals he is actually a Swiss mercenary fighting for the Serbian side and requests to stay in the room a few more moments, until the danger outside has passed. Raina expresses regret that he will have to face danger again. She then cries out when she sees the man's gun on her ottoman, scaring him. She teases him about his reaction, saying he may use the gun to protect himself from her. The Swiss mercenary replies that he has no cartridges, only chocolates, triggering more disdain from Raina. Mockingly, she brings him a half-finished box of chocolate creams and he devours them hungrily.

The soldier explains that he has been in battle and under fire for three days and is starving and exhausted. Raina is touched by his predicament but still feels that his behavior is not befitting of a soldier, explaining that Bulgarian soldiers do not show weakness as he does. The Swiss mercenary retorts that they certainly do and even more - the Bulgarian army is unprofessional. He explains that the Bulgarian cavalry charge earlier that day was an idiotic maneuver that succeeded because of sheer luck: Sergius led a suicidal cavalry charge against a line of bristling machine guns. Fortunately, the Serbians had, through an obscure logistical mistake, procured the wrong kind of cartridges. If not for this lucky coincidence, the Bulgarian army would have been mowed down immediately.

Highly offended, Raina refuses to believe the mercenary's version of events, insisting that Sergius is heroic. Raina shows the mercenary a picture of her fiancé Sergius and he confirms that this was indeed that man that was "charging like Don Quixote at the windmills" (14). The mercenary has trouble stifling his laughter and Raina becomes even angrier, demanding that he climb back down from the balcony.

At the thought of having to leave, the mercenary is filled with despair and exhaustion. He claims he does not have the strength to continue, as he has not slept in 36 hours. Raina is filled with motherly concern at his predicament. The intruder rouses himself and prepares to leave, claiming danger and exhaustion are merely part of being a soldier. In a moment of pity Raina gently calls him a "chocolate cream soldier" (15). Raina insists that he stay, explaining that her family, which is one of the most noble and rich families in all of Bulgaria, is civilized enough to be trusted to offer temporary asylum to a guest. She references *Ernani*, an opera where a noble family harbors a fugitive despite their disagreements with him. Raina's boasts about her family's position - that they have an indoor staircase and the only personal library in the

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country, or that they wash their hands daily - sound comical. The soldier teases her good-naturedly about her pretensions as she describes her wealth and manners.

Feeling safe for the first time in three days, the soldier is overtaken by exhaustion. Raina leaves to find her mother and the poor mercenary collapses on her bed. Raina returns with Catherine and the two women attempt to rouse the sleeping soldier to no avail. Raina is touched by his vulnerability and tells her mother to let him sleep. Catherine is appalled by her daughter's sympathy for the enemy.

## Analysis

*Arms and the Man* is a romantic comedy that centers on the “clash of ignorance and knowledge” (Lee 101); the play pits realism against the romantic ideas and delusions that surround the topics of love and war. In Act I the practical Swiss mercenary, later identified as Captain Bluntschli, represents knowledge and realism. Bluntschli has little regard for heroic conventions that might call for daring cavalry charges or willingness to face death with ease. He understands that when fighting multi-day battles food rations can be more important and effective at ensuring survival than weapons. He has no romantic or nationalistic notions of honor and glory in battle; he approaches soldiering as an accountant might approach accounting, simply as a professional. Though George Bernard Shaw satirizes romanticized notions of war, he retains respect for war itself; Bluntschli, a professional soldier, is perhaps the play's most grounded and competent character.

Bluntschli's knowledge quickly collides with Raina's romantic delusions. When Raina rapturously asks about the “great” cavalry charge, he explains that Sergius' grand military gesture was unprofessional and would have ended in slaughter if not for dumb luck. He disabuses her of the notion that real soldiers never tire, never hunger and never fear. After 36 hours without sleeping and 72 hours of being under fire, Bluntschli is exhausted, famished, and understandably apprehensive.

Though Bluntschli manages to complicate Raina's understanding he does not yet dispel her delusions, which are deeply rooted. Raina imagines war to be a stage for grand gestures of bravery and honor. Her ecstasy at hearing of Sergius' charge is so exaggerated as to be comical. When confronted with Bluntschli's pragmatic approach to war she is appalled and thinks him a coward unfit for battle. Her approach to love is similarly theatrical and ludicrous: she holds Sergius' picture above her like “a priestess”, worshipping at an altar of love (5).

Yet the first act hints that this romanticism is a veneer and Raina's true views are more complicated. Her romantic posturing is self-conscious, as when she stands on the balcony at the very beginning of the play. Moreover, she reveals that she had serious doubts about Sergius' participation in war, as she was worried that their grand ideals were nothing more than a fantasy absorbed from poetry and operas. Raina is also the only woman in the play to acknowledge and be concerned about the violence and cruelty of war. This impulse leads her to protect Bluntschli. Finally she has some attraction to the practical if unheroic Bluntschli, showing her affection when she calls him a “poor dear” after he finally passes out.

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The play effectively mocks Raina's class pretensions, which seem to spring from the same source as her romantic delusions. Raina imagines a world filled with dashing soldiers, pure ladies and elegant nobles. She strives to emulate the wealthy nobility in the fiction she consumes, as when she decides to harbor Captain Bluntschli after remembering an opera in which a noble family protects a fugitive. Yet Raina's aspirations are ridiculous. She wears fur coats that cost more than all her furniture; she proudly calls a room with a single bookshelf a library; and she decorates with cheap Viennese furnishings. Likewise, Catherine insists on wearing tea gowns and adopting other habits of the upper Western classes.

Chocolate serves as an enduring and complex symbol throughout *Arms and the Man*. When first introduced it serves as a symbol of Captain Bluntschli's pragmatism and disdain for romanticism. Instead of carrying his cartridges, which are later revealed to be useless as they are the incorrect size, the Swiss mercenary carries chocolate. During this time period, soldiers often carried chocolate with low milk content as rations; such chocolate rarely spoiled, even in humid conditions, and could provide a significant amount of calories, even in small portions (Satran 26). Some readers may, like Raina, incorrectly assume Bluntschli was carrying sweets or other luxurious treats. The chocolate soldiers carried was dry, gritty and brittle; it was not an indulgence, but a practical ration for the field.

In contrast, Raina has a box of chocolate creams, luxurious confectionary treats that spoiled quickly and were above the reach of most lower and middle class citizens. In this form, chocolate represents Raina's romantic and impractical notions. Bluntschli gratefully devours the chocolate creams, but out of very practical hunger, not out of any desire for indulgence. In her ignorance about the use of chocolate as field rations, Raina misunderstands Bluntschli's real purpose in keeping chocolate in his cartridge boxes, viewing him as ridiculous and naming him a "chocolate cream soldier" (15). Yet Bluntschli is anything but, he is the most practical and professional soldier depicted in the play.

