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National Open University
School of Humanities

BEGC 133
BRITISH LITERATURE

BLOCK

3

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: *ARMS AND THE MAN*

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BLOCK 3 GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: *ARMS AND THE MAN*

Introduction

The twentieth century has been one of the most exciting periods in the history of British literature, especially drama and theatre. The century witnessed a lot of original and brilliant work as well as experimentation in British drama. In Block 3, you will be studying the play *Arms and the Man* by the Nobel Prize winning British dramatist, George Bernard Shaw, who dominated British drama throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

Unit 1 of the Block introduces you to Bernard Shaw's dramatic works, and gives a brief introduction to some of his major plays.

Unit 2 and Unit 3, discuss brief summaries of Acts 1, 2 and 3 of the play *Arms and the Man,* and attempt a critical analysis of the play.

Unit 4 discusses some of the major themes and concerns of the play in detail.

Before studying the Units, do read the original text of the play. so that you get the true flavour of Shaw's writing and can experience his extraordinary wit and humour – for which he was justly famous.

UNIT 1 GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: AN INTRODUCTION

Structure:

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In earlier blocks of this course, you have been introduced to some of the finest British writers and their work, such as the drama of William Shakespeare, the fiction of Thomas Hardy, and the poetry of Alfred Tennyson. In this block, we will be turning once again to drama and study the play *Arms and the Man* by the British playwright George Bernard Shaw. Before we study the play in detail, we will discuss the life and work of Shaw, so that you are able to contextualise the play within the entire corpus of Shaw's dramatic achievement.

George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) was one of the best known intellectuals of Britain in the first half of the twentieth century. His interests were varied, ranging from music and theatre to politics and philosophy. He made significant contributions in all the fields that he worked in. Shaw worked tirelessly till his death in 1950, at the age of 94. In the preface to *Buoyant Billions* (one of his last plays, completed when he was above ninety), Shaw wrote "as long as I live, I must write."

One scholar captures the variety of Shaw's interests thus: he says, Shaw:

> "was a committed socialist, a successful, if controversial dramatist, an inspired theatre director of his own work, and an influential commentator on contemporary music, drama and fine art. In all his endeavours, he demonstrated an indefatigable zeal to reform existing social conditions, sterile theatrical conventions and outworn artistic orthodoxies" (Macdonald1).

Bernard Shaw (popularly known as G.B.S.) had made a mark on all aspects of British cultural life by the end of the nineteenth century, and was so famous, that according to his biographer Stanley Weintraub, by the beginning of the twentieth century "he possessed the best-known initials in England" (Weintraub).Shaw was awarded the Nobel prize for literature in 1925.As noted in the *Oxford Companion to English Literature*, Shaw's " unorthodox views, his humour and his love of paradox have become an institution" (893), and the word "Shavian" is often used to suggest these qualities of his writing.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit you should be able to:

- assess the contribution of Bernard Shaw to British drama and theatre
- explain how Shaw attempted to revive British drama and theatre and
- identify the unique and original aspects of his work.

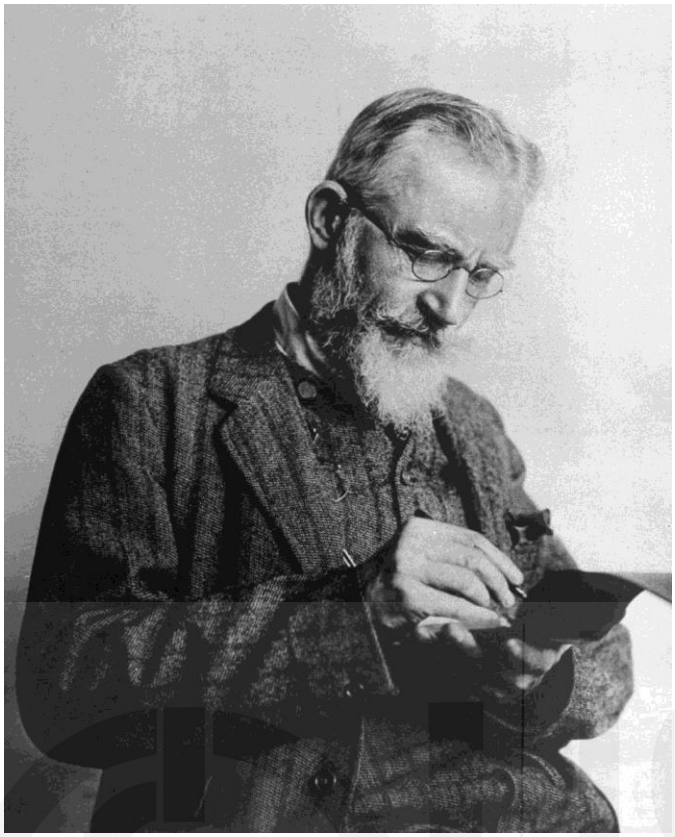
1.3 BERNARD SHAW: LIFE

Bernard Shaw was born in July 1856, in Dublin, Ireland in a middle-class Protestant family. His father George Carr Shaw was a heavy drinker and unsuccessful in his business, while his mother Elizabeth Shaw had ambitions to become a singer. The young Bernard Shaw got very little parental attention and was mostly left to his own resources. He received a mediocre schooling and was largely self taught. He inherited a love of music from his mother and eventually gained deep knowledge of music. His mother left the family and moved to London to pursue her musical career. After working as a junior clerk in Dublin for a few years, he joined his mother in London in 1876.In London, he began his literary career by attempting to write novels and music criticism. He desperately needed a source of income and while "waiting for responses to job applications, Shaw procured a reader's ticket to the British Museum. It became his informal university, and because it was home to radical intellectuals, became Shaw's informal club." (Weintraub, "George Bernard Shaw").

He also wrote theatre criticism, and the drama critic William Archer found him a job as a reviewer. Very soon, he established himself on the London art and theatre scene as a perceptive critic of music and theatre. He wrote critical articles for various newspapers and journals such as the *Dramatic Review*. Shaw also earned a reputation as a brilliant orator and gave several lectures.

According to his biographer Stanley Weintraub, "the 1880s were the decade in which Shaw found himself personally and professionally". During this period, he became a socialist, a journalist, an orator, a critic of the arts, writing reviews regularly for *The Pall Mall Gazette*, *The World* and *The Saturday Review*, and began his work as a playwright (Weintraub, "George Bernard Shaw").Shaw also became a political activist and a leading member of the Fabian society. He was a regular speaker on BBC for several years. Shaw married Charlotte Payne-Townshend,an Irish political activist in 1888 and they lived together till her death in 1943. Shaw died in 1950, as a rich, famous and successful writer, at his home, 'Shaw's Corner' in the village of Ayot St. Lawrence.

(Sources for this section on 'Bernard Shaw: Life': Margaret Drabble Ed. *Oxford Companion to English Literature*; Sternlicht, S. *Masterpieces of Modern British and Irish Drama*; and Stanley Weintraub("George Bernard Shaw").



