George Bernard Shaw

George Bernard Shaw Biography

It is with good reason that Archibald Henderson, official biographer of his subject, entitled his work *George Bernard Shaw: Man of the Century.*Well before his death at the age of ninety-four, this famous dramatist and critic had become an institution. Among the literate, no set of initials were more widely known than G.B.S. Born on July 26, 1856, in Dublin, Ireland, Shaw survived until November 2, 1950. His ninetieth birthday in 1946 was the occasion for an international celebration, the grand old man being presented with a *festschrift*entitled *GBS 90* to which many distinguished writers contributed. A London publishing firm bought space in the Times to voice its greetings:

GBS

Hail to thee, blithe spirit!

Shaw was the third child and only son in a family which he once described as "shabby but genteel." His father, George Carr Shaw, was employed as a civil servant and later became a not too successful merchant. Shaw remembered especially his father's "alcoholic antics"; the old man was a remorseful yet unregenerate drinker. It was from his father that Shaw inherited his superb comic gift. Lucinda Gurley Shaw, the mother, was a gifted singer and music teacher; she led her son to develop a passion for music, particularly operatic music. At an early age he had memorized, among others, the works of Mozart, whose fine workmanship he never ceased to admire. Somewhat later, he taught himself to play the piano — in the Shavian manner.

One of the maxims in *The Revolutionist's Handbook,*appended to *Man and Superman,*reads: "He who can does. He who can't teaches." Shaw, who was to insist that all art should be didactic, viewed himself as a kind of teacher, yet he himself had little respect for schoolmasters and formal education. First, his uncle, the Reverend George Carroll, tutored him. Then, at the age of ten, he became a pupil at Wesleyan Connexional School in Dublin and later attended two other schools for short periods of time. He hated them all and declared that he had learned absolutely nothing. But Shaw possessed certain qualities which are not always developed in the classroom — for example, an inquisitive mind and a boundless capacity for independent study.

Once asked about his early education, he replied: "I can remember no time at which a page of print was not intelligible to me and can only suppose I was born literate." He went on to add that by the age of ten he had saturated himself in the works of Shakespeare and also in the Bible.

A depleted family exchequer led Shaw to accept employment as a clerk in a Land Agency when he was sixteen. He was unhappy and, determined to become a professional writer, he resigned after five years of service and joined his mother, who was then teaching music in London. The year was 1876. During the next three years he allowed his mother to support him, and he concentrated largely on trying to support himself as an author. No less than five novels came from his pen between the years 1879 and 1883, but it was soon evident that Shaw's genius would never be revealed as a novelist.

In 1879, Shaw was induced to accept employment in a firm promoting the new Edison telephone, his duties being those of a right-of-way agent. He detested the task of interviewing residents in the East End of London and endeavoring to get their permission for the installation of telephone poles and equipment. A few months of such work was enough for him. In his own words, this was the last time he "sinned against his nature" by seeking to earn an honest living.

The year 1879 had greater significance for Shaw. He joined the Zetetical Society, a debating club, the members of which held lengthy discussions on such subjects as economics, science, and religion. Soon he found himself in demand as a speaker and a regular participant at public meetings. At one such meeting held in September, 1882, he listened spellbound to Henry George, an apostle of Land Nationalization and the Single Tax. Shaw credits the American lecturer and author with having roused his interest in economics and social theory; previously, he had concerned himself chiefly with the conflict between science and religion. When Shaw was told that no one could do justice to George's theories without being familiar with the theories of Karl Marx, Shaw promptly read a French translation of *Das Kapital,*no English translation being then available. He was immediately converted to socialism.

The year 1884 is also a notable one in the life of Bernard Shaw (as he preferred to be called). After reading a tract entitled *Why Are the Many Poor?*and learning that it was published by the Fabian Society, he appeared at the society's next meeting. The intellectual temper of this group, which included such distinguished men as Havelock Ellis, immediately attracted him. He was accepted as a member on September 5 and was elected to the Executive Committee in January. Among the debaters at the Zetetical Society was Sidney Webb, a man whom Shaw recognized as his "natural complement." He easily persuaded Webb to become a Fabian. The two, along with the gifted Mrs. Webb, became the pillars of the society which preached the gospel of constitutional and evolutionary socialism. Shaw's views, voiced in public parks and meeting halls, are expounded at length in *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism*(1928); many of his ideas also find a place in his dramas.

In the next stage of his career, Shaw emerged as a literary, music, and art critic. Largely because of the influence of William Archer, the distinguished dramatic critic now best remembered as the editor and translator of Ibsen, Shaw became a member of the reviewing staff of the *Pall Mall Gazette*in 1885. Earlier, he had ghostwritten some music reviews for G. L. Lee, with whom his mother had long been associated as a singer and as a music teacher. But this new assignment provided him with his first real experience as a critic. Not long thereafter, and again through the assistance of William Archer, Shaw added to these duties those of an art critic on the widely influential *World.*Archer insisted that Shaw knew very little about art but realized that Shaw thought that he did, which was what mattered. As for Shaw, he blandly explained that the way to learn about art was to look at pictures; he had begun doing so years earlier in the Dublin National Gallery.

Shaw's close association with William Archer was paramount in his championing the dramas of Henrik Ibsen as a new, highly original dramatist whose works represented a complete break with the popular theater of the day. "When Ibsen came from Norway," Shaw was to write, "with his characters who thought and discussed as well as acted, the theatrical heaven rolled up like a scroll." Whereas the general public, nurtured on "well-made" romantic and melodramatic plays, denounced Ibsen as a "muck-ferreting dog," Shaw recognized that Ibsen was a great ethical philosopher and a social critic, a role which recommended itself to Shaw himself. On July 18, 1890, Shaw read a paper on Ibsen at a meeting of the Fabian Society. Amplified, this became *The Quintessence of Ibsen*(1891). Sometimes called *The Quintessence of Shaw,*it sets forth the author's profoundest views on the function of the dramatist, who, Shaw believed, should concern himself foremost with how his characters react to various social forces and who should concern himself further with a new morality based upon an examination and challenge of conventional mores.

In view of what Shaw had written about Ibsen (and about himself) and because of Shaw's dedicated activities as a socialist exhorter, *The Widowers' Rouses,*his first play, may be called characteristic. Structurally, it represents no departure from the tradition of the well-made play; that is, the action is plotted so that the key situation is exposed in the second act, and the third act is devoted to its resolution. But thematically, the play was revolutionary in England. It dealt with the evils of slum-landlordism, a subject hardly calculated to regale the typical Victorian audience. Produced at J. T. Grein's Independent Theatre in London, it became a sensation because of its "daring" theme, but it was never a theatrical success. Shaw, however, was not at all discouraged. The furor delighted him. No one knew better than he the value of attracting attention. He was already at work on *The Philanderer,*an amusing but rather slight comedy of manners.

In 1894, Shaw's *Arms and the Man*enjoyed a good run at the Avenue Theatre from April 21 to July 7, and it has been revived from time to time to this very day. At last, the real Shaw had emerged — the dramatist who united irrepressible gaiety and complete seriousness of purpose. The play has been described as "a satire on the prevailing bravura style," and it sets forth the "view of romance as the great heresy to be swept from art and life."

In the same year, Shaw wrote *Mrs. Warren's Profession,*which became a *cause celebre.*Shaw himself grouped it with his so-called "Unpleasant Plays." Dealing with the economic causes of prostitution and the conflict between the prostitute mother and her daughter, it created a tumult which was kept alive for several years on both sides of the Atlantic. It may well be argued that in this play Shaw was far more the polemist than the artist, but the play still has its place among the provocative dramas of ideas.

The indefatigable Shaw was already at work on his first unquestionably superior play, *Candida.*First produced in 1895, it has been popular ever since and has found its place in anthologies.

Notable for effective character portrayal and the adroit use of inversions, it tells how Candida and the Reverend Morrell, widely in public demand as an advanced thinker, reached an honest and sound basis for a lasting marriage.

While working with the Fabians, Shaw met the personable Charlotte Payne-Townshend, an Irish heiress deeply concerned with the many problems of social justice. He was immediately attracted to her. After she had helped him through a long illness, the two were married in 1898, and she became his modest but capable critic and assistant throughout the years of their marriage.

During this period there was no surcease of playwriting on Shaw's part. He completed *You Never Can Tell, The Man of Destiny,*and *The Devil's Disciple.*This last play, an inverted Victorian-type melodrama first acted in the United States, was an immediate success, financially and otherwise. By the turn of the century, Shaw had written *Caesar and Cleopatra*and*The Admirable Bashville.*He was now the acknowledged major force in the new drama of the twentieth century.

The year 1903 is especially memorable for the completion and publication of *Man and Superman.*It was first acted (without the Don Juan in Hell intermezzo which constitutes Act III) in 1905. Then, some twenty-three other plays were added to the Shavian canon as the century advanced toward the halfway mark. Best known among these are *Major Barbara*(1905), *Androcles and the Lion*(1912), *Pygmalion*(1912), *Heartbreak House*(1916), *Back to Methuselah*(1921), and *Saint Joan*(1923). During the years 1930-32, the Ayot St. Lawrence Edition of his collected plays was published. Shaw's literary pre-eminence had found worldwide recognition. He refused, however, to accept either a knighthood or the Order of Merit offered by the Crown, but in 1926 he did accept the Nobel Prize for Literature. It was quite typical of him to state that the award was given to him by a grateful public because he had not published anything during that year.