The title of *Arms and the Man* is a reference to the first line of Virgil's *Aeneid*, a Latin epic poem describing the journey and heroics of Aeneas. The poem begins by announcing that it will sing of arms and the man and continues to celebrate the glorious story of Aeneas. George Bernard Shaw satirizes the poem by mirroring it throughout his play. At every opportunity Shaw reflects the *Aeneid* and then effectively undercuts it. Aeneas, an extremely handsome man, arrives as a fugitive at his future wife Dido's magnificent and opulent home, having been driven inland by a sea storm. When soldiers from an opposing force come looking for him, Aeneas uses supernatural means to stay hidden within a cloud; his deception is flawless. Comparatively, Bluntschli, an average looking man, arrives at a house whose greatest claim to local fame is having an indoor staircase. He is in the middle of actively fleeing from battle. When the Bulgarians come to search for him, he is left to lamely hide behind a curtain and even forgets his pistol in plain sight. By diminishing all the heroic aspects of Aeneas' story, Shaw effectively satirizes it and its predilection for romanticizing war and worshipping heroes.

## Arms and the Man Act II Summary and Analysis

### Summary

A little less than four months have passed since the incident with the chocolate cream soldier. Louka and Nicola stand in the kitchen with the used breakfast dishes arguing about the proper attitude towards their employers. Louka sneeringly accuses Nicola of having “the soul of a servant” and hints that she could reveal many of the Petkoffs’ secrets if they were to quarrel with her (23). Nicola remains calm and explains that he knows many more secrets than Louka, but that using them against the family would only backfire.

Suddenly Major Petkoff’s voice is heard from outside; he has returned from the war. A man in his early 50s, Major Petkoff is excited by the respect and title his participation in the war has conferred on him. Louka brings him coffee and brandy and Catherine runs down excitedly, still in her house clothes, to meet him. When told that the war has ended in a peace treaty, Catherine is indignant, insisting that the Bulgarians should have fought on to annex Serbia. Major Petkoff appeases her and ends the discussion, saying he could no longer remain away from her.

The Major reveals some of his ignorance by telling Catherine her sore throat is the result of too much washing and ridiculing a British man who bathed every day during the war. Catherine teases him for being a barbarian and announces she has had an electric bell installed to summon the help, because “civilized people never shout for their servants” (25). During their back-and-forth Sergius arrives at the gate and Nicola is dispatched to help him with his things. Major Petkoff tells his wife that Sergius is upset about rightly being denied a promotion after his careless cavalry charge.

Despite the Major’s intimation about the charge, Catherine refuses to believe it and treats the handsome, idealistic and somewhat moody Sergius like a returning hero. After entering the garden, Sergius turns down breakfast and poses himself self-consciously against a rail. He explains to an astonished Catherine that the cavalry charge ruined his military career and that he has submitted his resignation.

The second Sergius asks for Raina, she makes a dramatic entrance in a beautiful gold and green dress. The Major remarks that her timing is impressive, but Catherine reveals that Raina listens outside doors in order to make the most impressive entrance. Sergius and Raina greet each other like characters out of a romantic play about love-struck nobles. Then, prompted by Catherine, Sergius explains his disgust with the military and war, saying soldiering is the dishonorable art of catching an enemy at a disadvantage and railing against the bland professionalism of the foreign officers. Major Petkoff explains that the foreign officers were left to teach the local forces how to properly fight a war.

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A Swiss mercenary is mentioned and Sergius retells an anecdote he heard about the man: that he broke into the room of a young Bulgarian woman, who hid him and then proceeded to entertain him for an hour before finally telling her mother. The two women then snuck the man out in an old housecoat. Raina and Catherine act indignant, claiming that such a crude story should never be told in front of proper women. Major Petkoff rejects the women's pretension but Sergius apologizes, claiming his experiences during the war have made him cynical.

Catherine deftly manipulates Major Petkoff into leaving with her so Raina and Sergius can have a moment alone. The two lovers greet each other formally with a sense of "holy awe" and begin to praise one another in exalted tones (31). Without a trace of irony, Raina tells Sergius that they have found a "higher love" (31). Louka enters the garden to clear away the coffee dishes and interrupts their romantic posturing. Suddenly self-conscious, Raina leaves to fetch her hat so she and Sergius may go walking and find some privacy.

As soon as Raina departs, Sergius hones in on Louka, telling her that higher love is very fatiguing and pulling her into his arms. The always practical Louka suggests that he should either release her or at the very least they should move towards the back where they won't be seen. Louka rejects Sergius' kisses, criticizing his and Raina's romantic posturing and their subsequent indecent behavior. Hardening, Sergius attempts to shame Louka for insulting Raina, but Louka's wit is too quick and sharp for his barbs to land.

Sergius angrily demands to know who Raina has been indecent with, bruising Louka's arm when she refuses to tell him. Furious with Louka for withholding information and criticizing him and his fiancé, Sergius sneers that Louka has the "soul of a servant" (35). Louka's defiant but clearly wounded dignity causes Sergius to sincerely apologize. Yet Louka does not accept his apology, insisting that he can only remedy the situation by kissing her bruised arm. Sergius balks and refuses as Raina enters the room.

As the couple is about to leave for their walk, Catherine comes calling for Sergius, who is needed to help Major Petkoff coordinate troop movements. Raina pouts at losing her time alone with Sergius and goes to stand conspicuously before the library window so her father can see her waiting. Catherine and Raina argue while Sergius helps the Major. Catherine demands to know how long the Swiss mercenary was in her room and Raina professes not to know before telling her mother that she, Catherine, should marry her "pet" Sergius (37). Raina muses that telling Sergius about the chocolate cream soldier would be satisfying, saying she often has an urge to shock or upset his exhausting sense of propriety.

Just as Raina stalks away from her argument with Catherine, Louka enters and announces that a Serbian officer of Swiss origin has arrived and is asking for the lady of the house. Thinking quickly, Catherine tells Louka to discreetly close the door to the library where Major Petkoff and Sergius are working before bringing the Swiss soldier into the backyard with all his bags. When the chocolate cream soldier, now identified as Captain Bluntschli, arrives in the garden, Catherine explains that he must leave at once, as her husband will be angry to see a Serbian officer in their home. The Captain has come to return the



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old housecoat that was used to smuggle him, but Catherine is only preoccupied with getting him out of their home before the Major sees him.