George Bernard Shaw (source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/**)**

1.4 BERNARD SHAW AND SOCIALISM

During the 1880s, Shaw became deeply involved in the activities of the Fabian society. The Fabian Society was form edin 1884, and some of the most prominent left-wing thinkers of the late Victorian era became its members. *Fabian Essays* published in 1889, contained essays by political thinkers like George Bernard Shaw, Sidney Webb, and Annie Besant. The Fabians rejected violent revolutionary methods, preferring to enter local government and use trade unionism to transform society (www.fabians.org.uk).

The involvement with the Fabian Society left a permanent mark on Shaw's political and social vision. As his biographer notes, as a socialist, he believed in equality of opportunity and in the possibility that through social change, the human aspiration to lead a better life could be attained (Weintraub, ("George Bernard Shaw").Shaw remained a socialist all his life and most of his plays have socialist themes and sub-texts. His socialist perspective colours his critique of the rigidities of the British class system and of the capitalist order in almost all his writing.

Nicholas Grene points out how in his various prose writings, such as *Fabian Essays* (1889), *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* (1928), and *Everybody's Political What's What* (1944), Shaw maintained a consistent attack on the injustices of the capitalist system (135). Throughout his life, he continued to support various social causes such as women's rights, and was an advocate of equality of income, the abolition of private

property and changes in the voting system (Drabble, *Oxford Companion*892).Most of his plays are built around such social issues and concerns.

After arriving in London in 1876, Shaw lived almost entirely in England. However many critics note a distinct Irish quality in his literary output. The critic Sternlicht points out that like Oscar Wilde (a playwright, who like Shaw, was born in Dublin, Ireland) Shaw had a distinctively Irish wit (19-20). The theatre critic Christopher Innes observes how living and working in England, while always aware of his Irish heritage, gave Shaw a unique perspective, and that "this independent perspective gave his critique additional point" (Innes, 2010).Thus many critics are of the view that his Irish heritage gave Shaw a unique perspective on British society which made it possible for him to view its social problems from a new angle.

'Shaw's Corner' in the village of Ayot St. Lawrence - Shaw's home for several years. Source: www.geograph.org.uk

Check Your Progress 1

1. Explain the political methods of the Fabian Society.

2. Write a brief note on Shaw's political and social vision. To what extent did this vision colour his dramatic work?

1.5 BERNARD SHAW AS DRAMATIST

In earlier blocks of this course, you have already learnt about the Elizabethan period in English literature, and you have studied the work of Shakespeare, the most brilliant of Elizabethan dramatists. The theatre critic Christopher Innes says that "the twentieth century is one of the most vital and exciting periods in English drama, rivalling the Elizabethan theatre in thematic scope and stylistic ambition" (2002, 1). This remark gives us an idea of the diversity of themes and the stylistic experimentation in twentieth century British drama. Some of the leading British dramatists of the early twentieth century were Bernard Shaw, J. M. Synge, Sean O'Casey, T.S. Eliot, Harley Granville-Barker, John Galsworthy and Noel Coward. According to Innes, the work of Shaw marks the beginning of modern British drama: "any study of modern English dramatists, has to begin with Shaw's work" (2002, 8).

Activity: We have mentioned the names of some celebrated British playwrights in the section above. Prepare a list of plays written by these dramatists. Write short notes on the dramatic achievements of any two of them.

1.5.1 Shaw's Plays

Some critics consider Bernard Shaw to be "the greatest playwright in the English language since Shakespeare"(Sternlicht 23). As mentioned earlier, Shaw began his writing career by writing music and theatre criticism and novels such as *Immaturity, The Irrational Knot, Cashel Byron's Profession,* and *An Unsocial Socialist.* Shaw's early attempts at creative writing were unsuccessful, but these writings anticipated many of the themes of his later dramatic work.

Shaw was a prolific writer, and over a writing career spanning more than sixty years, wrote more than fifty plays which continue to be read, performed and discussed even today. These include *Widower's Houses* (1892), *Arms and the Man* (1898), *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1898), *You Never Can Tell* (1898), *The Devil's Disciple* (1901), *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1901), *Man and Superman* (1903), *John Bull's Other Island* (1904), *Major Barbara* (1907), *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1908), *Getting Married* (1910), *Androcles and the Lion* (1912), *Pygmalion* (1913), *Heartbreak House* (1919), *Back to Methuselah* (1921) *Saint Joan* (1929) and *The Apple Cart* (1929). Some of his plays were published in collections such as *Plays: Pleasant and Unpleasant* (1898) and *Three Plays for Puritans* (1901). His prose writings include *The Quintessence of Ibsenism (*1891), *The Perfect Wagnerite* (1898), *Common Sense About the War* (1914) and *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* (1928).

1.5.2 Shaw and Ibsen:

Shaw found British theatre at the end of the nineteenth century, lifeless and uninspiring. Even as a reviewer of theatre during the early stages of his career, Shaw was "voicing his impatience with the artificiality of the London theatre and pleading for the performance of plays dealing with contemporary social and moral problems" (Drabble, *Oxford Companion* 892-893). In his attempt to transform British theatre, Bernard Shaw was deeply influenced by the work of the Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen. Andrew Sanders in *A Short History of English Literature* notes how the spirit of Ibsen is evident throughout Shaw's long dramatic career(478).

Sternlicht labels Shaw an Ibsenite: "He took Henrik Ibsen's concept of the thesis play, in which a problem of society is presented for consideration by the society itself, represented by the middle-class audience. He employed the concept in social comedies that sparkled with wit, clever situations and wonderful dialogue" (Sternlicht 4). The 'thesis play', also called the 'problem play', first appeared(as noted in the *McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of World Drama),* in France in the work of Emile Augier and Alexandre Dumas *fils;* these dramatists, in reaction to the empty romantic theatre of the nineteenth century, made the theatre a platform for moral and social reform. The 'problem play' reached its artistic perfection, in the plays of Henrik Ibsen, such as *The Pillars of Society*, *Ghosts*, *A Doll's House* and *An Enemy of the People*. English playwrights like Henry Arthur Jones and George Bernard Shaw were greatly influenced by Ibsen and his method of attacking "outmoded social conventions, championing individual morality over the accepted traditions of marriage, politics and business"(Hochman,*McGraw-Hill Encyclopaedia of World Drama*).

Nineteenth century European dramawas dominated by a form of drama called the 'well-made play', which was based on a typical structure and artificial conventions. In his prose work, *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*(revised edition, 1913), Shaw summarises the main aspects of Ibsen's innovative drama and shows how it transformed the European theatre of his time. Shaw points out how, owing to the influence of Ibsen, a "new technical factor" had appeared in popular English drama also:

> "This technical factor in the play is the discussion. Formerly you had in what was called a well-made play,an exposition in the first act, a situation in the second, an unravelling in the third. Now you have exposition, situation, and discussion; and the discussion is the test of the playwright. The discussion conquered Europe in Ibsen's *Doll's House*; and now the serious play-wright recognizes in the discussion the real centre of his play's interest" (*Quintessence*141).

