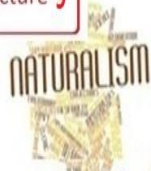
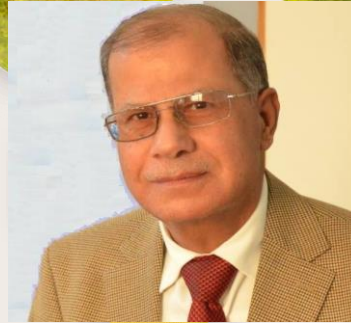


Lecture 9



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Hello!

Our lecture today will focus on the themes tackled
in the play.

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NATURALISM

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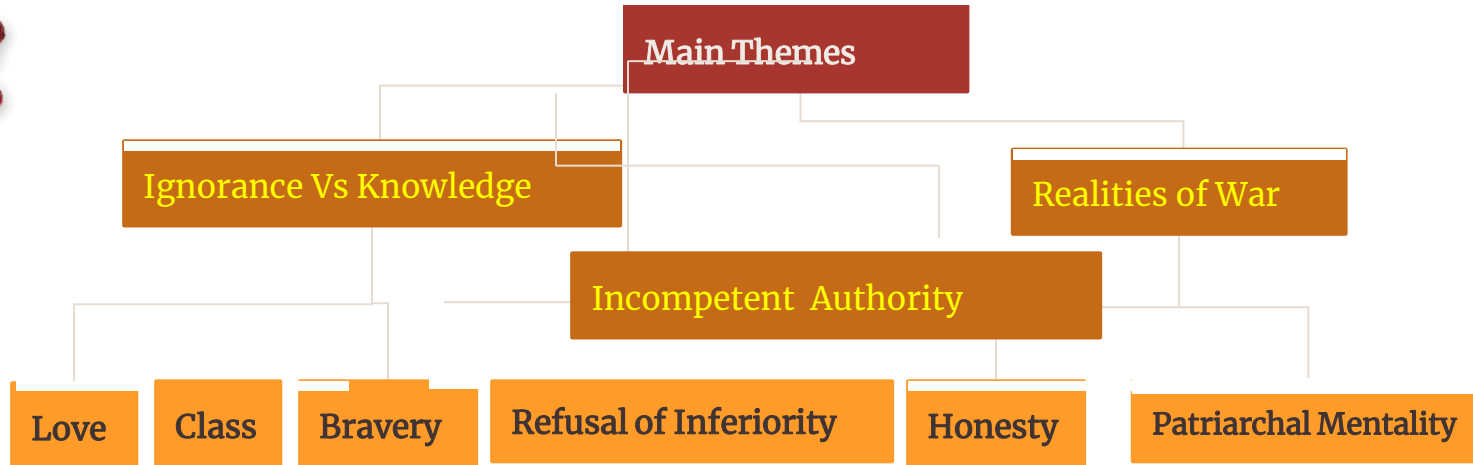
Arms and the Man- Themes of the Play

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Ignorance Vs Knowledge

Arms and the Man is concerned foremost with the clash between knowledge and ignorance, or, otherwise stated, between realism and romanticism. Raina and her fiancé Sergius are steeped in the romanticism of operettas and paperback novels. Bluntschli uses his superior knowledge to disabuse Raina of her military delusions, while the experience of war itself strips Sergius of the grand ideals he held. The couple's idealized vision of warfare deflates in the face of additional information. In the realm of love, the couple's pretensions are defeated by the thoroughgoing pragmatism of their respective new matches: Bluntschli and Louka. Both the Swiss Captain and Bulgarian maid confront their lovers about the gap between their words and their true selves, exposing their hypocrisy. When faced with reality, both Raina and Sergius are able to abandon their romantic delusions and embrace their honest desires.



The Realities of War

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



The Realities of Love

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

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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.

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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.

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Bravery

- 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.



Thanks!

Any questions?

You can find me at the url below

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