Before Catherine can rush the mercenary out of the yard, Major Petkoff and Sergius come running out to warmly greet Bluntschli, who they had dealings with during the war. The two Bulgarian soldiers beg Bluntschli to stay and help them coordinate troop movements, as they are at a loss. As Bluntschli is walking to the famous library to aid them, Raina catches a glimpse of him and involuntarily gasps that it is the chocolate cream soldier. Sergius and Major Petkoff look at her in confusion. She quickly explains that she had made a soldier-shaped cake decoration out of chocolate cream, but Nicola had accidentally crushed it. Catherine introduces Raina to Captain Bluntschli as if for the first time.

A moment later Nicola brings Captain Bluntschli's bags as Catherine instructed. Major Petkoff is appalled that Nicola would rudely bring out a man's luggage, as if encouraging his departure, when he has just arrived. Nicola attempts to explain Catherine's orders, but she denies having made any. The Petkoffs scold a bewildered Nicola, who apologizes and then retreats in confusion, dropping Bluntschli's bag on the Major's foot as he exits.

Major Petkoff asks Bluntschli to stay with the family until he must return to Switzerland. Raina and Sergius second the Major's request. To Catherine's consternation, Bluntschli agrees to stay.

## Analysis

Act II introduces the reader to Sergius, who matches Raina in terms of romantic delusions. The couple sing each other's praises in ridiculous and reverential tones and Sergius clings to the ideal of a heroic and brave soldier, despising the detached professionalism he encountered during the campaign. In his mind the true measure of a soldier should still be honor or bravery, not necessarily success or efficiency. He also shares his fiancée's habit of self-conscious posturing. Like Raina at the opening of the play, he poses in the garden, trying to strike a deliberately heroic stance.

Yet Sergius also exhibits Raina's creeping disillusionment with romanticism. War has made him cynical and pushes him to question whether his ideals of bravery have any place in reality. He admits to Louka that the "higher love" he has with Raina is exhausting, all while embracing her and attempting to kiss her (32). During her argument with Catherine, Raina also admits that she finds her fiancé's moral pretensions exhausting and wishes to shock Sergius' faux propriety. Raina and Sergius' romantic act leaves them both tired and stressed, creating an opening for the end of their engagement.

The second act also introduces Major Petkoff, a bumbling figure whose ignorance underlies many of the play's more farcical moments. His blustering rebuke of Nicola reflects this pattern; his ignorance of the meaning of his daughter's comment about the chocolate cream soldier paired with his ignorance of his wife's secret directives, lead to one of the act's funnier moments. His lack of knowledge is also

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highlighted when he attributes a sore throat to too much bathing and proves unable to organize simple troop movements.

Together Major Petkoff and Sergius work to prove Captain Bluntschli's remark that "nine soldiers out of ten are born fools" (9). The Captain represents an exception. He is the tenth soldier: competent, realistic, professional. On the contrary, Major Petkoff and Major Sergius Saranoff are common fools. Though they outrank the Captain they must beg for his help in arranging troop movements, as they do not understand the logistics of warfare. Major Petkoff plays the fool during the play's second and third acts and Sergius is filled with ridiculous romantic bluster that isn't deflated until the play's end. These are very different depictions of a soldier from the efficient and professional portrait of Bluntschli in the first act.

Louka proves a perceptive witness to and commentator on Sergius' hypocrisy. Using nothing more than a sharp tongue, she successfully dresses down and manipulates the higher-born Sergius throughout the second act. Louka, who is deeply unhappy with the limits of her socio-economic position, shows that "gentlefolk" are neither particularly clever, nor particularly virtuous, despite their pretensions (33). Sergius' biting comment about Louka having the "soul of a servant" echoes an earlier barb the maid lobs at Nicola (35). Yet the play seems to undermine any the idea that the soul of a servant is something to be despised. Nicola's admittedly deferential manner speaks to his thorough pragmatism and Louka's sharp wit and perception speak to her realism. Both servants cut much more flattering figures than either Major Petkoff or Sergius, both foolish members of the upper class.

The Petkoffs continue to show their class pretensions throughout the second act. The Major is filled with pride and repeatedly mentions his personal library, which the third act will reveal is nothing more than a room with a bookshelf. Catherine installs an electric bell in the so-called library because she has the vague notion that civilized people use them. Raina carefully dresses in the latest fashions... of the previous year. These airs are repeatedly the objects of the play's cutting humor. When the Petkoffs are more humble, Shaw is much kinder to them: he generously describes Catherine's beauty when she emerges dressed in her traditional house clothes, but ridicules her pretensions when she appears in an occidental tea gown in the first act.

The second act pulls away from the parallelism with the *Aeneid* displayed in the first. In Virgil's epic poem Dido's husband is only a dead memory. Shaw brings the dead to life in his interpretation: Raina's fiancé returns miraculously unharmed from war. This allows Shaw to create two couples - Raina and Bluntschli, and Sergius and Louka - where the original poem has only one. Yet Shaw continues to satirize the glorification of war embodied by the *Aeneid*: Aeneas helps build towering buildings and reinforcements in Dido's town, while Bluntschli makes administrative arrangements to prevent starvation among surviving troops. *Arms and the Man* allows its characters little traditional heroism.

The play's farcical or melodramatic elements continue in the second act. The two love stories that begin to unfold - "the highborn lady who falls in love with a man from the bottom of the social scale, who turns out to be a prince in disguise" and "the aristocrat who runs away with a servant girl who represents

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virtue” - are indeed romantic clichés. These stories start to take shape in the second act and will be resolved in the third: an inheritance in the third act will reveal Bluntschli to be a noble in disguise and finally worthy of Raina’s hand and Sergius will propose to the grounded Louka. Farcical elements are scattered throughout the second act: the women pretending ignorance at the anecdote about the Swiss mercenary, Major Petkoff welcoming Captain Bluntschli as Catherine attempts to rid herself of him, and the extended bit about Nicolas’ incompetence. These highly stylized comic occurrences will continue throughout the play, highlighting the clash between what the characters say, and how they really feel.

## Arms and the Man Act III Summary and Analysis

### Summary

Act III opens with Captain Bluntschli hard at work in the so-called Petkoff library, which is really just a room with a single bookcase, coordinating troop movements and preparing papers for Sergius' signature. Major Petkoff sits reading the paper and occasionally looks up to ask Bluntschli if he can help; Sergius stands over the Captain, clearly frustrated by his superior abilities. The Major wishes he had the old coat that disappeared from the blue closet. Catherine insists that it is there and the Major, who checked before Bluntschli's arrival, bets her a piece of jewelry that it is not. Nicola is sent to retrieve it and reports that it was hanging in the blue closet as Catherine said. The poor Major is completely befuddled.