Here Shaw is emphasising how, due to Ibsen's influence, the 'well-made play', with its typical structure and conventions, which dominated English theatre in the nineteenth century, gave way to a new discussion- based play . He explains how this shift happened with plays like Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, where Nora, the heroine "stops her emotional acting and says: "We must sit down and discuss all this that has been happening between us." And it was by this new technical feature: this addition of a new movement, as musicians would say, to the dramatic form, that *A Doll's House* conquered Europe and founded a new school of dramatic art" (*Quintessence*144).

Shaw sums up his appraisal of Ibsen, with his remarks on how Ibsen created a shift away from the well-made play, by making discussion central to the play, and by making ordinary people the characters:

> "The technical novelties of the Ibsen and post- Ibsen plays are, then: first, the introduction of the discussion and its development … making play and discussion practically identical; and, second, as a consequence of making the spectators themselves the persons of the drama, and the incidents of their own lives its incidents, the disuse of the old stage tricks by which audiences had to be induced to take an interest in unreal people and improbable circumstances" (*Quintessence*152-53).

Thus, according to Shaw, the technical innovations brought about by Ibsen are 1) making discussion the central feature of a play and 2) making ordinary people the characters and their

life situations, the incidents of drama, thus getting rid of the unreal characters and unreal situations of the well-made play. Shaw was extremely critical of the 'well-made play' and attacked its practitioners such as the French dramatist Scribe "for focusing on the mechanics of playmaking at the expense of honest characterisations and serious content." (www.britanica.com). It was, he felt, based on "unreal people and improbable circumstances," whereas Ibsen's problem play, shifted the focus to "serious content" and the problems we actually encounter in society.

Christopher Innes says, that in Shaw's view, Ibsen's major innovation was that he changed the typical structure of the well-made play, which is like this: exposition →complication →crisis →denoument. Ibsen replaced the denoument with discussion (2002, 19). Many critics see Shaw's study of Ibsen, as an attempt to bring a new kind of drama into English theatre, and as a turning point in the history of English drama. According to Christopher Innes, Shaw's *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* marks the beginning of modern British drama, and the point where traditionalist drama gave way to modern drama. He says:

> "The ferment of the modern era was already present in the final decade of the nineteenth century. Issues like women's rights or class justice, which have become major contemporary themes, were already finding reflections on the stage. The year 1890 marks the beginning of modern drama in England, as the date of Bernard Shaw's lecture on 'The Quintessence of Ibsenism'. This can be seen as the watershed between traditionalist and modern perspectives, with its call for a revolution in the nature and function of the dramatic experience" (2002, 8).

Shaw's drama, as well as his writings on theatre, are extremely significant, as they mark the beginning of modern drama in England.

Check Your Progress 2

1.Write a short note on the topic 'Henrik Ibsen and the problem play in European drama'.
2.What do you understand by the term 'well-made play'?
3. Write a short note on the ideas put forward by Shaw in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism.*

1.5.3 Shaw's major plays: A Brief Overview

We have seen in the previous section how Ibsen brought about a radical transformation in European drama; Shaw attempted a similar transformation in English theatre. As pointed out in the *Oxford Companion to English Literature,* following Ibsen's example, Shaw made discussion the basis of his plays, where, the dramatic conflict is the conflict of thought and belief(893). Most of Shaw's plays have long prefaces before the plays explaining and discussing in detail the ideas in the plays.

Shaw's creative writing is defined and shaped by his political and social vision. As Jan Macdonald points out, Shaw opposed the philosophy of 'Art for art's sake', and repeatedly asserted that his motive for engaging in artistic pursuits was to promote political ideas (Macdonald 64). Shaw wrote on the basis of his conviction that "a work of art must be grounded in the society from which it grows and must contribute to the progress of that society, spiritually, morally or practically. Romance, prettiness and superficial sentiment will

not serve" (Mcdonald 11). We have to keep this in mind while reading Shaw and critically analysing his plays. Let us now look at the themes of some of his major plays.

Shaw's first play *Widower's Houses* was performed in 1892, and published along with *The Philanderer* and *Mrs. Warren's Profession* in the collection *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant* (1898). Based on the fact that the wealthy and 'respectable' character Sartorius is actually a slum landlord, *Widower's Houses* exposes "the manner in which the capitalist system perverts and corrupts human behaviour and relationships", by showing "respectable" middle-class people, exploiting the poverty of the slum (*Oxford Companion*1066). According to Nicholas Grene, *Widowers Houses, Mrs. Warren's Profession, John Bull's Other island, Major Barbara* and *Pygmalion* are the five plays of Shaw which are concerned directly with economic, social and class questions. *Widowers Houses*, which analyses the economic basis of capitalist society, adds Grene, "is the nearest he ever came to writing a purely socialist dramatic work" (135). In the preface to *Widower's Houses*, Shaw claims that this play is "deliberately intended to induce people to vote on the Progressive side at the next Council election in London"(Preface to *Widower's Houses*). According to Christopher Innes, this is one of the instances where Shaw used drama to campaign for specific reforms (*Sourcebook* 189).

Mrs. Warren's Profession(1898): One of the 'Unpleasant Plays', this play was censored and the Lord Chamberlain did not give it a licence for public performance (until 1925) due to its controversial theme of prostitution. However, as Anthony Abbott says, "The play has become, during the past ten years or so, one of the favourites in the Shavian repertoire because of its feminist elements, and recent productions have put the emphasis where it belongs- on the play's central character, Vivie Warren"(Abbott 47). What Abbott is emphasising here is the fact that though the play was subject to censorship for a long time, it is now becoming more popular, since it is now seen as having feminist elements.

John Bull's Other Island (1904): Shaw wrote this play at the request of the great poet W. B. Yeats. *John Bull's Other Island* and *O'Flaherty VC* are the two plays by Shaw to have an Irish setting and themes. This play deals with issues of colonialism and land ownership in Ireland.

Man and Superman (1903): A philosophical play centred on the characters Jack Tanner and Ann Whitefield. Act 3 of the play includes the dream sequence "Don Juan in Hell", which has lengthy discussions of ideas such as the 'life force' and 'creative evolution'.

Pygmalion: Published in 1916, this is one of Shaw's best known plays, partly due to the fact that extremely popular musical and film versions of this play appeared later. The plot centres around the Cockney flower girl Eliza Doolittle, and the Phonetics Professor Higgins, and the professor's attempt to teach Eliza Standard English, so that she becomes presentable in upper class society. *Pygmalion*, says Nicholas Grene, has an element of social criticism, as sharp as any of his other plays. It is all the more effective since it is expressed in a light-hearted manner."Concentrating only on speech and accent, Shaw exposes the absurdities of a class-based society" (Grene 139). The title of the play links it to the Greek legend of the sculptor Pygmalion, who falls in love with a beautiful statue that he has created. The play formed the basis of an extremely popular musical titled 'My Fair Lady' and later a film of the same title. According to *The Oxford Companion to American Theatre*, the musical comedy 'My Fair

Lady' (1956), by Lerner and Loewe, "managed to retain all of Shaw's irreverence, wit and intellectuality".