Shaw persistently rejected offers from filmmakers. According to one story, when importuned by Samuel Goldwyn, the well-known Hollywood producer, he replied: 'The difficulty, Mr. Goldwyn, is that you are an artist and I am a business man." Later, however, the ardor and ability of Gabriel Pascal impressed him, and he agreed to prepare the scenario of *Pygmalion*for production. The film, released in 1938, was a notable success. *Major Barbara*and *Androcles and the Lion*followed, and the Irish-born dramatist had now won a much larger audience. *My Fair Lady,*a musical adapted from *Pygmalion,*opened in New Haven, Connecticut, on February 4, 1956, starring Rex Harrison and Julie Andrews, and it was and remains a spectacular success. A film version won an Academy Award in 1964 as Best Picture.

Discussing *Macbeth,*Shaw once wrote: "I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no 'brief candle' for me. It is a sort of splendid torch, which I have got hold of for the moment; and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations." Life indeed was a bright torch which burned long for Bernard Shaw. Almost to the very end, when he was bedridden with a broken hip, he lived up to his credo. He was ninety-two years old in 1949, when *Buoyant Billions*was produced at the Malvern Festival. In the same year his highly readable *Sixteen Self Sketches*was published. He was planning the writing of still another play when he died on November 2, 1950.

# 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](https://www.gradesaver.com/arms-and-the-man/study-guide/character-list" \l "sergius)’ fictitious cavalry charge in [*Arms and the Man*](https://www.gradesaver.com/arms-and-the-man); Captain [Bluntschli](https://www.gradesaver.com/arms-and-the-man/study-guide/character-list" \l "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.

## Character List

**Captain Bluntschli** A professional soldier from Switzerland who is serving in the Serbian army. He is thirty-four years old, and he is totally realistic about the stupidity of war.

**Raina Petkoff** The romantic idealist of twenty-three who views war in terms of noble and heroic deeds.

**Sergius Saranoff** The extremely handsome young Bulgarian officer who leads an attack against the Serbs which was an overwhelming success.

**Major Petkoff** The inept, fifty-year-old father of Raina; he is wealthy by Bulgarian standards, but he is also unread, uncouth, and incompetent.

**Catherine Petkoff** Raina's mother; she looks like and acts like a peasant, but she wears fashionable dressing gowns and tea gowns all the time in an effort to appear to be a Viennese lady.

**Louka** The Petkoffs' female servant; she is young and physically attractive, and she uses her appearance for ambitious preferment.

**Nicola** A realistic, middle-aged servant who is very practical.

## About *Arms and the Man*

One of Shaw's aims in this play is to debunk the romantic heroics of war; he wanted to present a realistic account of war and to remove all pretensions of nobility from war. It is not, however, an anti-war play; instead, it is a satire on those attitudes which would glorify war. To create this satire, Shaw chose as his title the opening lines of Virgil's *Aeneid,*the Roman epic which glorifies war and the heroic feats of man in war, and which begins, "Of arms and the man I sing. . . ."

When the play opens, we hear about the glorious exploits which were performed by Major Sergius Saranoff during his daring and magnificent cavalry raid, an event that turned the war against the Serbs toward victory for the Bulgarians. He thus becomes Raina Petkoff's ideal hero; yet the more that we learn about this raid, the more we realize that it was a futile, ridiculous gesture, one that bordered on an utter suicidal escapade.

In contrast, Captain Bluntschli's actions in Raina's bedroom strike us, at first, as being the actions of a coward. (Bluntschli is a Swiss, a professional soldier fighting for the Serbs.) He climbs up a water pipe and onto a balcony to escape capture, he threatens a defenseless woman with his gun, he allows her to hide him behind the curtains, and then he reveals that he carries chocolates rather than cartridges in his cartridge box because chocolates are more practical on the battlefield. Yet, as the play progresses, Bluntschli's unheroic actions become reasonable when we see that he survives, whereas had the war continued, Sergius' absurd heroic exploits would soon have left him dead.

Throughout the play, Shaw arranged his material so as to satirize the glories associated with war and to ultimately suggest that aristocratic pretensions have no place in today's wars, which are won by using business-like efficiency, such as the practical matters of which Bluntschli is a master. For example, Bluntschli is able to deal with the business of dispensing an army to another town with ease, while this was a feat that left the aristocrats (Majors Petkoff and Saranoff) completely baffled. This early play by Shaw, therefore, cuts through the noble ideals of war and the "higher love" that Raina and Sergius claim to share; *Arms and the Man*presents a world where the practical man who lives with no illusions and no poetic views about either love or war is shown to be the superior creature.

## Summary and Analysis Preface

Unlike *Pygmalion*or many of Shaw's other plays, there is no actual, separate preface to this particular play. However, there was a preface to the original volume of plays which contains this play and three others: *The Pleasant Plays,*1898, revised in 1921. As Shaw noted elsewhere, a preface seldom or never concerns the play which is to follow the preface, and this preface is no exception. Instead, Shaw used this preface to comment upon the new style of drama (or simply what he calls New Drama), a name applied to dramas such as his or Ibsen's, plays which were not written to be commercial successes, but to be intellectual vehicles which would make the audience consider (or think about) their life — to be intellectually aware of their historical place in civilization. Shaw refuses to pander himself to popular demands for romantic (and thus unbelievable and unrealistic) situations. Ultimately, according to Shaw, the theater should become a place for the airing of ideas and a place where sham and pretense can be exposed in a way that is delightful to the audience.

# Arms and the Man Summary

The play unfolds in Bulgaria in 1885, towards the end of the Serbo-Bulgarian War. [Raina](https://www.gradesaver.com/arms-and-the-man/study-guide/character-list#raina) Petkoff and her mother [Catherine](https://www.gradesaver.com/arms-and-the-man/study-guide/character-list#catherine) have received news that Raina’s fiancé [Sergius](https://www.gradesaver.com/arms-and-the-man/study-guide/character-list" \l "sergius) led a victorious cavalry charge against Serbian forces. [Louka](https://www.gradesaver.com/arms-and-the-man/study-guide/character-list" \l "louka), the household maid, enters to announce that the windows must be locked, as fleeing Serbian troops are being hunted down in the streets. Later that night a Serbian officer climbs the drainpipe outside Raina’s balcony and breaks into her room. Bulgarian soldiers arrive, asking to inspect the room, and Raina, overwhelmed by a moment of compassion, hides the enemy soldier behind her curtains. Louka is the only one who sees through the deception, but she only smirks and leaves in silence.

Once safe, the soldier comes out from hiding and explains he is a Swiss mercenary for the Serbian army. He admits to Raina that he does not carry cartridges for his gun, only chocolates, as these are more practical for a starving soldier. Thinking him childish, Raina offers the soldier some chocolate creams, which he devours hungrily. He explains that the cavalry charge led by Raina’s fiancé Sergius was only successful as a result of dumb luck. Angered, Raina finally demands he leave, yet the Swiss mercenary claims to be too exhausted to move. Feeling pity, Raina agrees to shelter him and runs to find her mother. When the two women return, the chocolate cream soldier, as Raina calls him, has fallen asleep in her bed.

The second act begins with [Nicola](https://www.gradesaver.com/arms-and-the-man/study-guide/character-list#nicola), an older servant, lecturing his fiancée Louka on appropriate conduct toward their employers. As they speak, [Major Petkoff](https://www.gradesaver.com/arms-and-the-man/study-guide/character-list#major-petkoff), Raina’s father, returns from the front. He announces that the war has ended with a peace treaty, upsetting his wife Catherine who believes Bulgaria should have annexed Serbia. Shortly afterward, Raina’s fiancé Sergius arrives. The once idealistic man has grown cynical, resigning from the military and complaining about the lack of honor and bravery among professional soldiers. He recounts an anecdote about a fleeing Swiss mercenary escaping into the bedroom of a fascinated Bulgarian woman, alarming Raina and Catherine. Once alone, Raina and Sergius speak of their love for each other in reverential and somewhat ridiculous tones.

As soon as Raina leaves to get her hat, Sergius embraces Louka and complains about how exhausting his relationship with his fiancée is. Louka claims not to understand the hypocrisy of the upper class, saying that both Sergius and Raina pretend to love each other while flirting with other people. Demanding to know whom Raina has been seeing, Sergius grabs Louka and bruises her arm. Louka asks that he kiss it in apology but Sergius refuses just as Raina enters the garden. As the couple prepares to leave for a walk, Catherine calls Sergius to the library to help Major Petkoff arrange some troop movements.

Catherine and Raina discuss the significance of Sergius telling the anecdote about the escaping mercenary. To her mother’s chagrin, Raina expresses a desire for Sergius to learn of her part in the story, wishing to shock his faux propriety. As Raina exits, Louka enters and announces that a Swiss officer is at the door. Captain [Bluntschli](https://www.gradesaver.com/arms-and-the-man/study-guide/character-list" \l "bluntschli), the chocolate cream soldier, has come to return the coat that was used to smuggle him out of the house. As Catherine attempts to send him away, Major Petkoff recognizes him from the peace negotiations, greets him warmly, and asks him to help coordinate Bulgarian troop movements. Raina sees him in the hallway and gasps that it is the chocolate cream soldier. Thinking quickly, she explains to her father and fiancée that she made a chocolate cream decoration in the shape of a soldier, but that Nicola has clumsily crushed it.