Bluntschli finishes the paperwork and dispatches Sergius to implement the orders. Afterward he confidentially asks the Major to go with Sergius and oversee him. Major Petkoff agrees, but before leaving asks Catherine to accompany him, as she will be more intimidating to the troops than he. The Swiss mercenary marvels at the Bulgarian Major's incompetency.

Left alone with the Captain, Raina tells Bluntschli that someone relayed the anecdote about a Swiss mercenary breaking into a Bulgarian lady's room to Sergius and Major Petkoff. Bluntschli is apologetic, claiming he only told a single close and trusted acquaintance. Raina retorts that if Sergius knew the anecdote was about her, he would challenge Captain Bluntschli to a duel. She claims that lying to Sergius has made her distraught, mounting an indignant performance for Captain Bluntschli's benefit. She insists ridiculously that she has only told two lies in her life: when she told the Bulgarian soldiers there was no Serbian officer in her room and when she fabricated the story about the chocolate cream soldier decoration.

Bluntschli tells her directly that he does not believe her pretentious performance, disarming her. Raina admits that she has always engaged in romantic posturing, even as a child. Bluntschli is the only one who has been able to see through her airs. She worries that Bluntschli must despise her, yet the Captain tells her he admires and adores her all the same. Raina wonders aloud what Bluntschli thought of the portrait she gave him: a photograph of herself signed and dedicated to the chocolate cream soldier. She slipped the portrait into the pocket of the coat Bluntschli was smuggled out of the house in. Bluntschli reveals he never searched the coat pockets, missing the signed portrait. He pawned the jacket to keep it safe during the war, repurchasing it afterward, and is unsure if the portrait is still in the pocket. Raina is upset to hear that he pawned the coat, accusing him of having a "low, shopkeeping mind" (53).

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Louka enters the room and delivers a stack of letters to Captain Bluntschli. One of the telegrams informs the Swiss soldier that his father has died. Raina is filled with compassion for the Captain, but Bluntschli's response is oddly suppressed: he seems mildly remorseful and surprised. Bluntschli announces he must leave immediately to manage his inheritance: a chain of hotels. After he leaves, Louka teases Raina about the Captain's lack of emotion; overwhelmed, Raina flees from the room almost in tears.

Nicola notices the odd way Louka is wearing her sleeve in order to hide her bruise and scolds her. Nicola reveals that Sergius gave him twenty levas out of foolishness and the Swiss mercenary gave him ten levas strategically, to thank him for supporting Catherine and Raina's lies about him. Nicola offers some of the money to Louka, who scornfully rejects it, saying he will always be someone's servant. Angered, Nicola replies that he was the one who shaped Louka into a lady. He says he would rather have Louka for a customer than a wife, insinuating Sergius might have married her in another life. Louka replies that she would rather have Nicola as a servant than a husband. Nicola advises her that in order to truly be a lady she must act as if she expected to always have her way. Louka huffily steps away.

Sergius enters and apologizes for interrupting; Nicola replies that he was only chiding Louka for reading the library books, behavior that is "above her station" (57). Sergius crosses to Louka and checks her arm for the bruise, offering to cure it. Louka rebuffs him and asks him if he is a truly brave man. Sergius replies assuredly that he is. The maid wonders if he would have the courage to marry a woman he loved, even if she were from a lower class. Sergius claims that he would, but that he is betrothed to Raina. Louka replies that now that Bluntschli has returned Raina will never marry Sergius, revealing the Swiss mercenary is Raina's secret love.

Sergius is indignant, refusing to believe that the romantic Raina could betray him. Louka perceptively points out that Raina would refuse to believe the romantic Sergius could betray her, but he has regardless. Sergius realizes he mocks his ideals with every action he takes. Then, in a strange turn, he tells Louka she is his and if he touches her again it will be as his bride. Louka, skeptical, exits as Bluntschli returns, preoccupied and worried.

Sergius confronts Bluntschli and challenges him to a duel; the Captain accepts without knowing exactly what the duel is about. Sergius proposes they fight with sabers on horseback, but Bluntschli prefers fighting on the ground, as horseback is too dangerous and he does not intend to kill Sergius. As a sword instructor, the Captain is confident he can disarm Sergius without wounding him. Raina enters as they are settling the details of the duel and anxiously demands to know the cause.

Sergius accuses Raina of loving Bluntschli, saying she had given the Captain "favors" that he never enjoyed (61). Bluntschli educates Sergius, explaining that he entered the room at gunpoint and threatened Raina with death if she resisted. Raina confirms the story. Sergius still insists something must have passed between the Swiss soldier and his fiancée, as Bluntschli came back to see her.

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Sergius reveals that Bluntschli's trusted acquaintance did not tell him about the incident, and Raina deduces that Louka must have told him of her infatuation with Bluntschli. She throws an accusation back at Sergius, saying she saw him holding Louka in the garden. Sergius realizes their relationship is a farce and withdraws from the duel, saying he can only duel men, not machines like the Captain.

Raina informs Sergius that Louka is engaged to Nicola, who is now his new rival. Raina accuses Sergius of using Louka to spy on her and Bluntschli. When Sergius responds with insults, Raina turns indignantly to Bluntschli, who explains that Sergius must defend himself somehow. Bluntschli asks where Louka is and Raina accuses her of listening outside the door. Though Sergius indignantly defends her, he finds her waiting in the hall. Louka, unembarrassed, explains that her love is at stake, a love stronger than anything Raina may feel even for her chocolate cream soldier. Sergius is confused, thinking Louka is referring to the cake decoration Raina prepared earlier.

At this moment Major Petkoff enters the room, claiming someone has been wearing his coat, which has become torn and stretched out. Nicola brings in the coat from Catherine, who has mended it. Raina takes it from Nicola and helps her father put it on, deftly removing the photograph as she does. As the Major sits down he looks for the picture, saying he found something strange: a photograph of Raina with a dedication to her chocolate cream soldier. He cannot find it and his suspicions are aroused: he questions Nicola about Raina's story about the smashed cake decoration. Petkoff congratulates Sergius on being the chocolate cream soldier. As Sergius angrily explains he is not, Bluntschli admits to being Raina's chocolate cream soldier.

Major Petkoff demands Raina tell him which of the two men she is engaged to. She replies that she is betrothed to neither, as Sergius is in love with Louka. Petkoff angrily tells Sergius that Louka is already engaged to Nicola. The old servant gracefully comes forward to explain the engagement was only to protect Louka and he looks forward to having her as a customer now that she is marrying into the nobility. Impressed with his practicality, Bluntschli announces he will hire Nicola as a hotel manager.