Major Barbara: Published in 1907, this play is centred on the characters Barbara, a Major in the Salvation Army; her wealthy father, the arms manufacturer, Andrew Under shaft; and her lover, the scholar Cusins. This play "portrays the conflict between spiritual and worldly power" (Drabble, *Oxford Companion* 609). According to Nicholas Grene, Shaw's aim in *Major Barbara*, as in most of his plays, is to "expose hidden connections and complicities, "in this case the links between philanthropic organisations and capitalism (Greene 138).

Candida :Published in 1898, *Candida* is a play about the relationships between Candida, her husband James Morell, and the poet Eugene Marchbanks. Forced to choose between the two men, Candida chooses her husband. According to G.K. Chesterton, the last scene of *Candida* is one of the moments when Shaw was truly inspired (121).

Saint Joan: (1924): This play is based on historical events in the life of Joan of Arc. According to Sternlicht, *Saint Joan* was recognized as a masterpiece, from its first performance itself. "More than any other of Shaw's plays, it made Shaw the obvious choice for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1925. Critics and audiences have found that although evil is temporarily triumphant in *Saint Joan*, the young woman conquers because her spirit remains unbroken. (Sternlicht 19). Sternlicht sees Shaw's Joan as one of the great characters of modern drama. "She is his most perfect construction. She is Shaw's superwoman. His Joan has a nonconformist mind that thinks outside the medieval box." (Sternlicht 26)

Heartbreak House (1919): As stated by Shaw in his preface, "Heartbreak House is not merely the name of the play which follows this preface. It is cultured, leisured Europe before the war." It focuses on the household of Captain Shot over and his family. According to the *Oxford Companion to English Literature*, this house portrays an aspect of British or European civilisation that is about to drive itself to destruction, "through lack of direction or lack of grasp of economic reality," (446).Anthony Abbott sees this play as "Shaw's masterpiece, fuller and more complex in characterization than his other plays". The inhabitants of Heartbreak House, says Abbott, "are the intelligentsia: still bright and imaginative, but withdrawn from the practical world, drifting aimlessly toward destruction. The house, designed by the captain in the form of a ship, is England herself. If the play's primary metaphor is heartbreak, or the process of disillusionment, *Heartbreak House* is Shaw's judgment on his own class and its failure to prevent the most tragic waste of life in human history." (*The Vital Lie*, 54-55). Thus this play exposes the aimlessness of the elite classes and the intelligentsia of England and of Europe, and their inability in preventing the tragedy of World War I.

Check your progress 3

Explain how Shaw's plays discuss some of the important social issues of Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries?

1.5.4 Shaw and the British dramatic tradition

Shaw was awarded the Nobel prize for literature in 1925 for his work, "... marked both by idealism and humanity, its stimulating satire often being infused with a singular poetic

beauty." (www. nobelprize.org). Shaw brought a new energy to British theatre and imparted to it the capacity to vigorously engage with the pressing issues of the day. According to Christopher Innes, "If any single person set the course of British drama over the last hundred years, it was Shaw…. He not only influenced the general direction taken by other British dramatists, but was largely responsible for defining its terms." Innes points out how Shaw, through the volume of his dramatic output and his public image, occupied a central position in British drama till his last play in 1950. According to Innes, the "mainstream of serious English drama has continued to reflect the realistic treatment of social questions that Shaw promoted" (2002, 13 -14). These comments show how Shaw's influence on the mainstream British dramatic tradition has been deep and long-lasting.

Bernard Shaw's plays continue to be read, performed and discussed in the twenty-first century. As Andrew Sanders notes, though his settings and preoccupations are predominantly those of England of the early twentieth century, he continues to surprise and provoke readers at the beginning of the twenty first century (479).

1.6 LET US SUM UP

We began this Unit by looking at the main events in Bernard Shaw's life. We then went on to discuss his socialist vision, which essentially colours his entire work. In the section 'Shaw and Ibsen' we discussed how Shaw was influenced by the work of Ibsen, and his concept of the 'problem play'. The last section of the unit provided an overview of the themes of some of Shaw's plays, and also discussed Shaw's influence on the British dramatic tradition. After studying this Unit, you will have the background knowledge to critically engage with the play *Arms and the Man.* In the remaining units of this block, we will study that play in detail.

Unit end question:

Discuss the achievement of Bernard Shaw as a dramatist. How did he transform the British theatre of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century's**?**

1.7 GLOSSARY

1.Corpus : collection of written works
2. Indefatigable :never giving up
3. zeal: enthusiasm
4. sterile: lacking imagination or new ideas.
5. paradox: a statement containing two opposite ideas that make it appear impossible.
6. Fabian Society :"The 1880s saw an upsurge in socialist activity in Britain and the Fabian Society was at the heart of much of it. … the landmark *Fabian Essays* was published, containing essays by George Bernard Shaw, Graham Walls, Sidney Webb, Sydney Olivier and Annie Besant. All the contributors were united by their rejection of violent upheaval as a method of change, preferring to use the power of local government and trade unionism to transform society. The Fabian Society derives its name from the Roman general Quintus Fabius, from his strategy of delaying his attacks on the invading Carthaginians until the right moment." (www.fabians.org.uk)

7. Henrik Ibsen(1828-1906) was a Norwegian playwright, "generally acknowledged as the founder of modern prose drama." While his early plays, such as *Ghosts, An Enemy of the*

People and *Pillars of Society*, were concerned largely with social and political themes, his later plays like *Rosmersholm* and *The Master Builder* were more concerned with the forces of the unconscious. (Drabble ed. *Oxford Companion to English Literature* 490).

8. Problem play: "A type of drama that developed in the 19th century to deal with controversial social issues in a realistic manner, to expose social ills and to stimulate thought and discussion on the part of the audience. ... The problem play reached its maturity in the works of the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, whose works had artistic merit as well as topical relevance . He went on to expose the hypocrisy, greed and hidden corruption of his society in a number of masterly plays." (www.brittanica.com)

9. Quintessence: the most important features of something

10. well-made play: A type of drama made popular by the French playwright Eugene Scribe. Its features were "complex and highly artificial plotting, a build-up of suspense, a climactic scene in which all problems are resolved, and a happy ending."(www.britannica.com)
11. exposition: the scenes of the play which introduce the main themes, characters and background.
12. denoument: the end of a play where everything is explained or settled.

13. watershed: a period that marks an important change
14. philanthropic: meant to help the poor and needy

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UNIT 2 *ARMS AND THE MAN*: SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS (1)

Structure

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous Unit, we discussed the life and work of George Bernard Shaw. The unit provided a brief overview of Shaw's work as a dramatist and you were introduced to some of his major plays. In this Unit as well as the next two units of this Block, we will be focusing on Shaw's play *Arms and the Man*. We will be discussing the summary of the play first, and then we will discuss the major themes and concerns of the play.