Later that afternoon, Captain Bluntschli makes short work of the administrative tasks. Major Petkoff wonders about the fate of his old lost coat. At Catherine’s request, Nicola fetches the coat that had previously disappeared, astounding the Major. The Major, Sergius and Catherine leave to implement Bluntschli’s orders, leaving the Captain alone with Raina. Raina begins posturing, complaining how morally wounded she is by having to lie for him. The Captain sees through her act and confronts her; he is the first person to see her pretentious behavior for what it is. Raina admits to behaving theatrically and suspects Bluntschli must despise her. On the contrary, Bluntschli is charmed by her posturing but cannot take it seriously. Suddenly, Bluntschli receives a telegram informing him of his father’s death and his large inheritance.

Raina and Bluntschli exit as Louka and then Sergius enter. Sergius inspects Louka’s arm and offers to kiss her bruise but is rejected. Louka questions his notions of bravery, arguing that anyone may be brave in battle but few are able to stand up to social expectations. She asks Sergius if he would marry someone below his station for love. Sergius claims he would but uses his engagement to Raina as an excuse. Hurt, Louka teases him with the knowledge that Bluntschli is Raina’s true love.

Sergius challenges Bluntschli to a duel. Raina enters and argues with Sergius, announcing that she saw him embracing Louka. Bluntschli explains to Sergius that Raina only let him remain in her room at gunpoint. Somewhat deflated, Sergius withdraws from the duel. When Bluntschli suggests that Louka join the conversation, Sergius leaves to look for her, only to find her eavesdropping in the hallway. Having understood that something is awry, Major Petkoff enters and demands to know who the chocolate cream soldier is. Bluntschli admits that it is he. Raina explains that she is no longer engaged to Sergius, as he loves Louka. Sergius kisses Louka’s hand, committing himself to marry her. Louka’s original fiancé Nicola gracefully bows out. Bluntschli follows Sergius’ lead and asks for Raina’s hand. The Captain’s new inheritance - a successful chain of hotels - persuades Major Petkoff to agree to the marriage. Bluntschli leaves to take care of his father’s estate with promises to return in a fortnight.

Play Summary

The play begins in the bedroom of Raina Petkoff in a Bulgarian town in 1885, during the Serbo-Bulgarian War. As the play opens, Catherine Petkoff and her daughter, Raina, have just heard that the Bulgarians have scored a tremendous victory in a cavalry charge led by Raina's fiancé, Major Sergius Saranoff, who is in the same regiment as Raina's father, Major Paul Petkoff. Raina is so impressed with the noble deeds of her fiancé that she fears that she might never be able to live up to his nobility. At this very moment, the maid, Louka, rushes in with the news that the Serbs are being chased through the streets and that it is necessary to lock up the house and all of the windows. Raina promises to do so later, and Louka leaves. But as Raina is reading in bed, shots are heard, there is a noise at the balcony window, and a bedraggled enemy soldier with a gun appears and threatens to kill her if she makes a sound. After the soldier and Raina exchange some words, Louka calls from outside the door; she says that several soldiers want to search the house and investigate a report that an enemy Serbian soldier was seen climbing her balcony. When Raina hears the news, she turns to the soldier. He says that he is prepared to die, but he certainly plans to kill a few Bulgarian soldiers in her bedroom before he dies. Thus, Raina impetuously decides to hide him. The soldiers investigate, find no one, and leave. Raina then calls the man out from hiding; she nervously and absentmindedly sits on his gun, but she learns that it is not loaded; the soldier carries no cartridges. He explains that instead of carrying bullets, he always carries chocolates into battle. Furthermore, he is not an enemy; he is a Swiss, a professional soldier hired by Serbia. Raina gives him the last of her chocolate creams, which he devours, maintaining that she has indeed saved his life. Now that the Bulgarian soldiers are gone, Raina wants the "chocolate cream soldier" (as she calls him) to climb back down the drainpipe, but he refuses to; whereas he could climb up, he hasn't the strength to climb down. When Raina goes after her mother to help, the "chocolate cream soldier" crawls into Raina's bed and falls instantly asleep. In fact, when they re-enter, he is sleeping so soundly that they cannot awaken him.

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

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

Act III begins shortly after lunch and takes place in the library. Captain Bluntschli is attending to a large amount of confusing paperwork in a very efficient manner, while Sergius and Major Petkoff merely observe. Major Petkoff complains about a favorite old coat being lost, but at that moment Catherine rings the new library bell, sends Nicola after the coat, and astounds the Major by thus retrieving his lost coat. When Raina and Bluntschli are left alone, she compliments him on his looking so handsome now that he is washed and brushed. Then she assumes a high and noble tone and chides him concerning certain stories which he has told and the fact that she has had to lie for him. Bluntschli laughs at her "noble attitude" and says that he is pleased with her demeanor. Raina is amused; she says that Bluntschli is the first person to ever see through her pretensions, but she is perplexed that he didn't feel into the pockets of the old coat which she lent him; she had placed a photo of herself there with the inscription "To my Chocolate Cream Soldier." At this moment, a telegram is brought to Bluntschli relating the death of his father and the necessity of his coming home immediately to make arrangements for the six hotels that he has inherited. As Raina and Bluntschli leave the room, Louka comes in wearing her sleeve in a ridiculous fashion so that her bruise will be obvious. Sergius enters and asks if he can cure it now with a kiss. Louka questions his true bravery; she wonders if he has the courage to marry a woman who is socially beneath him, even if he loved the woman. Sergius asserts that he would, but he is now engaged to a girl so noble that all such talk is absurd. Louka then lets him know that Bluntschli is his rival and that Raina will marry the Swiss soldier. Sergius is incensed. He sees Bluntschli and immediately challenges him to a duel; then he retracts when Raina comes in and accuses him of making love to Louka merely to spy on her and Bluntschli. As they are arguing, Bluntschli asks for Louka, who has been eavesdropping at the door. She is brought in, Sergius apologizes to her, kisses her hand, and thus they become engaged. Bluntschli asks permission to become a suitor for Raina's hand, and when he lists all of the possessions which he has (200 horses, 9600 pairs of sheets, ten thousand knives and forks, etc.), permission for the marriage is granted, and Bluntschli says that he will return in two weeks to marry Raina. Succumbing with pleasure, Raina gives a loving smile to her "chocolate cream soldier."

## Summary and Analysis Act I

Summary

The play opens at night in a lady's bedchamber in a small Bulgarian town in 1885, the year of the Serbo-Bulgarian war. The room is decorated in the worst possible taste, a taste reflected in the mistress' (Catherine Petkoff's) desire to seem as cultured and as Viennese as possible. But the room is furnished with only cheap bits of Viennese things; the other pieces of furniture come from the Turkish Ottoman Empire, reflecting the long occupation by the Turks of the Balkan peninsula. On the balcony, standing and staring at the romantic beauty of the night, "intensely conscious that her own youth and beauty are a part of it," is young Raina Petkoff. Just inside, conspicuously visible, is a box of chocolate creams, which will play an important part later in this act and which will ultimately become a symbol of the type of war which Shaw will satirize.

Raina's mother, Catherine Petkoff, is a woman who could easily pass for a splendid specimen of the wife of a mountain fanner, but is determined to be a Viennese lady. As the play begins, Catherine is excited over the news that the Bulgarian forces have just won a splendid battle at Slivnitza against the Serbians, and the "hero of the hour, the idol of the regiment" who led them to victory is Raina's fiancé, Sergius Saranoff. She describes how Sergius boldly led a cavalry charge into the midst of the Serbs, scattering them in all directions. Raina wonders if such a popular hero will care any longer for her little affections, but she is nonetheless delighted about the news. She wonders if heroes such as Sergius esteem such heroic ideas because they have read too much Byron and Pushkin. Real life, as she knows, is quite different.

They are interrupted by the entry of Louka, a handsome and proud peasant girl, who announces that the Serbs have been routed and have scattered throughout the town and that some of the fugitives have been chased into the neighborhood. Thus, the doors must be secured since there might be fighting and shooting in the street below. Raina is annoyed that the fugitives must be killed, but she is immediately corrected — in war, everyone can be killed. Catherine goes below to fasten up the doors, and Louka shows Raina how to fasten the shutters if there is any shooting and then leaves to help bolt the rest of the house.

Left alone, Raina picks up her fiancé's picture, raises it above her head like a priestess worshipping it, and calls the portrait her "soul's hero." As she prepares for bed, shots are suddenly heard in the distance and then some more shots are heard; these are much nearer. She scrambles out of bed, rapidly blows out the candles, and immediately darts back into bed. She hears more shots, and then she hears someone tampering with the shutters from outside; there is a glimmer of light, and then someone strikes a match and warns her not to try to run away. Raina is told to light a candle, and after she does so, she is able to see a man in a Serbian's officer's uniform; he is completely bespattered with mud and blood, and he warns her that if it becomes necessary, he will shoot her because if he is caught, he will be killed — and he has no intention of dying. When they hear a disturbance outside the house, the Serbian officer quickly snatches Raina's cloak that she is about to use to cover herself; ungentlemanlike, he keeps it, knowing that she won't want a group of army officers searching her room when she is clad in only a sheer nightgown. There is more noise downstairs, and Louka is heard at the door; she says that there is a search party downstairs, and if Raina doesn't let them in, they will break down the door. Suddenly the Serbian officer loses his courage; he tells Raina that he is done for. He will shoot the first man who breaks in and "it will not be nice." Raina impulsively changes her mind and decides to hide him behind the curtains. Catherine, Louka, and a Russian officer dressed in a Bulgarian uniform enter, and after inspecting the balcony and hearing Raina testify that no one came in, they leave. (Louka, however, notices something behind the curtain and sees the revolver lying on the ottoman; she says nothing, however.) Raina slams and locks the door after them.