Louka demands Sergius apologize for hurting her in the garden and he does with a kiss, making her his bride. Catherine enters to see Sergius embracing Louka and is appalled. Bluntschli, however, congratulates Sergius on his practical decision. Louka defends herself to Catherine, saying she has done Raina no harm, as she is destined to marry the Swiss soldier anyway. Bluntschli is incredibly surprised by Louka's remark, not having known about Raina's love for him. Bluntschli calls the idea of their marrying nonsense; he describes Raina as a young girl of seventeen. He admits to being romantic and somewhat foolish, having returned to the house to see her again, but protests that she is only a child.

Hurt and angry, Raina retorts that she is actually twenty-three. Bluntschli absorbs this shock and then immediately asks Major Petkoff for Raina's hand in marriage. The Petkoffs hesitate, explaining that Raina is accustomed to a comfortable lifestyle, one beyond the means of a common captain. In response Bluntschli pulls out the telegram announcing his father's death and reads aloud about his inheritance of

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the hotels, which include an obscene number of items (i.e. 10,000 dessert spoons and 2,400 quilts). Petkoff childishly asks if he is the Emperor of Switzerland but Bluntschli replies that he is a free citizen.

Raina initially rejects Bluntschli's proposal, explaining that she cannot be bought with things. Bluntschli refuses to accept her answer, reminding her of the kindness she showed him when he came to her as a beggar. Raina finally succumbs to her chocolate cream soldier and agrees. Bluntschli prepares to leave, instructing the Major on the movement of a regiment, asking Sergius to postpone his marriage to Louka until he can return, and promising to come back in two weeks.

## Analysis

The third act continues the farcical tone introduced in the first and second acts: Major Petkoff betting on the replaced coat and looking in vain for the photograph snatched from right under his nose, for example. *Arms and the Man* ends in a classical comedic fashion: all farcical misunderstandings are resolved and crossed lovers end up properly paired and sorted. Bluntschli and Raina and Sergius and Louka finish the play perfectly matched; each of the formerly delusional romantics is paired with a more pragmatic partner that pulls them towards realism. Even practical Nicola, though robbed of his fiancée, finishes the play properly sorted as a hotel manager. The farcical nature of the play's humor and the conventional ending makes *Arms and the Man* one of George Bernard Shaw's most accessible and best loved plays.

The play's neat resolution comes when each character reveals and embraces their true selves. Raina abandons her indignant romantic posturing after being gently confronted by Bluntschli, who enjoys her theatrical performances but sees through them. Subsequently she embraces a more grounded self, rejecting Sergius for the practical Swiss Captain who is not deceived by her acts. Bluntschli himself reveals his hidden inner romantic, explaining his compulsion to see Raina again against all odds. Like Raina, Sergius rejects his high romantic notions and embraces an idea of love that is comfortable and practical. He asks pragmatic Louka for her hand in marriage. By dropping their facades and embracing their inner nature, the characters are able to find happiness and their true place.

The third act elaborates on the work's overriding theme: the clash between ignorance and knowledge, usually between the Swiss captain and the Bulgarian family. Captain Bluntschli challenges the incompetence of the two Bulgarian Majors, instructing men who outrank him in how to handle the logistics of troop movements. This leads to a comedic moment when Major Petkoff displays his severe lack of ability; having been assigned by Captain Bluntschli to monitor Sergius, he requests his wife come aid him. Captain Bluntschli also confronts Sergius with the details of his stay in Raina's room, enlightening him and ostensibly preventing a wasteful and violent duel.

The play's final act undermines Sergius' initial ideas about bravery, which correspond to daring battlefield maneuvers and other theatrical gestures. When conversing with Louka, Sergius admits that any man of any station can exhibit crude bravery: the kind needed to participate in a cavalry charge and attack enemies. Louka identifies a more subtle and perhaps difficult kind of bravery: the kind necessary

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to break social mores. Such bravery would be needed to openly love and marry someone from a lower social class. Though hesitant, Sergius proves he has this more difficult bravery by acknowledging his love of Louka before the Petkoff family and agreeing to marry her.

Finally, the third act reveals the discrepancy between station and power. Though the effects of class and gender are written all over the work, power dynamics in *Arms and the Man* do not always correspond to class and gender norms. The separation between the Petkoffs and their help is rather rigid, with a formal code of behavior. Yet Louka, though a servant, regularly challenges the upper-class Petkoffs and successfully manipulates Sergius, pushing him to marry her by cleverly presenting him her hand and reminding him of his promise. Likewise, Bluntschli, who is a captain, regularly commands the majors who outrank him.

Women regularly wield power in the play, despite the restrictions of their position. Women may not be allowed to fight in battle but Catherine still accompanies her husband to the field to help him discipline his troops. Catherine also skillfully manipulates the bumbling Major, convincing him his coat has always been in the blue closet and drawing his attention away from the connection between Raina and Bluntschli. Louka represents a similar subversive power dynamic, using her wit to help push Sergius into committing to her. Even Raina, a more orthodox feminine figure, uses her quick thinking to hide her relationship with Bluntschli from her father and fiancé. In a play where knowledge is power, the women in general wield much more information than the men. Indeed, the person of highest station in the play according to contemporary class and gender norms, Major Petkoff, is also the most foolish and least in-control of all the characters.



## Arms and the Man Symbols, Allegory and Motifs

### Chocolate

Chocolate serves as an enduring and complex symbol throughout *Arms and the Man*. When first introduced it serves as a symbol of Captain Bluntschli's pragmatism and disdain for romanticism. Instead of carrying his cartridges, which are later revealed to be useless, the Swiss mercenary carries chocolate. During this time period, soldiers often carried chocolate with low milk content as rations; such chocolate rarely spoiled, even in humid conditions, and could provide a significant amount of calories, even in small portions (Satran 26). Some readers may, like Raina, incorrectly assume Bluntschli was carrying a luxurious treat, but it was not an indulgence, but a practical ration for the field.

### Major Petkoff's Coat

Major Petkoff's coat is the focus of one of the most comical moments of the play. Bluntschli arrives at first to return the coat that was used to smuggle him away after his escape. A coat features in the anecdote that is floating around about a Bulgarian fugitive, so the Major searches for his coat as proof that his house was not involved. Naturally, his old coat is not in the blue closet where it hung before Bluntschli's escapade. However, Catherine repeatedly insists the coat is right where he left it - despite her knowledge to the contrary. Catherine wagers her husband a piece of jewelry that the coat is in the blue closet, and Nicola proves her right - as she must have returned it to the blue closet during lunch. The coat is both an object of comedy and a symbol of the Major's incompetence. Even he is quick to believe he was in error, though he had seen with his own eyes just hours before that his coat was missing. When he finally pulls the coat on, he finds it has stretched in the back, connoting that Bluntschli is more a man than the Major, both literally and figuratively.

