



Research Paper

The Notion of ‘Self’ in George Bernard Shaw’s dramatic work *Arms and the Man*

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Abstract

George Bernard Shaw, in his literary work, *Arms and the Man*, deals with various topics that affect the life of the British community socially and politically, he has dealt with many issues related to the life of the British people with his dramatic views and opposed the government calling for their rights. Set amid the quadrimester Bulgarian-Serbo war that lasted from November, 1885 till March, 1886, that drama satirizes the foolishness of glorifying something as horrible as war and satirizes his sentimental madness about the idealistic conception of love. In *Arms and the Man*, he explores the themes of the drama in a very satirical and humorous way. It focuses on fundamentals such as the search for genuine individuality and personality, the genuineness of senseless war, and the silly question of dreamy love, freedom to choose and decide. Depicting the useless war of the Bulgarians with its contentious beliefs and practices, it represents the final station of the human beings in the drama. Furthermore, it shows that protagonists such as Bluntschli and Sergius arrived the summit of forthright individualism along with their abandoned conventional career choices as well as familial posts. The examination too addresses by what means oppressed characters alike Nicola and Louka deal with the futile civil structure, false aristocratic lifestyle and rascal upper class in exploration of the elite's continuity. George Bernard Shaw wrote the play chiefly as a means to advocate reality and disillusion audiences with romantic assortment of courage, war and wedding. Thus, this study explores the notion of ‘self’ in this drama through the use of sarcasm and ironic vision.

Keywords: arms, man, war, love, drama.

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I. Introduction

George Bernard Shaw, sometimes known as G. B. Shaw, was an Irish author, commentator, sophist and civic advocate who lived from July 26, 1856, to November 2, 1950. From the 1880s until his death and beyond, he left a lasting effect on Western politics, theatre, and society. He produced more than 60 plays, including well-known pieces like *Saint Joan*, *Man and Superman*, and *Pygmalion*. Shaw developed into the renowned playwright regarded as belonging to his period and was given the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1925. His works also mix modern sarcasm with classical allegory. *Arms and the Man* was early made on 21 April, 1894 appearing in the Avenue Theater and issued in 1898 as component of Shaw's *Pleasant Plays* with inclusion of *You Never Can Tell*, *Candida*, and *The Man of Destiny*. *Arms and the Man* was one of Shaw's early financial achievements. He was called to the stage behind the screen, where he was warmly applauded. Amidst applause, a person boomed. He characteristically replied: "My dear fellow, I quite agree with you, but what are we two against so many?" This drama is "Drama of Ideas", that displays the hollowness of battle and humorously addresses the hypocrisy of humans.

Arms and the Man is a comedy, whose title source is the beginning of Virgil's *Aeneid*: "Of arms and the man I sing".

Calvin T. Higgs, Jr. disclosed how Vergil's *Aeneid* is used in *Arms and the Man*:

To examine the play in relation to Vergil's epic is to investigate the link established between the playwright and the play in its development stages. Desiring to produce a literary expression of his developing philosophy, Shaw

was drawn to those elements of Vergil which seemed to demonstrate a positive determinism operating on human actors. (3)

Three acts make up this drama. The Serbo-Bulgarian War is included in Act I of the play, which is set in November 1885. Teenage Bulgarian lady Raina Petkoff is in her chamber when her mother Catherine walks in and tells her that there was an attack nearby and Major Sergius Saranoff, Raina's fiancé, won a cavalry attack. Both females exclaim with joy that Saranoff fulfilled their need for a hero:

RAINA: It proves that all our ideas were real after all. (2)

But they soon turn to guarding the dwelling as a result of street fights. However, a Serbian army officer enters over Raina's doors. Raina chooses to cover him and rejects seeing anybody during interrogating by a Russian officer who was looking for a guy who was delineated moving up through the plumbing to get to Raina's gallery. She carefully shields and Serb after the Russians had left, the Serb admits that the weapon had been unloaded as he was carrying chocolates in the cartridge belt instead of bullets:

MAN: I've no ammunition. What use are cartridges in battle? I always carry chocolate instead. (11)

He reveals that due to his military duty and the impending Serbian conflict, he was a Swiss mercenary fighting on the side of the Serbs. He continues by saying that only brand-new troops carry ammo, whereas ordinary and veteran soldiers carry food. Raina is taken aback by this attitude and calls him a lousy soldier. Unaware that his depiction of the horseman of the day is making fun of her betrothed, he responds by listing the characteristics of a true jerk:

MAN: You never saw a cavalry charge, did you?

RAINA: How could I?

MAN: Ah, perhaps not—of course. Well, it's a funny sight. It's like slinging a handful of peas against a window pane: first one comes; then two or three close behind him; and then all the rest in a lump. (13)

Raina is furious but agreed to let him stay when he made her realize the harms of returning to the streets. She attempts to influence him by means of her lineage's money and status, telling that her family own a noble right to incline on the inimical. Bluntschli promises her security and suggests her to inform her mom of this situation, so that all goes well. When she was away, he slept for long in her bed and couldn't be woken up by Catherine in shock. Raina takes pity on him and says her mom to let him sleep.