When the Serbian officer emerges and offers his thanks, he explains that he is not really a Serbian officer; he is a professional soldier, a Swiss citizen, in fact, and he now wishes that he had joined with the Bulgarians rather than with the Serbs. He asks to stay a minute to collect his thoughts, and Raina agrees, deciding to sit down also, but as she sits on the ottoman, she sits on the man's pistol, and she lets out a scream. Raina now realizes what it was that Louka was staring at, and she is surprised that the others didn't notice it. She is frightened of the gun, but the soldier tells her there is no need to be — it is not loaded: he keeps chocolates rather than bullets in his cartridge holder. In fact, he wishes he had some chocolates now. In mock scorn, Raina goes to the chest of drawers and returns with a half-eaten box of chocolates, the remainder of which he immediately devours. Raina is shocked to hear him say that only foolish young soldiers or else stupid ones like those in charge of the recent attack on the Serbs at Slivnitza carry bullets; wise and experienced soldiers carry chocolates. Then he offends her further (and still innocently, of course) by explaining how unprofessional the cavalry charge against the Serbians was, and if there had not been a stupid mistake on the part of the Serbs, the Bulgarians would have been massacred. Then the soldier says that the Bulgarian "hero," the leader of the troops, acted "like an operatic tenor . . . shouting his war-cry and charging like Don Quixote at the windmills." He says that the fellow was the laughingstock of everyone present: "Of all the fools let loose on a field of battle, that man must be the very maddest." Only a stupid mistake carried the day for him. Raina then takes the portrait of Sergius and shows it to the officer, who agrees that this was indeed the person who was "charging the windmills and imagining he was doing the finest thing."

Angry at the derogatory remarks about her "heroic" betrothed, Raina orders the stranger to leave. But he balks; he says that whereas he could climb up the balcony, he simply can't face the descent. He is so exhausted that he tells her to simply give out the alarm — he's beaten. Raina tries to spark some courage in him, but realizes that he is more prudent than daring. Raina is at a loss; she simply doesn't know what to do with him: he can't be caught in the Petkoff house, the richest house in Bulgaria and the only one to have a library and an inside staircase. She then remembers an opera by Verdi, *Ernani,*in which a fugitive throws himself on the mercy of some aristocratic people; she thinks that perhaps this might be the solution because, according to the opera, the hospitality of a nobleman is sacred and inviolable. In response, the soldier tells her that his father is a hospitable man himself; in fact, he owns six hotels in Switzerland. Then falling asleep, he kisses her hand. Raina panics. She insists that he stay awake until she can fetch her mother, but before she can get out of the room, he has crawled into her bed and is asleep in such a trance that when Raina returns with her mother, they cannot shake him awake. His fatigue is so great that Raina tells her mother: "The poor darling is worn out. Let him sleep." This comment arouses Catherine's stern reproach, and the curtain falls on the first act.

Analysis

In reading a Shavian play, one should pay attention to Shaw's staging directions at the beginning of the act. The stage directions here call for the scenery to convey the impression of cheap Viennese pretentious aristocracy incongruously combined with good, solid Bulgarian commonplace items. Likewise, since Raina will ultimately be seen as a person who will often assume a pose for dramatic effect, the act opens with her being (in Shaw's words) "intensely conscious of the romantic beauty of the night and of the fact that her own youth and beauty are part of it." As we find out later, she even listens at doors and waits until the proper moment to make the most effective, dramatic entrance.

As noted in the "Introduction" to these notes, the title of this play is ironic since it comes from the opening line of Virgil's *Aeneid*("Of arms and the man I sing. . . ."), an epic which glorifies war and the hero in battle. Shaw will use the idea of the hero (Sergius) in war (the Serbo-Bulgarian war) in order to satirize not merely war itself, but the romantic glorification of war. In addition to this goal, he will also satirize romantic notions of valor and courage, affectation and pretense, and most important, misguided idealism. The dramatic shift that will occur in the play involves two romantic idealists (Raina and Sergius) who, rejecting their original positions instead of marrying each other, will each become engaged to a practical realist — Sergius to the practical and attractive servant, Louka, and Raina to the professional realist, Captain Bluntschli.

Raina is seen, at first, as the romantic idealist, but she is also characterized as being a fleeting realist when she wonders if her idealism and Sergius' idealism might be due simply to the fact that they have read so much poetry by Byron and other romantics. Likewise, Raina wants to glory in the noble idealism of the war, but she is also deeply troubled by its cruelty: "What glory is there in killing wretched fugitives?" In this early comment, we have her rationale for her later hiding and, thus, her saving Bluntschli's life.

Before meeting Bluntschli, Raina seems to want to live according to the romantic idealism to which she and Sergius aspire. She knows that he has, in effect, placed her on too high a pedestal, but she does want to make an effort to live "up to his high standards." For example, after hearing of his heroic feats, she holds up his photo and "elevates it, like a priestess," vowing never to be unworthy of him. This vow, however, as we soon see, will not last too long.

Captain Bluntschli's arrival through the balcony doors is, in itself, a highly melodramatic and romantic stage entrance. In fact, almost everything about Act I is contrived — the lady's bedroom, the concealment of the fugitive behind a curtain, the threat of a bloody fight, the matter of chocolate creams, and, finally, the enemy soldier falling asleep in the lady's bed — all of this smacks of artificiality and is juxtaposed against Captain Bluntschli's realistic appraisal of war and his matter-of-fact assertion that, from a practical viewpoint, Sergius' military charge was as foolish as Don Quixote's charge on the Windmills. And actually, while Raina ridicules Captain Bluntschli for his cowardice, for his hiding behind a woman's curtains, for his inordinate fear (he has been under fire for three days and his nerves are "shot to pieces"), and for his extraordinary desire for chocolate creams, she is nevertheless attracted to him, and even though she pretends to be offended at his comments about Sergius, she is secretly happy that her fiancé is not as perfect as we were earlier led to believe that he was.

At the end of the act, Raina returns to her artificial pretensions as she tries to impress Bluntschli with her family's aristocratic aspirations, bragging that her father chose the only house in the city with an inside stairway, and a library, and, furthermore, Raina says, she attends the opera every year in Bucharest. Ironically, it is from romantic operas that Raina derives many of her romantic ideals, and she uses one of Verdi's romantic operas as her rationale for hiding this practical Swiss professional soldier. The final irony of the act is that the professional man of war is sleeping as soundly as a baby in Raina's bed, with her hovering over him, feeling protective about him.

***Act 1***

It is November 1885, during the Serbo-Bulgarian War. Raina Petkoff, a young Bulgarian woman, is in her bedchamber when her mother, Catherine, enters and announces there has been a battle close by and that Raina’s fiancé, Major Sergius Saranoff, was the hero of a cavalry charge. The women rejoice that Sergius has proven to be as heroic as they expected, but they soon turn to securing the house because of fighting in the streets. Nonetheless, a Serbian officer gains entry through Raina’s shutters. Raina decides to hide him and she denies having seen anyone when she is questioned by a Russian officer who is hunting for a man seen climbing the water pipe to Raina’s balcony. Raina covers well, and the Russian leaves without noticing the pistol on Raina’s bed.

When Raina hands the gun to the Serbian after the Russian leaves, the Serbian admits that the gun is not loaded because he carries chocolates in his cartridge belt instead of ammunition. He explains that he is a Swiss mercenary fighting for the Serbs because it is his profession to be a soldier and the Serbian war was close by. He adds that old, experienced soldiers carry food while only the young soldiers carry weapons. Shocked by this attitude, Raina criticizes him for being a poor soldier. He counters by describing what makes a real fool, not knowing that his version of the day’s cavalry charge makes fun of her betrothed. She is incensed but agrees to let him stay once he impresses upon her the danger of going back out into the street. She tries to impress him with her family’s wealth and position, saying that they have the nobility to give refuge to an enemy. He pledges her safety and advises her to tell her mother about his presence, to keep matters proper. While she is gone, he falls into a deep sleep on her bed and he cannot be roused by a shocked Catherine. Raina takes pity on him and asks that they let him sleep.

**Act 1, Section 1**

The play begins in [Raina](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Arms-and-the-Man/character-analysis/#Raina)'s bedroom, 1895. Raina's mother, [Catherine](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Arms-and-the-Man/character-analysis/#Catherine), tells Raina that her fiancée, [Sergius](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Arms-and-the-Man/character-analysis/#Sergius) (whose photograph is on ostentatious display in the room), was very heroic in a battle of the Serbo-Bulgarian War that day. He led the cavalry in a charge. Raina is happy because she had doubts about Sergius's bravery. Then, the servant [Louka](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Arms-and-the-Man/character-analysis/#Louka) comes in and says they must close the shutters because there is gunfire in the streets. Raina says she feels sorry for the Serbian soldiers, who are poor refugees, and she doesn't really want to close her shutters. Louka tells her in secret that the shutters don't close properly because the latch is broken. Raina closes them and goes to bed.

A moment later, a man breaks into the room. He is a Serbian soldier trying to avoid capture and death. Raina chides him for being fearful, and he says all soldiers are. A Bulgarian officer comes in, looking for the soldier, whom someone saw climbing up Raina's balcony. Raina hides the man and lies about him being there. The officer chalks it up to people's imaginations running away with them.