### The Petkoff Library

The Petkoff family makes a big deal about their library, "the only one in Bulgaria" (17). It is a particular point of pride for the Petkoffs, as it communicates their upper-class status and cultured ways. Petkoff tells the Russian soldiers under his command about his library; Raina tells Bluntschli (when he is yet an unnamed fugitive) in order to impress him and communicate her family's civilized air. However, in the stage directions for Act III, it is revealed that the "library" is nothing more than a single shelf of books. The library is ultimately a symbol for the Petkoffs' pretension.

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## **The Electric Bell**

Like the library, Catherine's pride over the new electric bell is a symbol of the Petkoffs' class pretensions. In her mind, civilized people do not yell for their servants. The Major teases her about the bell, and her newfound habits of washing often - and he continues to yell for Nicola. Their conversation in Act II reveals both the Major's ignorance and Catherine's desire to be a part of good society. When she presses the bell in Act III, the Major asks her why she is showing it off. Even he knows the bell is more for performance than convenience.

## **Sergius' Portrait**

Sergius' portrait in Raina's room is revered as if it were a piece of religious iconography. When she learns of his victory in the charge, she lifts the portrait from her table and exalts upon his image. However, this is not a true moment of romantic awe. The stage directions reveal that she does not show any "bodily affection" for Sergius' image (5). Sergius' victory momentarily makes Raina feel her "ideas" of romantic love are now "real" (3). She feels she should love her venerated war hero Sergius, as a woman of social standing. However, as Bluntschli's arrival is about to prove, Raina's love is nothing more than a performance of how she thinks love should appear.

## Arms and the Man Metaphors and Similes

### Raina the Priestess (pg. 5)

When Raina finds out that Sergius led a successful charge, she lifts his portrait in the air, "like a priestess". She is not worshipping a romantic, or even sexual, love for Sergius. Rather, she is worshipping at the altar of her ideas of love. Though she yearns to break through the pretensions of their pairing, Raina believes her performances are justified by Sergius' victory. Now, her love is a war hero - a worthy object for her affections. But Sergius is merely a tool for her to express what she believes is the way she must behave. She loves the idea of Sergius, not the man.

### A Handful of Peas (pg. 13)

Bluntschli compares a cavalry charge to "slinging a handful of peas against a window pane" - the first wave consists of the leader and one or two officers, and then the rest follow in a disorganized "lump". This description knocks Sergius down a few pegs by dispelling the notion of absolute bravery in the face of mortal danger. Bluntschli tells Raina that most injuries are from horses slamming into one another, and the leader must fight with his horse to keep moving to the front line. He also tells her that Sergius' enemies were defeated due to an ammunition mistake and not a successful charge; the Bulgarians would have been mowed down if they faced an army with the right cartridges. So Sergius' stroke of luck is revealed to be dangerous incompetence masked by over-exuberant confidence.

### Sergius as Don Quixote (pg. 14)

When Raina asks Bluntschli if he recognizes her beloved as the hero of the battlefield, he affirms Sergius' identity, but shatters her illusion of his bravery. In describing Sergius' efforts in the charge, Bluntschli uses several unflattering similes. He refers to Sergius as "an operatic tenor", and comments on his dashing looks. But his appearance belies an overblown sense of confidence and incompetence. The comparison Bluntschli makes to Don Quixote is particularly apt. Just as Quixote's ideals are shattered by reality, Sergius cuts a fine figure, but his skill as a soldier is nothing but sound and fury. Bluntschli reveals that his success was the result of dumb luck rather than acumen.

### The Commercial Traveller (pg. 30)

Sergius complains that the Swiss soldier he encountered (Bluntschli) was like a "commercial traveller in uniform" - a salesman. But he also says the man was a true soldier. This passage reveals that Sergius now

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knows more about the realities of war. The pomp and circumstance is now gone from the profession, and he understands that the real soldiers are those who can wheel and deal for what is more necessary to victory. Though the Swiss brokered a shady deal, Sergius admires the man's pragmatism. Sergius is passed over for a promotion despite his heroic gesture, and comes to understand that the romance of war is an illusion.

## **Sergius' English Bull Terrier (pg. 58)**

Louka asks Sergius if the poor men on the battlefield were as brave as the rich. Sergius waves away the question, explaining that the desire to kill is nothing special. He uses the example of his dog to explain the mind of a soldier. A dog can be vicious and attack, but will allow itself to be beaten by its owner. Likewise, soldiers are afraid of their superiors, but will punish or take punishment happily if there are orders in place. Sergius' comments dispel the notion of innate heroism and bravery of military men.

## Arms and the Man Irony

### Sergius' Victory

Sergius' victory is revealed to be the product of dumb luck rather than skill or bravery. The opposing army's ammunitions were depleted because of a mix-up in cartridge supplies. While he did display bravery, he learns that the grand gestures do not amount to success in battle. Being a soldier, he learns,

...is the coward's 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 (29).

War is a profession, a trade, and not a stage for romantic flourishes (as Bluntschli says). Sergius' success is only the result of someone else's failure.

### Sergius and Raina

Sergius and Raina are, on the surface, made for one another. They are from the two richest families in Bulgaria, one is an elegant lady and the other a war hero. They refer to each other as "king" and "queen". However, under this surface lies two people who are going through the motions and putting on a performance of love. Sergius, the "brave" soldier, lacks the gumption to declare his love for the housemaid. He may lead a cavalry charge, but does not dare to marry below his station. Raina's idea of love is theatrical and exaggerated, based more on the idea than the man. The irony is that both characters are more suited to their impossible mates - Louka and Bluntschli. By the end of the play, the correct pairs are together, and all pretenses are dropped.

### The Anecdote about the Swiss

Mistaken or hidden identity factors heavily in *Arms and the Man*. When Bluntschli arrives, Sergius and the Major have no idea that he is the escaped fugitive whose story has become a legend. They recognize him as a man who was both part of the opposing side and now a potential advisor. Though Catherine and Raina try to shoo him away, Major Petkoff implores Bluntschli to stay. The competing forces in the Petkoff house sets the stage for the farcical elements of the play, and also the ultimate breakdown of pretensions by Raina and Sergius.

## **Arms and the Man Imagery**

### **Raina's Room**

The stage directions for the beginning of Act I reveal a lot about Raina. Her room is a clash of east and west styles, some gorgeous, some paltry. Her furniture is cheap but the furs she wears are expensive. The mix of high and low signifies the war between her true feelings and pretensions. Staring out at the mountain, she is "intensely conscious" of the vista's - and her own - beauty (2). Raina is romantic, but acutely aware that her romance is calculated. When Bluntschli storms into her room and life, she maintains her pretensions about love and war at first, but is taken over by empathy for his plight. In her room, Raina plays the full range of her feelings.

