

# "Arms and The Man" as an Anti-Romantic Comedy.

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Arms and the Man is an anti-romantic comedy. In the play Shaw attacks the romantic ideas about war and love. By romanticism Shaw means all that is not based on fact and reality. This play is anti-romantic because in it Shaw has attacked the romantic and idealistic notions about life; and it is a comedy because in it he has exposed and laughed at the romantic illusions about love and war.

In Arms and the Man Shaw exposes the unsoundness of the romantic view of war. There was a popular view that war is a romantic game which gives a man the opportunity of displaying his heroism. And a soldier is a superman, a great hero, above all weaknesses. The soldier who takes the biggest risk in war is the greatest hero. But Shaw ridicules the romantic views about war and soldiering in the play.

Raina and Sergius are two apostles of romantic illusions. She becomes wild in joy when she learns from her mother that Sergius has won the battle of Slivnitza by leading a cavalry charge against a battery of machine guns. She feels that all her ideas about Sergius' heroism have been proved true. She worships his portrait like a priestess and addresses it as the hero of her soul.

But soon afterwards, she comes into close contact with the realities of war when Bluntschli suddenly bursts into her bedroom. He tells her what is true about life and war. He says that soldiers are afraid to die and it is their duty to live as long as they can. He again tells her that "nine soldiers out of ten are born fools." He further says that cartridges are of no use to a soldier in the battle field. From his experience he has learnt that food is more useful to a fighting soldier than any weapons of war because food provides sufficient strength to fight heroically. He shatters her ideas about Sergius' heroism by telling her that Sergius led the cavalry charge like an utter fool because if the Serbians had the right kind of ammunition in their machine guns, the Bulgarians could be massacred.

Sergius himself has learnt the reality of war. To display bravery was the only matter to him. So ignoring the command of the Russian officer and violating military rules he led the cavalry charge against the artillery at his own responsibility. But reality begins to prevail over him when he sees that two Cossack colonels were promoted to major-generals, though they lost the battle following the rules of military warfare strictly, but he was discredited by the Russian officers instead of being promoted because he won the battle the wrong way. Ultimately he realises that soldiering is the coward's art of attacking the enemies when they are weaker and keeping at a safe distance when they are stronger. When Bluntschli narrates the horror of war, Sergius' romance is completely shattered and he considers war as a fraud, a hollow sham.

In *Arms and the Man* Shaw takes a realistic view about love and marriage and exposes the hollowness of romantic love. Raina and Sergius have 'higher love' for each other. But their higher love fails to tie them together. When Raina goes out of his sight, his sexual instinct is stirred by the physical charm of the maid servant, Louka. He makes amorous advances towards her. He takes her into the stable yard gateway to be hidden themselves so that they cannot be seen at the time of their love-making. But Raina sees all through the window.

Raina's romantic illusion about love begins to shatter when she meets Bluntschli. She feels sympathy for him and gives him shelter and chocolates. When he leaves the Petkoff house, she gives him behind his back her photograph with the inscription: "Raina to her Chocolate Cream Soldier: a Souvenir." She sees Sergius flirting with Louka but does not protest. When Sergius accuses her of allowing Bluntschli to make love to her behind his (Sergius') back, she wonders, "Oh, what sort of God is this I have been worshipping!" Then she also accuses him of having flirted with Louka. She realises his real character and becomes completely disillusioned about him, and begins to feel even more drawn towards Bluntschli.

Hence both Raina and Sergius get rid of their 'higher love.' When Sergius is exposed, he declares to marry Louka. Raina agrees to marry Bluntschli because she finds him a practical minded man with great common sense and lot of first hand knowledge of life and human nature. She also finds in him economic security and comfort.

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Thus in Arms and the Man Shaw expresses his anti-romantic attitude towards love and war. In the play he does not idealises war. He exposes the hollowness of the love of war. He also exposes the follies of romantic love. He shows that love is not a romance but a reality. To him love and marriage should be based on economic security and mutual understanding. In the play he tries to find out the essence of truth behind the garb of romance and respectability.

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