**Act 1, Section 2**

After the officer leaves, Raina notices that the man's gun was on the ottoman the whole time. He tells her it doesn't matter, as it wasn't loaded. He has no ammo because he's been carrying chocolate instead, to have something to eat. Raina is shocked but offers him some chocolate she has, as he is hungry.

They get to talking about that day's battle. The man says he was certainly fearful, as every soldier is once he's been in battle for three days. He also comments the Bulgarian army wasn't very professional, sending in soldiers they knew would be killed. The only reason they weren't killed was that the Serbians had the wrong kind of cartridges for their guns. He describes the man who led the cavalry charge in a way that makes him sound not very heroic and somewhat buffoonish. Raina shows him Sergius's picture and asks if he was the cavalry leader. The man says it was and apologizes. Raina tells him to leave. He says he can't climb the drainpipe again. He'd just as soon die. In fact, dying would just be a long sleep, and he's very tired. Raina takes pity on him and says he can take refuge in their home. After all, he is a guest and the duties of a host are paramount. He falls asleep in Raina's bed, and she tells her mother to let him sleep there.

## Summary and Analysis Act II

Summary

Some four months have passed since the first act, and a peace treaty has just been signed. The setting for this act is in Major Petkoff's garden. Louka is standing onstage in a disrespectful attitude, smoking a cigarette and talking to Nicola, a middle-aged servant who has "the complacency of the servant who values himself on his rank in servitude." The opening dialogue informs us that Nicola is engaged to Louka, but that he has reservations about her deportment. He refuses to marry a person who is "disrespectful" to her superiors; he plans to open a shop in Sofia, and he thinks that the success of the shop will depend on the goodwill of his employees, and he knows that if they spread bad reports about him, his shop will never be successful. When Louka maintains that she knows secret things about the mistress and the master, Nicola reminds her that all servants know secrets about their employers, but the secret of being a good servant is to keep these things secret and to always be discreet; if servants begin telling secrets, then no one will ever employ them again. Louka is furious and says that Nicola has "the soul of a servant"; Nicola agrees — "That is," he says, "the secret of success in service."

Their discussion is interrupted by the entrance of Major Petkoff, an "insignificant, unpolished man" who has just returned from the war. He sends Louka into the house to get his wife and to also bring him some coffee. Catherine comes out and welcomes her husband, and he tells her that the war is over, the peace treaty is signed, and all is now peaceful. When he inquires about his wife's health, she tells him that she has a sore throat. The Major maintains that the soreness comes "from washing [her] neck every day." He himself does not believe in these silly modern notions of washing. "It can't be good for the health; it's not natural. There was an Englishman at Philippopolis who used to wet himself all over with cold water every morning when he got up." He maintains that the English climate is so dirty that the English have to wash, but others don't; his father, for example, lived to be ninety-eight years old and never had a bath in his entire life.

As Catherine is explaining to her husband about the installation of an electric bell in the library, the Major is confused over its use because — in his opinion — if he wants someone, he will shout for them. At this time, Major Sergius Saranoff arrives; he is "a tall romantically handsome man" and is the original of the portrait in Raina's room in the first act. He is roundly congratulated for his famous charge against the Serbs. Sergius, however, does not appreciate the compliment, because even though he was successful, he participated in a maneuver where the Russian consultants failed; thus, he did not accomplish his great success by the rulebook. "Two Cossack colonels had their regiments routed on the most correct principles of scientific warfare. [Furthermore,] Two major-generals got killed strictly according to military etiquette," and now the two colonels who failed are promoted to generals and he (Sergius) who succeeded is still a major; therefore, he has resigned.

As Catherine is protesting that Sergius should not resign — the women, she says, are for him — Sergius suddenly asks, "Where is Raina?" At that very moment, Raina enters sweepingly, announcing, "Raina is here." Sergius drops chivalrously on one knee to kiss her hand. While Raina's father is impressed with the fact that Raina "always appears at the right moment," her mother is annoyed because she knows that Raina always listens at doorways in order to make her entrance at exactly the right moment. Catherine pronounces it to be "an abominable habit."

Raina then welcomes her father home, and again they discuss Sergius' military career. Sergius now views war in a very cynical manner; according to him, there is nothing heroic nor romantic about it. "Soldiering is the coward's art of attacking mercilessly when you are strong, and keeping out of harm's way when you are weak. . . . Never fight [your enemy] on equal terms." Furthermore, he now views soldiering as having too much of the taint of being a trade business, and he *despises*trade; this is, of course, an allusion to Captain Blutschli, who, of course, is in trade, and it is also a reference to Louka's fiancé, Nicola, who wants to go into trade. To prove his point, Sergius asks them all to consider the case of the Swiss officer (Bluntschli) who was able to deal very shrewdly and to make clever bargains concerning prisoners. As a result, soldiering has been "reduced to a matter of trading and bartering." He adds that the man was merely "a commercial traveler in uniform."

Since the subject has come up, Major Petkoff encourages Sergius to tell the story about the Swiss officer who climbed into a Bulgarian lady's bedroom in order to escape capture. Raina, recognizing herself as the woman of the story, pretends to be offended. Major Petkoff therefore tries to get Sergius to help him with some army details, and Catherine instructs Sergius to remain with Raina while Catherine discusses some business with her husband. By this ruse, she is able to leave the two young people alone.

Alone together, Raina looks upon Sergius with admiration and worship: "My hero! My king!" — to which he responds, "My queen!" Raina sees Sergius only in terms of the knight of olden times who goes forth to fight heroically, guided only by his lady's love. She believes that the two of them have truly found what she calls the perfect "higher love." When Louka is heard entering the house, Raina leaves to get her hat so that they can go for a walk and be alone. In Louka's presence, Sergius swaggers a bit and then asks Louka if she knows what "higher love" is. Whatever it is, he says, he finds it "fatiguing" to keep it up: "one feels the need of some relief after it." He then embraces Louka, who warns him to be careful, or, at least, if he won't let her go, he should step back where they cannot be seen. After she makes a sly comment about the possibility of Raina's spying on them, Sergius defends Raina and their "higher love," and Louka maintains that she will never understand "gentlefolk" because while Sergius is professing love for Raina, he is flirting with her behind Raina's back, and, furthermore, Raina is doing the same thing. Sergius tries to reprimand Louka for gossiping so about her mistress, but he is visibly upset and dramatically strikes his forehead. He insists that Louka tell him who his rival is, but she will not do so, especially since he has just reprimanded her for talking about her mistress. She tells him that she never actually saw the man; she only heard his voice outside Miss Raina's bedroom. But she knows that if the man ever comes here again, Raina will marry him. Sergius is furious, and he grips her so tightly that he bruises her arm; he reminds her that because of her gossiping, she has the "soul of a servant," the same accusation which she made earlier about Nicola. Louka retaliates by pointing out that Sergius himself is a liar, and, furthermore, she maintains that she is worth "six of her [Raina]." As Louka begins to leave, Sergius wants to apologize for hurting a woman, no matter what the status of that woman is, but Louka will not accept an apology; she wants more. When Sergius wants to pay her for the injury, Louka says that she wants him to kiss her bruised arm. Surprised, Sergius refuses, and Louka majestically picks up the serving pieces and leaves, just as Raina enters, dressed in the latest fashion of Vienna — of the previous year. Immediately, Catherine calls down that her husband needs Sergius for a few minutes to discuss a business matter.

When Sergius is gone, Catherine enters, and she and Raina express their irritation that "that Swiss" told the entire story of his night in Raina's bedroom. Raina maintains that if she had him here now she would "cram him with chocolate creams." Catherine is frightened that if Sergius finds out the truth about what happened, the engagement will be broken off. Suddenly, however, Raina reveals that she would not care, and that, furthermore, she has always wanted to say something dreadful so as to shock Sergius' propriety, "to scandalize the five senses out of him." She half-hopes that he will find out about her "chocolate cream soldier." She then leaves her mother in a state of shock.

Louka enters and announces the presence of a Serbian soldier at the door, a soldier who is asking for the lady of the house; he has sent his card bearing his name, "Captain Bluntschli," thus giving us for the first time the name of the "chocolate cream soldier." When Catherine reads the name and hears that the caller is Swiss, she realizes that he is the "chocolate cream soldier" and that he is returning the old coat of Major Petkoff's which they gave him when he left. Catherine gives Louka strict instructions to make sure that the library door is shut; then, Louka is to send in the captain and have Nicola bring the visitor's bag to her. When Louka returns with the captain, Catherine frantically explains that her husband and future son-in-law are here and that he must leave immediately. Captain Bluntschli agrees reluctantly and explains that he only wants to take the coat out of his bag, but Catherine urges him to leave it; she will have his bag sent to him later. As Bluntschli is writing out his address, Major Petkoff comes in and greets the captain warmly and enthusiastically. Immediately, Major Petkoff tells the captain that they are in desperate need of help in working out the details of sending troops and horses to Philippopolis. Captain Bluntschli immediately pinpoints the problem, and as they are about to go into the library to explain the details, Raina enters and bumps into the captain and surprisedly exclaims loudly: "Oh! the chocolate cream soldier." She immediately regains her composure and explains that she was cooking a kind of dessert and had made a chocolate cream soldier for its decoration and that Nicola sat a pile of plates on it. At that moment, Nicola brings in the captain's bag, saying that Catherine told him to do so; when Catherine denies it, Major Petkoff thinks that Nicola must be losing his mind. He reprimands Nicola (for doing what Nicola has been commanded to do), and at this point Nicola is so confused that he drops the bag, almost hitting the Major's foot. As the women try to placate the Major, he, in turn, urges Captain Bluntschli to remain as their houseguest until he has to return to Switzerland. Even though Catherine has been subtly suggesting that Captain Bluntschli leave, Bluntschli agrees to remain.