2.2 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you should be able to

a) Discuss the summary of Act I and Act II of *Armsand the Man.*
b) Critically analyse Act 1 and Act II of the play and explain how they are significant in the total structure of *Armsand the Man.*

2.3 SUMMARY OF ACT I

The play is set against the background of the Serbo-Bulgarian war of 1885.

The curtain rises on the bedroom of Raina Petkoff in a small town in Bulgaria. It is a cold night in 1885, and Rainais standing on her balcony, looking at the snow covered Balkan mountains in the distance. She is intensely conscious of the romantic beauty of the night and of the fact that her own youth and beauty are part of it. She is in her night gown, well covered by a long mantle of furs. Raina's father, Major Petkoff, and her fiance, SergiusSaranoffare fighting against the Serbs on the front. **A** decisive battle has taken place at Slivnitza between the Serbs and the Bulgarians.

Catherine Petkoff, Raina's mother, entersto inform her daughter of the victory of the Bulgarians in this battle. Catherine tells Raina aboutthe heroism of Raina's lover, Sergius, who led a cavalry charge against the Serbs and put them to flight. Hearing this report, Raina is thrilled, and is very proud of her lover. Louka, the beautiful maid of the Petkoffs, enters and tells Raina that all the windows and doors should be closed, as the fleeing Serbs are being

chased by the Bulgarians, and there could be shooting on the street below. Catherine and Louka leave Raina's room after all the windows and doors are closed.

On hearing about the heroism of her beloved, Raina is now elated beyond words. Left alone in her bedroom, she worshipfully adores the portrait of her beloved Sergius, and turns over the pages of a novel. She hears some shots, first at a distance, and then close by, and blows out the candles in the room. Someone suddenly opens the shutters, enters the room in the dark, and warns Raina that if she called out, she would be shot. Raina lights a candle and finds a Serbian army officer in a tattered uniform, with mud, blood, and snow all over his body, in her room. He is being pursued by the Bulgarian army, and if Raina raised an alarm, they would rush in to kill him. He has no intentions of dying. He knows that Raina would not want any outsiders to come in and see her in her night gown, and uses this aspect to defend himself. As long as Raina is not properly dressed, she will not allow the Bulgarian soldiers to get into her room.

> "The Man: "I'll keep the cloak; you'll take care that nobody comes in and sees you without it …. This is a better weapon than the revolver.
>
> Raina: It is not the weapon of a gentleman!
>
> The Man: It's good enough for a man with only you (Raina) to stand between him and death."

Louka knocks at the door, and the fugitive realises that he is in a difficult situation. He throws up his head with the gesture of a man who sees that it is all over with him, and sword in hand, he prepares himself to die fighting with the Bulgarians. On an impulse, Raina helps him hide behind the curtain. Raina opens the door pretending to have been disturbed in her sleep. Louka tells her excitedly that a Serb had been seen climbing up the water-pipeto her balcony and therefore the Bulgarian soldiers want to search her bedroom. Catherine allows a Russian officer from the Bulgarian side to enter Raina's room. While the officer searches, Raina stands with her back to the curtain behind which the fugitive is hidden, so that he would not be discovered. When the Russian officer questions her, Raina tells him that she had not gone to bed and that no one could have got in without her knowledge. Then the officer goes out satisfied, and Catherine follows him. Louka, who notices the soldier's pistol lying on the ottoman, "glances at Raina, at the ottoman, at the curtain; then purses her lips secretively, laughs to herself, and goes out."

As soon as Raina locks the door, the man steps out from behind the curtain, and realising that Raina had saved him, declares, "Dear young lady, your servant until death." He tells Raina that he is a mercenary Swiss soldier who has joined the Serb army merely as a professional fighter. While handing over the revolver to the soldier, she tells him that it was really fortunate that the Russian officer did not notice it. The pistol is not loaded as, he does not have any ammunition. He says he usually carries chocolate, instead of ammunition, and had finished his last bit of chocolate a long time back. Raina is shocked to hear this and this further convinces her that he a very poor soldier. She then offers him a box of chocolate creams, which he devours hungrily.

The Swiss soldier describes the cavalry charge undertaken by the Bulgarians. He tells her that the Bulgarians had shown "sheer ignorance of the art of war", on the part of its leader, adding

indignantly, "I never saw anything so unprofessional." He describes the leader of the charge (Sergius) thus:

> MAN.
> He did it like an operatic tenor—a regular handsome fellow, with flashing eyes and lovely moustache, shouting a war-cry and charging like Don Quixote at the windmills…."

It was really a mad act to throw acavalry regiment on a battery of machine guns with the certainty that if the guns went off, all would be killed in no time. As the Serbs were without cartridges because of some mistake, the Bulgarians won and the Serbs had toflee from the battlefield. The Bulgarian officer who led the charge must be a mad manto throw his cavalry so foolishly into the jaws of death. He behaved like Don Quixote, who charged the windmills. Raina then shows the Swiss soldier the portrait of her beloved and tells him that she is betrothed to Sergius. Seeing the portrait, the soldier comments that it is the same foolish Don Quixote. He then adds apologetically that perhaps her fiance had come to know that the Serbs had no cartridges and decided that it was a safe job to attack them. As this remark means that Sergius was a pretender and coward, Raina is more offended than earlier.

Angered at his remarks about her fiance, Raina tells him that he shouldclimb down the pipe, into the street below; at this thought, the Swiss soldier drops his head on his hands in the deepest dejection. Overcome by pity, Raina, calls him a "very poor soldier—a 'chocolate cream soldier"' and tries to cheer him up. To avoid causing inconvenience to Raina by staying on in the room, the Swiss soldier proposes to climb down; but a terrible burst of firing is heard from the street, and Raina pulls him away from the window. She asks him to trust to the hospitality of the Petkoffs. The soldier does not wish to stay in Raina's bedroom secretly longer than is necessary, and asks her to inform her mother.

Raina goes to bring her mother, and by the time mother and daughter come back, the soldier is fast asleep and does not wake up even after Catherine tries to shakes his hand. Raina shocks her mother saying, "Don't, mamma: the poor dear is worn out. Let him sleep." Here the first Act ends.

Check Your Progress 1

Write the summary of Act I of the play in your own words.

2.3.1 Analysis of Act I

Act I introduces the main characters; Bluntschli, Raina, Catherine, and Louka actually appear on the stage and we are given a lot of information about Sergius. Act I performs several of the functions that the exposition performed traditionally. The important themes, such as the satire of both romantic love and of romantic glorification of war are introduced in this Act.

We come to know that Bluntschli is a hard headed realist, who has a very down-to-earth, practical approach to everything. He is a professional soldier – he says "I joined Servia because it was nearest to me." He has no glorious visions of war, and believes that every soldier should try his best to save his own life. His realism is tempered by his sense of humour. Raina is a young lady whose notions are derived from her reading of romances and

novels. She is impulsive, yet kind hearted and noble. Raina is conscious of belonging to one of the richest and best known families in Bulgaria. She is proud of the fact that her family lives in a house with two rows of windows, an inside staircase and a library – all of which she sees as indicators of superior economic and social standing. Having read Byron and Pushkin, and a lot of fiction, she is extremely romantic in her view of life.