Act-II of the play is set on 6 March, 1886, when Raina's dad, Major Paul Petkoff, returns to his residence and proclaims the termination of the battle. Catherine is saddened that the Serbs had signed peace treaty, thinking Russians could win. It's class consciousness with the force of the Petkoff couple in weapons and people brag high-end turn signal light like the library and the electric bell when in fact their library has only arranged some novels in the cupboard:

CATHERINE: You are a barbarian at heart still, Paul. I hope you behaved yourself before all those Russian officers.

PETKOFF: I did my best. I took care to let them know that we have a library.

CATHERINE: Ah; but you didn't tell them that we have an electric bell in it? I have had one put up. (20)

Louka insults her fiance Nicola amid one clash about meeting class expectations. Louka wants to be hurt by her own comments, but Nicola is not. He practically understands and accepts his post in community. At this, Louka says:

LOUKA: You have the soul of a servant, Nicola. (23)

Major Saranoff comes immediately after Petkoff made statements that demonstrate Sergius is no-good army commander. Catherine admires Sergius, but he proclaims his retirement from the army:

SERGIUS: Soldering, my dear madam, is the coward's art of attacking mercilessly when you are strong, and keeping out of harm's way when you are weak.(29)

Raina involves in the chat just ahead the argument transforms into a Serb officer who conquered the persons in a cavalry attack and as per a colleague, was safeguarded by two Bulgarian women later in action. Catherine and Raina assume to be dismayed at the untrustworthy conduct. Catherine and Major Petkoff leave the two youthful persons alone. Raina and Sergius exchange all the idiotic things lovers expect about how much they yearn for each other. However, as Raina walks around wearing a hat, Saranoff hits on the maid Louka, whom he seems to have pursued in the old days. Louka opposes this attitude of his and discloses that yonder is somebody Raina has honest affections for and not the fabricated emotions she has for Saranoff. Sergius is annoyed and censures Louka, even though he is baffled with his own emotions.:

LOUKA: do you know what higher love is?... Very fatiguing thing to keep up for any length of time, Louka. One feels the need of some relief after it.(32)

Petkoff receives some final military assistance from Sergius. Raina is informed by Catherine that Petkoff sought his coat, which they had given to the Serb while she was away. Soon later, Captain Bluntschli, a Swiss officer, shows in to collect the coat. Because Petkoff and Sergius observed him, the women's attempts to hurry him up were unsuccessful. To the dismay of the women, Petkoff accepts Bluntschli's offer to help them with the logistics of relocating soldiers and extends an invitation to live with them.

In Act III of the play, as everyone is unwinding in the study, Bluntschli is busy making instructions that Saranoff signs. Petkoff grumbles that his previous coat—which is nowhere to be found—would make him more comfortable. Bluntschli had returned it, and Catherine was insistent on keeping it into the blue cupboard. Petkoff saw the occurrence as a flaw in fogginess when the coat was discovered by a servant in the proper closet. Raina has an opportunity to meet privately with Bluntschli while Saranoff and Petkoff are out giving orders to the couriers, and she informs him that the tale of the night out in her room became viral. She, her father, and her boyfriend all heard about the whispers in the camp. In this section, Bluntschli explains:

BLUNTSCHLI: When you get into that noble attitude and speak in that thrilling voice, I admire you; but I find it impossible to believe a single word you say. (51)

Raina reveals, after joking about grandeur and deceit, that she tucked her photo with a letter under her dad's coat when giving it to Bluntschli. Unluckily, Bluntschli at no time recovered it, and they think that it is yet in the coat. A herald comes with a message informing Bluntschli that his dad passed away and he must take over his family trade. Louka talks of her goals with Nicola. Nicola realises it is preferable for him to let Louka marry Saranoff and then serve them. Saranoff and Louka then fight on Saranoff's bravery in confessing his feelings to Louka:

LOUKA: If I loved you, though you would be as far beneath me as I am beneath you, I would dare to be the equal of my inferior. Would you dare as much if you loved me? (58)

She confesses Raina has feelings for Bluntschli. Bluntschli rejects Saranoff's challenge to a battle after Raina secretly seen Saranoff with Louka. When Raina informs Saranoff that Louka and Nicola are engaged, it rekindles his affections. Petkoff enters, complaining that he needs to mend his coat. Unaware that her father had already seen the picture, Raina grabbed the photo out of the pocket and flung it at Bluntschli as she helped Petkoff put on his coat. When Petkoff was unable to locate the image in his coat, the "chocolate ice cream soldier" image serves as the starting point for the questioning and a sequence of disclosures from all parties follow. Nicola deceitfully claims she is not engaged to Louka in order to wed Saranoff. Louka claims that Raina would not marry Saranoff because of her love for Bluntschli when Catherine complains about her treatment of Raina. Bluntschli is challenged to a duel by Saranoff. At this point, Bluntschli says:

BLUNTSCHLI: I'm a professional soldier! I fight when I have to and am very glad to get out of it when I haven't to. You're only an amateur: you think fighting's an amusement. (63)

Until he discovered that Raina was 23 years old and not the adolescent girl he had believed her to be, the Swiss captain was hesitant to declare his love in public. Bluntschli confidently makes a marriage proposal to Raina when she is mature enough to recognise her feelings. Bluntschli proceeds to inform them about his enormous money despite Catherine's repeated protestations that he is unfit to be her daughter's father. Raina symbolically objects to her Sold to Bluntschli as chief contestant, but he forces her to remember that she was enamored with him prior to her awareness of his status or wealth. She gives in, and to everyone's surprise, the drama is over.