Analysis

*Arms and the Man*is an early Shavian play, and in it, Shaw used certain techniques that he was never to use again. In the first act, for example, the entire act has a farcical note about it and the use of a screen or a curtain for a character to hide behind was a traditional technique used only in comedies. The coat episode in the third act is a contrived bit of farce that amuses the audience, but it cheapens the intellectual aspect of the drama because it contributes nothing other than its own farcical element.

In Act II, the structure of the act is more serious, but it also uses several traditional farcical elements. For example, there is the use of the exaggerated means whereby Sergius can deceive Raina while trying to make love with Raina's maid, the story told in the army camp about the soldier who escapes into a lady's bedroom (while the ladies of the story have to listen in pretended dismay), the sudden appearance of the captain and the hasty decisions which the ladies must undertake, and finally the sudden surprise that occurs when we discover that Captain Petkoff knows Bluntschli — all of these circumstances are elements of melodrama or farce.

In the early part of the act, we see Louka as an ingenious maid who refuses to acknowledge that she has "the soul of a servant," a fault that she accuses Nicola of having. Later, however, when Sergius tells her that she possesses the soul of a servant, his comment stings. We do, however, admire the way that Louka is able to dismiss Nicola and to manipulate the supposedly superior and aristocratic Sergius.

When we meet Sergius and hear of his total disillusionment with war and with "soldiering [which] is the coward's art of attacking mercilessly when you are strong and keeping out of the way when you are weak," we are then prepared for the fact that Sergius will not be a romantic idealist for long. His new views on war should prepare us for a significant change in his total outlook on life; thus, he will soon reject Raina's idealistic "higher love" in favor of a more direct love with the attractive and practical Louka, a maid who says forthrightly that if Sergius is going to embrace her, then at least they should stand back where they can't be seen.

With Louka, Sergius can admit that there are at least six different people occupying himself and then wonder aloud, "Which of the six is the real man? That's the question that torments me." We now know that the real Sergius is not the one with whom Raina has fallen in love, the one with the "higher love." Thus, by the end of this act, Shaw has set up all of the necessary motives and reasons for Sergius and Raina to break off their engagement and marry someone else.

***Act 2***

On March 6, 1886, Raina’s father, Major Paul Petkoff, comes home and announces the end of the war. Catherine is upset that the Serbians have agreed to a peace treaty, believing that her side should have a glorious victory. Major Saranoff arrives just after Petkoff makes comments indicating that Saranoff is not a talented military leader. Catherine praises Saranoff, but he announces that he is resigning from the army. Raina joins the conversation just before the discussion turns to a Swiss officer who bested the men in a horse trade and who had been, according to a friend’s story, rescued by two Bulgarian ladies after a battle. Catherine and Raina pretend to be shocked by such unpatriotic behavior.

Catherine and Major Petkoff leave the two young people to have some time to alone. Raina and Sergius exchange all the silly platitudes expected of lovers about how much they missed each other and how they worship each other. However, while Raina is away to get her hat for a walk, Sergius flirts with the maid, Louka, whom he has apparently chased in the past. Louka protests his behavior and reveals that there is someone for whom Raina has real feelings, not the fake ones she puts on for Sergius. Sergius becomes angry and insults Louka, although he is confused about his own feelings.

Sergius goes to help Petkoff with some final military business. In his absence, Catherine tells Raina that Petkoff has asked for the coat they gave the enemy soldier when he left. Just then, the Swiss officer, Captain Bluntschli, arrives to return the coat. The women try but fail to hurry him away before Petkoff and Sergius see him. Bluntschli offers to help them with the logistics of their troop movements, and Petkoff invites him to stay, much to the discomfort of the ladies.

**Act 2, Section 1**

Several months later, Sergius and Major [Petkoff](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Arms-and-the-Man/character-analysis/#Petkoff) are coming home from war. Petkoff is pleased at having won, while Sergius announces he is going to resign from the military. They tell a story they heard from a Swiss soldier, who said he had escaped harm by hiding in a young lady's bedroom and then snuck off, wearing the master of the house's coat. Catherine and Raina appear offended by this story. Meanwhile, Louka and her fellow servant, [Nicola](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Arms-and-the-Man/character-analysis/#Nicola), to whom she is engaged, have figured out that something is up.

Sergius and Raina dramatically declare their love for one another and plan an outing.

**Act 2, Section 2**

After Raina leaves to get ready, Louka talks to Sergius. Sergius declares how tiring "higher love" is, meaning the type of love he has with Raina. They always have to make dramatic declarations of the other's perfection, and he is unable to be himself. Louka says there was a man in Raina's bedroom. She heard enough of their conversation to know that if the man returned, Raina would marry him. They had a real conversation, unlike Raina and Sergius. This upsets Sergius, and he grabs Louka's arm, bruising her. At the same time, though, they are also flirting. Louka asks Sergius to cure the bruise. He apologizes and offers her money, but she wants a kiss, which he will not give.

Raina and Catherine enter. After Sergius leaves the room to talk with Petkoff, they discuss how much trouble they'd be in if the men knew about the man in Raina's room. Raina, however, still seems enamored with the man and says she'd stuff him with chocolates if he came back. Just then, [Bluntschli](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Arms-and-the-Man/character-analysis/#Bluntschli), the very same soldier, arrives to return Petkoff's jacket. Catherine begs him to sneak out and plans to send back his duffel bag after she extracts Petkoff's coat from it. But before he can go, Petkoff and Sergius come into the room. Recognizing Bluntschli, whom they know, they invite him to stay at the house.

Summary and Analysis Act III

Summary

This act shifts to the Petkoffs' library, a setting which Shaw uses to let us know that this is a very poor excuse for a library; it consists of only a single room with a single shelf of old worn-out paper-covered novels; the rest of the room is more like a sitting room with another ottoman in it, just like the one in Raina's room in the first act. The room is also fitted with an old kitchen table which serves as a writing table. At the opening of the act, Bluntschli is busy at work preparing orders, with a businesslike regularity, for the disposition of the Bulgarian army. Petkoff is more of a hindrance than a help, for he constantly interrupts to see if he can be of any help. Finally, his wife tells him to stop interrupting. Petkoff, in turn, complains that all that he needs to be comfortable is his favorite old coat, which he can't find. Catherine rings for Nicola and tells the servant to go to the blue closet and fetch his master's old coat. Petkoff is so certain that it is not there that he is willing to make a bet of an expensive piece of jewelry with her. Sergius is about to enter a bet also, but Nicola suddenly returns with the coat. Petkoff is completely astonished and perplexed when Nicola announces that it was indeed hanging in the blue closet.

At this moment, Bluntschli finishes the last order, gives it to Sergius to take to his soldiers, and then asks Petkoff to follow to make sure that Sergius doesn't make a mistake. Petkoff asks his wife to come along because she is good at giving commands. Left alone with Raina, Bluntschli expresses his astonishment at an army where "officers send for their wives to keep discipline."

Raina then tells Captain Bluntschli how much better he looks now that he is clean, and she inquires about his experiences after he left her bedroom. She lets him know that the entire story has been told so many times that both her father and her fiancé are aware of the story, but not the identities of the people involved. In fact, Raina believes that "if Sergius knew, he would challenge you and kill you in a duel." Bluntschli says that he hopes that Raina won't tell, but Raina tells him of her desire to be perfectly open and honest with Sergius. Because of Bluntschli, Raina says, she has now told two lies — one to the soldiers looking for him in her room and another one just now about the chocolate pudding — and she feels terrible about lying; Bluntschli cannot take her seriously. In fact, he tells her that when "you strike that noble attitude and speak in that thrilling voice, I admire you; but I find it impossible to believe a single word you say." At first, Raina is indignant, but then she is highly amused that Bluntschli has seen through the disguise that she has used since she was a child: "You know, I've always gone on like that," she tells him.

When Raina asks him what he thought of her for giving him a portrait of herself, Bluntschli tells her that he never received it because he never reached into the pocket of the coat where Raina had put it. He is not concerned until he learns that Raina inscribed upon it "To my Chocolate Cream Soldier." In the meantime, Bluntschli confesses, he pawned the coat, thinking that was the safest place for it. Raina is furious, and she accuses him of having a "shopkeeping mind." At this point, they are interrupted by Louka, who brings Bluntschli some letters and telegrams, which inform him that his father has died and that Bluntschli has inherited several hotels which he will have to manage. He must leave immediately. Alarmed, Raina follows him out.