Act I initiates the satire of romantic love and of romantic views of war, which forms the main thematic strand of the play.

RAINA.
(*disdainfully*). I suppose not. (*She draws herself up superbly, and looks him straight in the face, saying with emphasis*) Some soldiers, I know, are afraid of death.
MAN.
(*with grim good humor*). All of them, dear lady, all of them, believe me. It is our duty to live as long as we can, and kill as many of the enemy as we can.

This dialogue reveals the romantic ideas of Raina and their subsequent frustration. Also, it reveals the humorous and realistic approach of the Serbian officer. While Raina thinks that a truly heroic soldier should march fearlessly into the battlefield, ready to face death, Bluntschli knows that, in reality, all soldiers fear death.

MAN.
I've no ammunition. What use are cartridges in battle? I always carry chocolate instead; and I finished the last cake of that yesterday.
RAINA.
(*outraged in her most cherished ideals of manhood*). Chocolate! Do you stuff your pockets with sweets—like a schoolboy—even in the field?
MAN.
Yes. Isn't it contemptible?
(*Raina stares at him, unable to utter her feelings….*

In response to Raina's suggestion that he should protect himself by loading his pistol, the stranger tells her that he does not have ammunition, that instead of ammunition he carries chocolates; and that his pockets are empty at present as he finished the last chocolate cake hours ago. To her this appears to be the most unsoldierly thing to do, which makes her see Bluntschli as a very "poor soldier". She also gives him the somewhat ridiculous epithet 'chocolate cream soldier'. Her romantic views of the soldier's profession makes it impossible for her to realise that Bluntschli's habit of carrying chocolate reveals his practical and realistic approach.

Raina is keen to hear about the triumphant cavalry charge led by her brave Sergius:

RAINA.
(*eagerly turning to him, as all her enthusiasm and her dream of glory rush back on her*). Did you see the great cavalry charge? Oh, tell me about it. Describe it to me.
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.

This is definitely not what Raina expected to hear. The soldier's prosaic description contrasts with the report given by Raina's mother earlier:

CATHERINE.
(*with surging enthusiasm*). You can't guess how splendid it is. A cavalry charge—think of that! He defied our Russian commanders—acted without orders—led a charge on his own responsibility—headed it himself—was the first man to sweep through their guns. Can't you see it, Raina; our gallant splendid Bulgarians with their swords and eyes flashing, thundering down like an avalanche and scattering the wretched Servian dandies like chaff.

For Catherine and Raina, it is difficult to imagine what it is like to actually be on the battlefield. Raina's romantic notions suffer even more when Bluntschli ridicules Sergius for foolishly leading his men in what he thought was a brave charge at the enemy.

MAN.
He did it like an operatic tenor—a regular handsome fellow, with flashing eyes and lovely moustache, shouting a war-cry and charging like Don Quixote at the windmills. We nearly burst with laughter at him; but when the sergeant ran up as white as a sheet, and told us they'd sent us the wrong cartridges, and that we couldn't fire a shot for the next ten minutes, we laughed at the other side of our mouths. I never felt so sick in my life, though I've been in one or two very tight places. And I hadn't even a revolver cartridge—nothing but chocolate. We'd no bayonets—nothing. Of course, they just cut us to bits. And there was Don Quixote flourishing like a drum major, thinking he'd done the cleverest thing ever known, whereas he ought to be court-martialled for it. Of all the fools ever let loose on a field of battle, that man must be the very maddest. He and his regiment simply committed suicide—only the pistol missed fire, that's all.

Sergius's misguided attack would have been suicidal; the only reason the Bulgarian side won the battle was that by mistake, the Serbs were sent the wrong cartridges. Don Quixote, the central figure of the Spanish classic *Don Quixote* by Cervantes, is probably the most famous example of a man who, under the influence of tales of chivalry, imagines that he is an adventurous knight and fights imaginary battles. Bluntschli is here referring to one of the most famous episodes in this classic, where Don Quixote charges at windmills, thinking they are giants. This comparison to Don Quixote, presents Sergius in a truly ridiculous light. Much later in the play, we learn that Sergius, in spite of all his dramatic displays of valour, realises that the soldier's life is not for him, while expressing his admiration for the military leadership and abilities of Bluntschli.

As the Act draws to a close, Raina is seen to be gradually developing an attachment towards the Swiss soldier. When she returns with her mother, they find the soldier fast asleep. Catherine tries to shake him awake, but Raina stops her.

RAINA.
(*catching her arm*). Don't, mamma: the poor dear is worn out. Let him sleep.

CATHERINE.
(*letting him go and turning amazed to Raina*). The poor dear! Raina!!! (*She looks sternly at her daughter. The man sleeps profoundly.*)

Check Your Progress 2

From your reading of Act I, what do you understand about the characters Raina Petkoff and Bluntschli?

2.4 SUMMARY OF ACT II

The scene opens in the garden of Major Petkoff s houseon a fine spring morning, nearly four months after the events of Act I.Nicola, the middle-aged servant of the Petkoffs, is lecturing Louka, the maid and telling her to improve her manners and be respectful to her mistress. Nicola wishes to enjoy the goodwill of the Petkoffs; he is planning to start a shop in Sofia after leaving his present job, and he relies heavily on their support. Louka, has a defiant nature, and declares that she is not afraid of her mistress as she knows some of their family secrets. Nicola, who is realistic, warns her that nobody would believe her and that onceshe is dismissed from thes ervice of the Petkoff family, she would never get another situation. He adds that even though he too knows some secrets of the family, the disclosure of which may bring about problems among the members, he does not disclose them as it will not be good for his prospects.Louka despises Nicola for his servile attitude and says, "(*with searching scorn*), You have the soul of a servant, Nicola…. You'll never put the soul of a servant into me."

Major Petkoff returns from the war and enters his garden. Catherine, comes to the garden and greets him affectionately. Major Petkoff tells her about the ending of the war and the signing of the peace treaty. Catherine says that he should have annexed Serbia and made Prince Alexander the emperor of the Balkans.

Her husband, in a lighter vein, tells her that such a task would have kept him away from her for a long time. When Catherine complains of suffering from a sore throat, her husband attributes the cause of sore throat to her habit of washing everyday.

PETKOFF.
I don't believe in going too far with these modern customs. All this washing can't be good for the health. … I don't mind a good wash once a week to keep up my position; but once a day is carrying the thing to a ridiculous extreme.

Catherine responds that he is a barbarian at heart and hopes that he behaved properly before the Russian officers. Petkoff answers that he has done his best and even told them that his home has a library. Catherine adds that the library now has an electric bell as well, so that they will not have to shout for their servant, something that civilised people are not supposed to do.

Major Sergius Saranoff knocks at the door. When Nicola goes to bring him in, Petkoffe tells his wife that he wishes to avoid the company of Sergius as long as he can, because Sergius pesters him for promotion. Catherine thinks that Sergius should be promoted, soon after his marriage to Raina. Sergius Saranoff, a romantically handsome man, now enters the scene.