After Shakespeare, George Bernard Shaw is fine. Today, he is still regarded as one of the most vibrant and leading playwrights. Like others quirky plays, *Arms And The Man*, raised him at the height of his scholarly expedition as Paul Sawyer observed four relevant notes:

The *Arms and The Man* is unique among Shaw's plays in several respects: 1) it was the first of his plays to be produced in commercial theatre; 2) it was the first of his plays to be acted in America; 3) it is the only one to be translated into Basic English; and 4) it is the only Shaw play to be printed with three different final curtain lines. This brief note will address itself to the last "respect". (123)

In addition to these truthful reputations, the genuine last line of the drama is explained in detail, with Sawyer stating:

The original last line was, "What a man! What a man!" It can now be found in Shaw's handwritten copy of the play at the British Museum, that is, it is also in the play's typescript on the title page of Act-I, where Shaw wrote his name. This typescript at present is owned by Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscript Library of Yale University. (123)

Fatemeh Azizmohammadi and Zohreh Tayari censured *Arms and the Man* for two views. First, they explained the category clash that is prevalent throughout society, "In *Arms and the Man*, class struggle is shown by

introducing of play different characters". (7) Captain Bluntschli at no time displayed his demeanor as an upper class despite his immense wealth. But Raina Petkoff is contrasting in personality and approach, "Raina Petkoff is one of the George Bernard Shaw's most happy heroines in his plays. She belongs to high class of society". (7) The critical fact to note here is that the upper classes strongly control the lower classes through their influence, domination, and authoritarian behavior. Furthermore, gender concerns are also clear in the work:

"George Bernard Shaw pictures gender role in characters, Louka, Catherine, Sergius, and other. There is masculinity in Louka's character while annoying Nicola. She reveals her control through her interaction with Sergius. Mrs. Petkoff also shows masculinity in controlling house hold works in absence of her husband Mr. Petkoff. (7)

Shahzad Ahmad Siddiqui and Syed Asad Raza explored the drama including idealistic and realistic views: In this play, Shaw attacks genially the romantic notions of war and love. He has adopted a realistic approach in depicting every day activities which were common those days. Here Shaw attacks the social follies of society in order to bring a positive change for which he received criticism. Shaw rejects romanticism in order to embrace realism. (48)

Dipti H. Mehta told against romantic sense, "The play is anti-romantic because in it Shaw has attacked the dreamy veneration of life and it is also a comedy because in it he has open to the elements and ridiculed the worthlessness of romantic love and valiant concept of conflict". (461) In reality, the drama presents the inner picture of mankind, "Shaw with his brilliant intelligence and humour rips off the quixotic illusion of war and love and shows what they really are". (462)

Farhana Haque applied psychological way where she regards Raina Petkoff's altering mindsets in relation to affection and love:

Raina's conflicts between her Id, Ego, Superego, and her disappointment towards Sergius made her to rearrange her own opinions. As a dramatic person in the play she has experienced a characteristic change regarding her sense of love. After meeting with Bluntschil, Raina Petkoff's stereotype concepts of war and hero became changed. (60-61)

J. Scott Lee included the comical oneness of *Arms and the Man* separating both partial parts, "We can divide *Arms and the Man* into two sections which reflect potentialities for the action and the comic action itself. The first section is an extended "prologue." It runs to the point in Act II when Sergius and Louka are alone. The second is the comic action proper. It begins with Sergius's advance towards Louka". (102)



Figure 1



Figure 2

Cecil Lewis directed a 1932 British film version of the novel. As seen in figures 1 and 2, the film stars Barry Jones as Bluntschli and Anne Gray as Raina.

The German film version of *Arms and the Man* titled *Helden (Heroes)* stars O. W. Fischer as Captain Bluntschli and Liselotte Pulver as Raina was a finalist for the 1958 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film.

II. Conclusion

To sum up, it can be said that in *The Arms and the Man*, Shaw effectively arranges plain, clear, and casual communication to build an interesting background. From this trusted foundation, each character in the play develops without hesitation in the face of various puzzling bearings. In that context, war and love were used here as both elemental review developments that everybody took. At that time, Shaw debated the certainty of human survival approving the respectable living. Moreover, he seeks the true elementary requisite of life as

"self", regardless of whether or not that personality has any title. To determine the authentic existence of people, Shaw has let his characters look life and sensibility, conventional and curious situations, and perceptions of high and low. Thus, all these things increased the pleasantness of the play.

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