Nicola enters and sees Louka with her sleeve rolled up so as to expose her bruised arm, and he reprimands her. Then they argue over the duties and obligations of being a servant. Louka says that she absolutely refuses to act like a servant, and Nicola answers that he is quite willing to release her from their engagement if she can better herself. Then, he would have another customer for his shop, one who would bring him good business. When Sergius enters, Nicola leaves immediately, and Sergius, noticing the bruise on Louka's arm, asks if he can cure it now by kissing it. Louka reminds him of his place and of hers. She wonders aloud if Sergius is a brave man and if poor people are any less brave than wealthy people. Sergius answers that in war any man can have courage: "the courage to rage and [to] kill is cheap." Louka then asks if Sergius has true courage; that is, would he dare to marry someone whom he loved if that person was socially beneath him? She asserts that she thinks that Sergius would "be afraid of what other people would say," and thus he would never have the courage to marry beneath him. Sergius contradicts her until Louka tells him that Raina will never marry him, that Raina is going to marry the Swiss soldier. As she turns to go, Sergius grabs her and holds her firmly; as he threatens her and questions the truth of her accusation, she wonders if anyone would believe the fact that she is now in his arms. He releases her with the assertion that if he ever touches her again, it will be as her fiancé.

As Louka leaves, Bluntschli enters and is immediately told by Sergius where he is to be on the following morning; they will duel on horseback and with sabres. Bluntschli maintains that as the challenged party, it is his privilege to choose the weapons, and he plans to have a machine gun. But when Bluntschli sees that Sergius is serious, he agrees to meet him with a sabre, but he refuses to fight on horseback because it is too dangerous. Raina enters then, in time to hear their last arrangements. Bluntschli explains that he is an expert with the sword and that he will see to it that neither of them are hurt; afterward, he will leave immediately for Switzerland and no one will ever hear of the incident. Sergius then accuses Bluntschli of receiving favors from Raina which he (Sergius) has never enjoyed — that is, she received Bluntschli in her bedroom. Bluntschli points out that she did so "with a pistol at her head. . . . I'd have blown out her brains if she'd uttered a cry." Sergius cannot accept the story that there is nothing between the two because if it were true, then Captain Bluntschli would not have come back to the Petkoff house. He could have sent the coat; he came only to see Raina.

When Sergius makes further accusations, Raina reminds him that she saw him and Louka in each other's arms, and she now understands about their relationship. Sergius realizes that his and Raina's engagement is over, and he therefore cancels the duel with Bluntschli, who is pleased to get out of it since he didn't want to fight in the first place. Raina, however, is furious, and she tells Bluntschli that Sergius had Louka spy on them and that Sergius rewarded Louka by making love to her. As they continue to argue, Bluntschli tries to get Sergius to stop because he is losing the argument. Suddenly, Bluntschli asks where Louka is. Raina maintains that she is listening at the door, and as Sergius stoutly denies such a thing, Raina goes to the door and drags Louka inside; she was, in fact, eavesdropping. Louka is not ashamed; she says that her love is at stake and that her feelings for Sergius are stronger than Raina's feelings for the "chocolate cream soldier."

At this point, Major Petkoff enters in short sleeves; his old coat is being mended. When Nicola enters with it, Raina helps him on with the coat and deftly removes the inscribed portrait from the coat pocket. Thus, when her father reaches for the photograph to ask Raina the meaning of a photograph of her with the inscription: "Raina, to her Chocolate Cream Soldier: A Souvenir," the photo is missing! Major Petkoff is confused and asks Sergius if he is the "chocolate cream soldier." The Major responds indignantly that he is not. Then Bluntschli explains that he is the "chocolate cream soldier" and that Raina saved his life. Petkoff is further confused when Raina points out that Louka is the true object of Sergius' affections, despite the fact that Louka is engaged to Nicola, who denies this and says that he is hoping for Louka's good recommendation when he opens his shop.

Suddenly Louka feels as though she is being bartered, and she demands an apology; when Sergius kisses her hand in apology, she reminds him that his touch now makes her his "affianced wife," and even though Sergius had forgotten his earlier statement, he still holds true to his word and claims Louka for his own. At this moment, Catherine enters and is shocked to find Louka and Sergius together. Louka explains that Raina is fond only of Bluntschli, and before Raina can answer, Bluntschli explains that such a young and beautiful girl as Raina could not be in love with a thirty-four-year-old soldier who is an incurable romantic; the only reason he came back, he says, was not to return the coat but to get just one more glance at Raina, but he fears that she is no more than seventeen years old. Raina then tells Bluntschli that he is indeed foolishly romantic if he thinks that she, a twenty-three-year-old woman, is a seventeen-year-old girl. At this point, Bluntschli asks permission to be a suitor for Raina's hand. When he is reminded that Sergius comes from an old family which kept at least twenty horses, Bluntschli begins to enumerate all of the possessions (including two hundred horses) which he owns; he fails, however, to mention that his possessions are connected with the hotel business that he has just inherited. His list of possessions is so impressive that it is agreed that he shall indeed marry Raina, who is delighted with her "chocolate cream soldier." As Bluntschli leaves, with the promise of being back in two weeks, Sergius looks in wonder and comments, "What a man! Is he a man!"

Analysis

After the farcical bit about the discovery of the old coat in the blue closet, which perplexes Major Petkoff, Shaw then gets down to the resolution of the drama, which involves the revealing of Raina's, Sergius', and Bluntschli's true natures.

First, in Bluntschli's interview with Raina, we see him as the practical man who will not let Raina assume any of her poses; he will laugh at all of the poses that she assumes. Captain Bluntschli, while being charmed and captivated by Raina, refuses to take her poses seriously; that is, he delights in her posturing, but he is not deceived by them: "When you strike that noble attitude and speak in that thrilling voice, I admire you; but I find it impossible to believe a single word you say." Thus, Bluntschli forces Raina to reveal her true nature, and she is delighted that someone has seen through her guise and has allowed her to come down off her pedestal. We were earlier prepared for this revelation when she told her mother that she would like to shock Sergius; already, we have seen that she finds "higher love" to be something of a strain on her. Thus, it is ultimately a relief for her to discard all of her artificial poses and finally become herself.

Likewise, Bluntschli changes. While he will not tolerate posturing, yet, since he is such a plainspoken man, we are surprised to discover that beneath his exterior, he has a romantic soul — that is, he came back with the Major's coat only to have one more glimpse of Raina, with whom he is infatuated. Therefore, as the practical man is seen to change, so also does Sergius, whom we saw very early in the second act confess to being tired of playing this game of the ideal of the "higher love." He is immensely relieved not to have to be the over-idealized, noble object of Raina's love; he found trying to live up to her expectations tiresome. After discovering that there is no nobility or heroics connected with war, he is delighted to discover that Raina's heroics are not for him; as a result, he turns to the more basic but yet attractive Louka.

The resolution of the drama is brought about by the simple technique of having all of the characters recognize their basic nature and yield to it. Consequently, the ending of this comedy is similar to most classic comedies — that is, after a mix-up or confusion between the lovers, everyone is paired with the proper person finally.

***Act 3***

Bluntschli is busy drawing up orders, and Saranoff signs them as everyone else is lounging in the library. Petkoff complains that he would be more comfortable in his old coat, but he cannot find it. Now that Bluntschli has returned it, Catherine insists that the coat is in the blue closet, where she placed it since the last time her husband looked. When the servant finds the coat in the appropriate closet, Petkoff dismisses the incident as a foible of old age.

When Saranoff and Petkoff go out to deliver orders to the couriers, Raina has a chance to talk with Bluntschli alone, and she lets him know that his story about his evening in her room made it through camp rumors all the way to her father and her fiancé. After bantering about honor and lies, Raina reveals that she had slipped her portrait and a note into her father’s old coat when she gave it to Bluntschli. Unfortunately, Bluntschli never discovered it, and they realize that it could still be in the pocket. A messenger arrives with telegrams that tell Bluntschli that his father has died and that he must attend to the family business.

Louka and the manservant, Nicola, have an exchange about Louka’s ambitions and about the role of servants. Nicola realizes that it might be more to his advantage to let Louka marry Saranoff and to then become their servant. Later, Saranoff and Louka argue about whether Saranoff is afraid to express his love for Louka, and she reveals that Raina has fallen for Bluntschli. Saranoff challenges Bluntschli to a duel, but when Raina charges that she saw Saranoff with Louka, he backs off. Raina then stirs Saranoff’s emotions by telling him that Louka is engaged to Nicola.

Petkoff enters, complaining that his coat had to be repaired. When Raina helps Petkoff put on the coat, she pulls the incriminating photo from the pocket and tosses it to Bluntschli, not knowing that her father has already seen the photo. When Petkoff does not find the photo in his pocket, the questioning begins about the photo’s inscription to a “Chocolate Cream Soldier,” and an avalanche of truthful revelations from all parties begins. Nicola wisely denies being engaged to Louka so she can marry Saranoff. As Catherine protests the dishonor to Raina, Louka injects that Raina would not have married Saranoff anyway because of Bluntschli. The Swiss captain is hesitant to declare himself in love until he learns that Raina is twenty-three years old, and is not the teenager he thought she was. Confident then that she is old enough to know her feelings, Bluntschli asks for Raina’s hand in marriage. Again, Catherine protests because she thinks Bluntschli cannot provide for her daughter appropriately, so he tells them of his great wealth. Raina puts up a token protest about being sold to the highest bidder, but Bluntschli reminds her that she fell in love with him before she knew he had any rank or money. She capitulates, and the play ends with everyone happy.

**Act 3, Section 1**

A bit later, in the library, Bluntschli is fixing Major Petkoff's military matter when Petkoff says he wants his coat, which he cannot find. Catherine says it's in the closet and sends Nicola to get it. While she is gone, Petkoff takes bets on whether or not the coat will be found. Nicola returns with the coat, which he found in the closet where it belongs. Bluntschli completes his work and Sergius, Petkoff, and Catherine go off to deliver the orders.