Catherine welcomes him with enthusiasm. When Catherine says that everybody is mad about him and wild with enthusiasm, because of his magnificent cavalry charge, Sergius makes a profound statement: “Madam: it was the cradle and the grave of my military reputation. … I won the battle the wrong way when our worthy Russian generals were losing it the right way.” He was therefore denied a promotion.

Being frustrated about not getting a promotion, Sergiushas sent in his resignation. Though Major Petkoff advises him to withdraw his resignation, Sergius sticks to his decision. When he asks for Raina, sheap pears, and they greet each other solemnly. To Catherine’sremarkthat Sergiusis not a soldier anymore, he responds that soldiering is the coward's art of attacking mercilessly when one is strong and keeping out of harm's way when one is weak. He adds that he has accepted the advice of a captain who arranged the exchange of prisoners with them at Pirot. Petkoff remarks that the Swiss captain overreached them about the horses. Confirming Petkoff’s remark, Sergius adds, “Ah, he was a soldier—every inch a soldier!” He was so thoroughly professional and clever that at his hands Sergius and Petkoff were like children. Sergius thennarrates to them the story that he had heard about the Swiss soldier. After the battle of Slivnitza, he was pursued by the Bulgarian soldiers and climbed the water-pipe of the house of a Bulgarian family and entered the bedroom of a young lady. She was enchanted by the Swiss soldier’s manners and entertained him for a while, before informing her mother. The next morning he was sent by the lady and her mother on his way, disguised in an old coat belonging to the master of the house who was away at the war. Sergius and Petkoff are totally unaware that the incident happened in the Petkoff household itself.

There being no doubt about the identity of the Swiss soldier, Raina becomes disturbed and tells Sergius that his camp life has made him coarse, and that is why he could repeat such a story before her. Agreeing with her daughter, Catherine says that if such women really existed, she and Raina should be spared the knowledgeof such indecent women. Sergius begs to be excused for his mistake, but Major Petkoff says that Raina, being a soldier’s daughter, should be able to with stand a little strong conversation. Petkoff then asks Sergius to join him in the library for he has to discuss some military affairs, the issue of three regiments that are to be sent back to Philippolis. Catherine asks Sergius to remain with Raina and takes her husband to see the new electric bell.

Raina places her hands over the shoulders of Sergius, and looking at him with admiration and worship, addresses him as 'my hero' and ‘my king’, while Sergius responds by calling her ‘my queen’ and kissing her forehead “with holy awe.” She admits that she is entirely unworthy of his love, for while he has won glory in the battlefield, she has been doing nothing at home. Sergius replies that he had gone to war “like a knight in a tournament with his lady looking on at him,” and could achieve victory, only because she inspired him all the time.

Raina is delighted to hear these words and says that both of them have found 'higher love' and that when she thinks of him, she can never do a base deed or think an ig noble thought. When Sergius wants to be the worshipper of Raina, the ‘saintly lady’, she responds by saying that she loves and trusts him, and she knows that Sergius willnever disappoint her. At this moment of higher love, Louka enters the scene to clearthe table. (When you come to know about the relationship between Louka and Sergius, you will realise how ironic Louka's entry is while Sergius and Raina are on the plane of higher love.)

The moment Raina goes into the house to collect her hat for going out with her beloved, the attention of Sergius is arrested by Louka. He asks if sheknows what higher love is. On her replying in the negative, he explains to her that keeping up higher love is very tiring, and so he feels the need of some relief afterwards. Putting his hand around Louka's waist, Sergius asks her whether she considers him handsome. After a feigned protest, Louka advises him to go behind abush where they may not be seen by prying eyes. Having hidden in a safe spot, Louka tells him that Raina is sure to be spying upon them. Offended by Louka's words, Sergius says that though he is worthless enough to betray the higher love, he cannot tolerate anybody insulting it.

When Sergius tries to kiss her, Louka avoids him and tells him that just as he is making love to her behind Raina's back, Raina was doing the same behind his back. He again feels offended and tells her that as a gentleman he is not going to discussthe conduct of the lady to whom he is engaged, with her maid. His jealousy is, however, arousedand so he asks her to tell him the name of his rival. Louka refuses, saying she had not seen the person, only heard him through the door of Raina's room. Then Louka says she is sure that if the gentleman comes again, Raina will definitely marry him.

At this juncture, Sergius is so much annoyed that he catches hold of her arm tightly and, as result, her arm is bruised. He then turns away from her and declares that she is an abominable little clod of common clay. Feeling her bruised hands, Louka says indignantly that whatever clay she is made of, he is also made of the same and adds that Raina is a liar and cheat. When Sergius apologizes for hurting her and offers money to make amends, she refuses to accept it. Loukaleaves, as Raina returns, dressed for a walk.

Raina asks Sergius whether he had been flirting with Louka, and Sergius denies, asking her how she could think of such a thing. Raina tells him that she meant it as a jest. Catherine enters and asks Sergius to help her husband who is in the library with his work. After Sergius leaves, Catherine tells Raina that the first thing her father asked for was his old coat in which they had sent off the Swiss soldier. Raina remarks that it was really bad on the part of the Swiss soldier to tell his friend that he had stayed in a young lady's room, and adds that if she had been there, she would have filled his mouth with chocolate creams to silence him. As Raina's remark smacks of love for the Swiss soldier, Catherine bluntly asks her how long the Swiss soldier had stayed with her in her room. Raina does not give a direct answer. Catherine expresses her apprehensions about the consequences if Sergius comes to know of the incident .Raina firmly replies that she is not afraid even ifSergius comes to know of the 'chocolate cream soldier'.

After Raina leaves the scene, Louka comes in to inform her that a Serbiansoldier is at the door, requesting to meet Catherine. He is carrying a carpet bag, adds Louka, and from his card, Catherine recognises that it is Bluntschli. She realises that Bluntschli has come to return Petkoff's old coat. Catherine, then, orders Louka to bring theman at once into the garden, without anybody's knowledge, and instructs her to shut the door of the library. When Captain Bluntschli, who is now clean and smartly dressed appears, Catherine asks him to leave at once. If her husband discovers their secret, he would not spare her and herdaughter. Also, she asks him to leave the bag containing the coat, and assures him thatthe bag would be sent back to him at his address. As Bluntschli hands her his card, Petkoff, who has already seen him through the window of the library and was wondering why his servants didn't bring Bluntschli to the library, comes there followed by Sergius. Petkoff addresses the Swiss

soldier as “my dear Captain Bluntschli”, and welcomes him. Catherine, who is afraid of the disclosure of the secret, rises to the occasion and lies that she was just asking Bluntschli to join them for lunch. Sergius tells Bluntschli, that they will not allow him to go so soon, as they need his advice about sending the three regiments to Philippopolis. Petkoff appreciates the way Bluntschli under stood the whole problem immediately. Raina returns at this juncture and recognising Bluntschli exclaims spontaneously "Oh! The chocolate cream soldier!"