### **The Library**

The stage direction for Act III begins with the reveal that the library is nothing more than a single shelf of books. This visual gag is also a symbol of the Petkoffs' pretenses of class. The shelf is shoddy, housing just a few stained, used paperbacks. It is quite the opposite of the grand library they tell all of Bulgaria about. In Act III, all of the preconceived notions and performances break apart into truth, and the library is the perfect visual to connote the disconnect between the Petkoffs' words and their true feelings.

### **Louka's bracelet**

When Sergius bruises Louka's arm in Act II, her response in Act III is not to hide the marks with her dress, but to roll up her sleeve with a broach and wear a gilt bracelet. Even the way Louka saunters into the room is in defiance of her station. The jewelry is meant to be eye-catching; indeed, Nicola notices it and chastises her immediately. Louka's bracelet is a visual clue and a symbol of her brashness. She wants to wear her love for Sergius proudly on her sleeve, and will not allow fashion, custom, or class to change her behavior.

## Arms and the Man The Serbo-Bulgarian War of 1885

Encompassing modern-day nations like Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Romania, the Balkans is a small, fractured region in Southeastern Europe. The religiously, ethnically and linguistically diverse area has long been the seat of wrenching sectarian conflicts, and the Serbo-Bulgarian War of 1885 is no exception.

The war occurred in the destabilizing context of Ottoman decline. Founded by Turks in Northwestern Anatolia in 1299, the Ottoman Empire ruled over the Balkans from the 14th and 15th centuries for over 500 years, until the 19th and early 20th centuries, when provinces began seeking and winning independence as modern nation-states. At its peak, the expansive empire controlled the lands of North Africa, Spain, Southeastern Europe and the Middle East. By the 1800s corruption and European interference had triggered a period of sustained Ottoman decline. Eagerly awaiting new territorial conquests, the Central European powers of Russia, Germany and Austria began calculating how to best exploit the Empire's slow collapse.

The Serbo-Bulgarian War of 1885 was a very brief and largely forgotten war, lasting a scant two weeks in November. Yet it represents a small chapter in a wider Balkan history of unrest, violence and expansionism. In September of 1885 Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia, a semi-autonomous province in the weakening Ottoman Empire, declared their unification. This nascent nationalism disturbed the central European powers intent on expanding their influence in the Balkans. Likewise, Serbia worried about the effects the union would have on Serbian regional power. Encouraged by Austrian promises of territorial gains, Serbia declared war on November 14th.

With Austria supporting Serbia, Russia came to the aid of the newly unified Bulgaria. The larger Central European powers supported "the quarreling countries with officers and supplies", fueling the war (McNabb 5). Though Russia withdrew its support, Bulgaria proved victorious at the Battle of Slivnitza on November 19th, turning the tide of the short war. (Slivnitza serves as the setting for Sergius' fictitious cavalry charge in *Arms and the Man*; Captain Bluntschli flees back through the Petkoff's hometown in the wake of the battle.) Peace was finally declared March 3rd 1886, though actual fighting had ended in late November.

## **Arms and the Man Literary Elements**

### **Genre**

Comedy

### **Language**

English

### **Setting and Context**

A small Bulgarian town, near the Dragoman Pass, during the 1885 Serbo-Bulgarian War

### **Narrator and Point of View**

There is no narrator, as the work is a play. However, the stage directions give great detail about how the audience should feel about the characters. For example, descriptions of Catherine and Raina's clothing belie their class pretensions and the library, which is talked up consistently by the Petkoffs, is revealed in the stage description of Act III to be nothing more than a bookshelf.

### **Tone and Mood**

A farcical comedy concerning the nature of war and love.

### **Protagonist and Antagonist**

Raina Petkoff is the protagonist, and her true antagonist is the reality of war and love.

### **Major Conflict**

Raina Petkoff and her betrothed Sergius Saranoff harbor illusions about love and war, which are shattered by the presence of Captain Bluntschli, a mercenary who embodies pragmatism gained through experience.



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## Climax

As Captain Bluntschli is revealed to be the chocolate cream soldier, the charades are ended - Sergius proposes marriage to Louka and Raina drops her performance of romance.

## Foreshadowing

In Act I, Raina tells Captain Bluntschli that he is as safe in the Petkoff home as he would be if he were in the house of his own father. Bluntschli balks at this, foreshadowing the reveal of his relationship with his father. In Act III, Bluntschli learns that his father had died, and is not terribly upset. He inherits his father's hotel business, which makes him a suitable match for Raina. Also in Act I, Raina muses to Catherine that her feelings of love are proven to be real because of Sergius' victory in battle. This foreshadows Raina's eventual abandon of her pretensions, as she is aware of their falsehood from the beginning of the play.

## Understatement

N/A

## Allusions

The title is taken from the first line of Virgil's Aeneid, and the first act of the play is largely patterned after the events of its namesake. The Aeneid begins by announcing that it will sing of arms and the man and continues to celebrate the glorious story of Aeneas. At every opportunity Shaw reflects the Aeneid and then effectively undercuts it; Bluntschli is anything but a glamorous hero. By diminishing all the heroic aspects of Aeneas' story, Shaw effectively satirizes it and its predilection for romanticizing war and worshipping heroes.

## Imagery

The stage directions provide visual clues for the meaning beyond the dialogue. For example, Raina's room, the library, and the costume and jewelry choices for the characters add an extra dimension of symbolism and irony.

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## Paradox

The term "chocolate cream soldier" carries a connotation of softness. However, the chocolate soldier is in actuality wiser than the other 9 out of 10 who are, as Bluntschli says, fools. The soldier that carries chocolate rather than munitions is one who is concerned with his safety rather than heroism. For a professional soldier like Bluntschli, a chocolate soldier is pragmatic and wise. Raina at first misinterprets Bluntschli's desire for the sweet; she assumes he is callous and detached, unlike the proud officers of her father and betrothed. After she is schooled in the reality of battle and love, this insult is turned into a pet name.

## Parallelism

Captain Bluntschli challenges Raina at every turn, as he is the only one who can see through her performance. In a witty moment of parallelism, he turns her words around:

Raina: Do you know, you are the first man I ever met who did not take me seriously?

Bluntschli: You mean, don't you, that I am the first man that has ever taken you quite seriously? (51)

Raina asserts that other men take her performance at face value, and consider her a woman of pride and fine bearing. Bluntschli, on the other hand, sees her for the woman she is, rather than who she pretends to be. Therefore, he is the only man who takes the true Raina seriously, discounting her lie.