Left alone with Bluntschli, Raina tells him that Petkoff and Sergius heard about him hiding in a lady's room but don't know that she is the lady. She says Sergius would challenge him to a duel and kill him if he knew. What's more, she says it is hard for her to lie to Sergius because she never lies. Bluntschli says he thinks she lies all the time, as does he. He also says he admires her. Raina tells Bluntschli that he is the first man not to take her seriously, and he says he is the first man who *has*. She says she puts on a noble attitude in front of everyone, implying it is an act. They all believe her. Raina tells Bluntschli she left a portrait of herself in the coat, for him to find. However, he didn't see it and thinks it might still be in the coat. It might not be, though, since he also pawned the coat for a while. Raina is horrified because she wrote something on the portrait.

Louka comes in with mail for Sergius, saying that his father is dead. She and Nicola discuss that she has ideas above her station.

**Act 3, Section 2**

Sergius and Louka argue about Sergius caring too much what others think. She says if she were the empress of Russia, she would marry the man she loved even if he was beneath her. But Sergius doesn't have that kind of courage. Sergius says she is just jealous of Raina. Louka says she knows Raina really loves Bluntschli, not him. Sergius says that if he were to love Louka, he would marry her in spite of what Bulgaria thinks. If he touches her again, it will be as his fiancée.

Sergius challenges Bluntschli to a duel. Bluntschli protests Raina only allowed him in her room because he held a pistol to her head. Raina realizes that it was Louka who told Sergius the truth. She knows Sergius has been making love to Louka.

Petkoff enters. He has found the photograph in his coat pocket, which Raina inscribed, "Raina, to her [Chocolate](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Arms-and-the-Man/symbols/#Chocolate) Cream Solider: a souvenir." Finally, Bluntschli tells Petkoff what happened. Petkoff asks which of the gentlemen she is engaged to. Raina says that Sergius loves Louka, not her. Petkoff says that's impossible because Louka is engaged to Nicola. Nicola says she isn't. He gives her up, and Sergius becomes engaged to Louka. After realizing that Raina wants to marry him and is 23, which is older than he thought, Bluntschli becomes a suitor for Raina's hand. He reveals he has a lot of family money from his hotel business. Raina protests that she didn't give her hand to kiss, her bed to sleep in, or her roof to shelter to the emperor of Switzerland. She gave them to her chocolate cream soldier.

## Character Analysis

## Raina Petkoff

Raina is one of Shaw's most delightful heroines from his early plays. In the opening scenes of the play, she is presented as being a romantically idealistic person in love with the noble ideal of war and love; yet, she is also aware that she is playing a game, that she is a *poseuse* who enjoys making dramatic entrances (her mother is aware that Raina listens at doors in order to know when to make an effective entrance), and she is very quixotic in her views on love and war.

Whenever Raina strikes a pose, she is fully aware "of the fact that her own youth and beauty are part of it." When she accuses Bluntschli of being "incapable of gratitude" and "incapable of any noble sentiments," she is also amused, and she is later delighted that he sees through her "noble attitude" and her pretensions. In fact, her attraction for Bluntschli is partly due to the fact that she can step down off the pedestal which she must be upon, metaphorically, whenever she is in Sergius' presence. She shocks her mother when she says that she would like to shock Sergius' propriety since he is such a "stuffed shirt." Yet, at first, she is filled with undefined ideals. She admires Sergius' victories, but she is also genuinely troubled by the reports of the suffering and slaughter that accompany the war. She does respond immediately to the plight of the Serbian soldier (Captain Bluntschli), even though just a few moments earlier, she was delighting in Sergius' victory over the Serbs. And when there is the possibility of an actual slaughter taking place in her room (the Swiss soldier vowed to kill rather than be killed — even though we later discover that this was a bluff since he had no bullets), she impetuously decides to hide him and help him escape. When Bluntschli ridicules Sergius' quixotic cavalry charge, she pretends to be offended, but she is secretly glad that her intended is not "perfect."

Of Raina, Shaw wrote in an essay entitled "A Dramatic Realist to his Critics":

The heroine [Raina] has been classified by critics as a minx, a liar, and a poseuse; I have nothing to do with that: the only moral question for me is, does she do good or harm? If you admit that she does good, that she generously saves a man's life and wisely extricates herself from a false position with another man, then you may classify her as you please — brave, generous and affectionate; or artful, dangerous, faithless — it is all one to me. . . .

Raina, then, is perhaps a combination of all the above qualities. She is romantic, for example, when she remembers an opera (Verdi's *Ernani*) in which a member of the aristocracy shelters an enemy; thus, she shelters Bluntschli, since it is "chivalrous" to protect him. She does possess exalted ideals, but she is also pleased to step down from her pedestal and enjoy life directly; finally, in spite of her aristocratic background, she marries a person with "the soul of a hotel keeper."

## Character Analysis

## Captain Bluntschli

Captain Bluntschli is a thirty-four-year-old realist who sees through the absurd romanticism of war. Furthermore, unlike the aristocratic volunteers who are untrained, amateurish idealists, Captain Bluntschli is a professional soldier, trained in waging a war in a highly efficient, businesslike manner. These methods allow Sergius to refer to his ability to wage a war as being low-class commercialism, devoid of any honor and nobility. Bluntschli would agree with this appraisal since he sees nothing romantic about the violent and senseless slaughter of human beings, even though it is his profession.

Being a professional soldier, he adopts a practical and wise view (his name is a combination of *Blunt,*plus the ending, which in Swiss means "sweet" or "endearing" or "lovable"). Given the choice of being killed or saving his life by climbing up a balcony and into a lady's bedroom, he chooses unheroically not to be killed. Practically, he knows that a dead professional soldier is of no value to anyone; thus, he saves his life by the most expedient method available — he hides in a lady's bedchamber. Likewise, given the choice of killing someone or of not going hungry, he chooses to eat rather than to kill; thus, he carries chocolates rather than cartridges, a highly unromantic but very practical thing to do.

When Bluntschli first hears of Sergius' cavalry charge and refuses to view Sergius' actions in any way except as a foolhardy display of false heroics, he reveals his complete practicality and subjects himself to Raina's charge that he is "incapable of appreciating honor and courage." Yet, his questioning of Sergius' actions causes Raina to question Sergius' qualities.

Bluntschli does possess some qualities which cause Raina to exchange the "noble and heroic" Sergius in favor of him. Raina's perfect honesty, in fact, allows her to relax and to come down from her pedestal. Bluntschli's fondness for chocolates in the midst of war is appealingly incongruous. His docility, combined with his efficiency, endears him to others, especially the entire Petkoff family, and, finally, he reveals to the established group that he is an incurable romantic. He explains that he could have sent the old coat back, but that he wanted to return it personally so that he could have one more glimpse of the entrancing Raina. Thus, he wins her for his "affianced wife."

## Character Analysis

## Sergius Saranoff

Sergius is the epitome of what every romantic hero should be: He is dashing, swashbuckling, devastatingly handsome, idealistic, wealthy, aristocratic, brave, and the acclaimed hero of a recent crushing victory in a recent cavalry raid which he led. He is possessed of only the loftiest and most noble ideals concerning war, romance, and chivalry, and he represents the quintessence of what a noble Bulgarian aristocrat should be. Yet Sergius is more than this. He is an aristocrat, but he is a Byronic type who has certain ideals, and he is likely to become thoroughly disillusioned when these ideals fail. For example, Sergius did go to war filled with high ideals, and he did lead a heroic and courageous cavalry attack; later, however, he discovered that wars are not conducted by bravery and courage; they are more often waged and won better by efficient and practical planning than they are won by glorious and chivalric deeds. For Sergius, then, war is only fit for sons of hotel keepers, who have something of the tradesman about them. For that reason, Sergius has resigned from the army in complete disillusionment.

After having become cynical about soldiering, Sergius becomes skeptical about his relationship with Raina. After all, as he tells Louka, it is rather tiresome having to live up to Raina's "ideal of the higher love." It was he, however, who placed Raina on a pedestal so high, in fact, that he was blinded to any possible fault she might have. When Louka reveals all of Raina's faults — Raina lies, she pretends, and she has entertained another man in her bedroom — Sergius then feels free to cast his affections where they normally lead him — into marriage with the attractive Louka.

# Arms and the Man Themes

## Ignorance vs. Knowledge

[*Arms and the Man*](https://www.gradesaver.com/arms-and-the-man) is concerned foremost with the clash between knowledge and ignorance, or, otherwise stated, between realism and romanticism. [Raina](https://www.gradesaver.com/arms-and-the-man/study-guide/character-list#raina) and her fiancé [Sergius](https://www.gradesaver.com/arms-and-the-man/study-guide/character-list" \l "sergius) are steeped in the romanticism of operettas and paperback novels. [Bluntschli](https://www.gradesaver.com/arms-and-the-man/study-guide/character-list" \l "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](https://www.gradesaver.com/arms-and-the-man/study-guide/character-list" \l "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](https://www.gradesaver.com/arms-and-the-man/study-guide/character-list#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](https://www.gradesaver.com/arms-and-the-man/study-guide/character-list#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 [George Bernard Shaw](https://www.gradesaver.com/author/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 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 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 a 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.

## 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 here 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 ammunitions 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 similies. 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 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.

# Dramatic Irony and Literary Elements

## 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 show 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.

**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

## 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.

## 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.

## 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 Aenas. 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.

## 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.

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.

Questions   
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