## Personification

N/A

## Use of Dramatic Devices

Major Petkoff is most often used as comic relief. His thin grasp on the machinations both on the battlefield and in his own home is the basis for much of the humorous misunderstanding in the play. The arrival of Captain Bluntschli brings the Major's blunders into relief. Deft misdirection by Catherine and Raina lead to the most humorous scenes of the play. The women use Nicola as a scapegoat when trying to keep Bluntschli's identity as the chocolate cream soldier a mystery. Raina's lie about a ruined dessert and Catherine's mock innocence when Nicola brings the captain's bag to her alleviates the Major's suspicion while casting doubt on Nicola's capabilities. Catherine's skillful deception regarding the old coat results in her husband's befuddlement - and a piece of jewelry. Major Petkoff and Nicola's moments of confusion are moments of pure farce in a play concerned with knowledge as power.

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The stage directions also serve to undercut the pretensions of the characters, as the descriptions of setting and costumes reveal the truth, which is often contrary to the dialogue. For example, the library, a point of pride to the Petkoffs, is revealed to be nothing more than a bookshelf.

## Arms and the Man Essay Questions

### 1. How are women portrayed in the play?

The play's portrayal of women is complex. Both Raina and Catherine are often presented as frivolous or foolish, particularly when exhibiting class pretensions. Yet Shaw makes Sergius and Major Petkoff just as - if not more - ridiculous. Multiple times throughout the play, women are shown to be powerful: Raina and Louka using their wit to control the men around them; Catherine shepherding the bumbling Petkoff through life; Louka successfully pushing Sergius into marrying her. Regardless of any social limits they may face, women in *Arms and the Man* wield informal power and shape the events of the play.

### 2. What older work does the title *Arms and the Man* reference? Why is this allusion made?

The play's title is a reference to Virgil's epic poem the *Aeneid*, which documents the heroic travels and adventures of Aeneas. Shaw borrows much of the structure of the first act from the *Aeneid* in order to better satirize the glorification of both warriors and war. By reflecting the conventions of Virgil's poetry and distorting them, Shaw brings attention to the unrealistic ideals of the original. Bluntschli serves as a diminished version of Aeneas, highlighting the unbelievable aspects of the warrior's story, effectively satirizing heroic retellings of wars.

### 3. Discuss the different conceptions of bravery presented by the play.

*Arms and the Man* presents two competing conceptions of bravery: the romantic and the realistic. The first belongs to Sergius at the beginning of the play and focuses on theatrical and dramatic actions taken during battle; this understanding pushes Sergius to lead a suicidal charge against a row of machine guns. The second is first articulated by Louka and focuses on personal integrity in the face of social pressure. Sergius demonstrates this second form of bravery when he agrees to marry Louka, a servant well below his social station with whom he has fallen in love.

### 4. Explain the symbolic value of Bluntschli's chocolate rations and Raina's chocolate creams.

Chocolate serves as a dual symbol in *Arms and the Man*. When in the form of Bluntschli's gritty rations it represents pragmatism; chocolate with low dairy content was often used by soldiers in wartime, who prized its durability and caloric density. When in the form of Raina's chocolate creams, it represents romanticism; chocolate creams were an expensive, fragile treat enjoyed primarily by the upper classes. Raina misunderstands the meaning of Bluntschli's decision to

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carry chocolates; such a choice was not childish, but eminently reasonable given chocolate's value as a ration and the fact that the Captain was issued the wrong cartridges.

**5. How does George Bernard Shaw use farcical elements to further the play's theme?**

The play's primary theme revolves around the confrontation between knowledge and ignorance. Shaw uses farcical elements to highlight and dramatize this confrontation. Most farcical moments in the play revolve around a character's lack of information. The Major does not know his coat has been returned; Nicola does not know why he is being reprimanded for bringing in the captain's bags; the Major does not know who or what the chocolate cream soldier is. Ultimately all these farcical scenarios are resolved when knowledge is brought to bear.

**6. According to the play, what characteristics make a person a good soldier?**

Captain Bluntschli represents Shaw's ideal soldier. The Swiss mercenary is dispassionate, competent and, above all, pragmatic. Bluntschli harbors no romantic ideals; he views war as business to be efficiently dispatched. If Bluntschli demonstrates what a soldier should be, Sergius and Major Petkoff demonstrate what he shouldn't be. Sergius is filled with poetic ideas about bravery and honor; worse, he acts on those ideas without regard for effectiveness or safety. Major Petkoff is the picture of incompetence, unable to coordinate troop movements or even run his own household.

**7. How does George Bernard Shaw view romanticism?**

Romanticism serves as the play's theoretical villain. It is romantic ideals that lead Sergius to naively charge a line of machine guns and that trap him and Raina in an exhausting relationship. In *Arms and the Man* romanticism is always a reflection of ignorance; once a character gains knowledge, they abandon their poetic ideas. Sergius returns from the war a cynic and both he and Raina abandon their engagement after being made aware of their hypocrisy, pairing up with more practical partners. It can be assumed that Shaw had a low opinion of romanticism.

**8. Discuss the different views of war presented by the play.**

Sergius, Raina and Catherine all, at least initially, view war as a kind of stage where an honorable man can, through bravery and purity, achieve glory. Bluntschli presents a much less dramatic and more practical understanding. For the Swiss captain, being a soldier is just a profession and war is just a business. In his view, the ultimate goal of war is not to win glory or prestige, but to survive. Eventually both Sergius and Raina adopt Bluntschli's views: the actual experience of war destroys Sergius' ideals and the captain educates Raina.

**9. Why do Sergius and Raina find "higher love" tiring?**

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Inspired by their romantic ideals, the couple pretends to share an all-consuming and pure “higher love” (31). Unfortunately this love belongs in the theoretical domain of poetry, not in reality, and it proves an impossible standard to follow. Raina and Sergius are forced to constantly perform in order to conform to their ideas of what love should be like. This continuous piece of domestic theater leaves them both exhausted and ultimately unhappy. Falling short of their romantic ideals grinds them down and ultimately leads to their canceled engagement.

10. **What function does Major Petkoff play in *Arms and the Man*?**

Major Petkoff functions as a figure of fun in the play; he is the fool in a play filled with foolishness. He is a Major who cannot coordinate simple troop movements. He is equally incompetent on the domestic front, bumbling from scene to scene confused and manipulated. Many of the play’s jokes are partially or entirely at his expense. He is astounded to find his old coat; he pompously chastises Nicola for smashing a non-existent pastry; he discovers that the portrait of Raina has vanished under his nose. He serves as a form of comic relief, leaving speeches about love, war and idealism to the more serious characters.