As Bluntschli stands rigid, Sergius is a mazed , and Petkoff also wonders what could be happening. Then, Catherine, with great presence of mind, saves the situation by introducing Bluntschli to Raina as though she has never met him earlier. Raina then explains her remark by saying that she was referring to a beautiful ornament which she had earlier made for the ice pudding, which had been spoiled by Nicola. Turning towards Bluntschli, she says she hoped he did notthink that she had called him ‘the chocolate cream soldier’.

After hearing Raina's remark, Petkoff is angry with Nicola and says that the servant must have taken to drinking. In the first place, he had brought the visitor to the garden, instead of taking him to the library, and in the second place, he has spoilt Raina's ice pudding. At this moment, Nicola appears with a bag and place sit respectfully before Bluntschli. Petkoff asks him why he has brought the bag there, and Nicola replies that he brought it there at his lady's orders; but interrupting him Catherine says that she didn't order him to bring the bag there. Hearing Catherine’s falsehood, after a moment's bewilderment, Nicola accepts it as his fault and begs to be excused for it. Catherine and Raina try to soothe Petkoff. Captain Bluntschli is then pressed by all of them to stay with them till he returns to Switzerland. Bluntschli finally agrees to stay.

Check Your Progress 3

Write a summary of Act II in your own words.

2.4.1 Analysis of Act II

In Act II**,** as in Act I, we are introduced to characters like Sergius, about whom we have heard several reports in Act I. Major Petkoff and Nicola, the servant appear on the scene for the first time. The plot develops further, and complication sarise due to the arrival of the Swiss soldier, Bluntschli and due to Louka's knowledge of Raina's secret. In this Act, Shawcarries forward the satire of the romantic ideal of love by making Sergius, who claims to be on the plane of higher love, flirt with Louka, the maid of the lady whom he ‘worships’.When Sergius and Raina meet for the first time after his return, they address each other in lofty language: Raina addresses Sergius as “My hero! My king,” while Sergius calls her “My queen”.Raina’s attitude is one of worship and admiration, while Sergius treats her with ‘holy awe.’Sergius says that she has been his inspiration all along:

> Sergius: “Dearest,all my deeds have been yours. You inspired me. I have gone through the war like a knight in a tournament with his lady looking down at him.”
> Raina: “And you have never been outfrom my thoughts for a moment. (very solemnly) Sergius, I think we two have found the higher love. When I think of you, I feel that Icould never do a base deed, or think an ignoble thought.”
> Sergius: “My lady, and my saint!” (*Clasping her reverently.*)

'Higher love' here means'spiritual love', which has no tinge of physical attraction. Sergius is conscious that this is an artificial pose, which is very tiring to keep up. He tells Louka that he needs some relief after keeping up this appearance of 'higher love'. After Raina leaves the scene, within minutes, Sergius is flirting with Louka, trying to embrace and kiss her. The insolent young Louka tells him that just as he was making love to herbehind Raina's back, she (whom he had addressed as a 'saint' just a few minutes ago) was doing the same behind his. Sergius is himself aware of contradictory tendencies within himself: while flirting with Louka, he says, "What would Sergius, the hero of Slivnitza, say if he saw me now. What would Sergius, the apostle of the higher love, say if he saw me now?" Through this passage Shaw conveys that the human mind has many contradictions and different aspects which may be the exact opposites of each other. Also, this passage is a satire on people who believe in higher love or spiritual love and pretend that they ignore physical passion altogether.

The satire of war is also carried further: Sergius who was acclaimed as a great hero in Act I has resigned from the army, as he has not got his promotion, and as he has been advised by Bluntschli. Sergius himself admires Bluntschli, whom Raina had despised as a "poor soldier" in the previous Act, saying, "Ah, he was a soldier—every inch a soldier!" He now has a new perspective of the soldier's profession:

> "Soldiering, 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. That is the whole secret of successful fighting. Get your enemy at a disadvantage; and never, on any account, fight him on equal terms."

Shaw, in the above passage, satirises the romantic notions of the heroism of soldiers and the glory of war. We are reminded that soldiers are ordinary human beings made of flesh and blood, who wish to avoid death on the battlefield at any cost.

In Act II we encounter more instances of the Petkoff family trying to appear as 'civilised' folk. When Catherine says she hopes her husband has been behaving properly before the officers, Petkoff says that he did his best and also claims that he has told them that he has a library at home. To this Catherine adds that there is an electric bell in the library to summon the servants, as "civilised people never shout for their servants," something Petkoff is constantly doing. Her husband retorts that he has also learnt about what civilized people do and what they do not do: civilized people don't hang the clothes to dry where visitors can see them. Catherine responds immediately by adding that refined people do not notice such things. The above dialogue is a satire of people who wish to belong to the so-called elite sections of society, and are always trying to appear sophisticated and refined.

In Act II, new developments are introduced: Sergius and Nicola are apparentlynow "rivals" for the love of Louka. Complications arise due to Louka'sknowledge of Raina's secret and the arrival of Bluntschli to return Major Petkoff's coat.Moreover, in this Act, Shaw satirises love by juxtaposing a scene of higher love between Sergius and Raina with another of flirtation between Sergius and Louka.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have discussed the summary of Acts I and II of *Arms and the Man.* We then analysed the two summaries and discussed how the various characters are introduced. In this

Unit we also considered how the satire of romantic notions of love and war is gradually built up by Shaw. In the next unit, we will discuss Act III of the play.

Unit End Question:

You have now read and discussed Acts I and II of *Arms and the Man*. What in your opinion, are the main themes of the play?

UNIT 3 *ARMS AND THE MAN*: SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS (2)

Structure

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In Unit I of this block, we familiarised ourselves with the life and work of George Bernard Shaw. In Unit II, we discussed the summaries of Acts I and II of *Arms and the Man* and critically analysed these Acts. Now, we move on to Act III, the last Act of the play. After analysing the summary of Act III, we will also discuss the main characters of the play and the significance of the title of the play.

3.2 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you should be able to:

- critically analyse Act III of *Arms and the Man.*
- discuss the main characters of the play.
- explain the significance of the title of the play.

3.3 SUMMARY OFACT III

After lunch, the scene shifts to Major Petkoff's library. Bluntschli is hard at work with a couple of maps before him; Sergius, who is supposed to be working, is watching him, wondering at Bluntschli's quick, business-like progress. Major Petkoff feels uncomfortable without his old coat, and asks for it. Catherine says that it must be hanging in the blue closet where he had left it. But Major Petkoff emphatically says that he had looked in the closet, and did not find it. Catherine calls Nicola and orders him to bring his master's coat from the closet. When Nicola returns with the old coat, Petkoff feels that because of his age, he is suffering from hallucinations.

After Bluntschli completes the task that Petfoff has given him, Major Petkoff, Catherine, and Sergius go out to give those papers and the necessary instructions to the messengers. Looking mischievously at Bluntschli, Raina comments that he is looking smarter than he looked when they last met. He tells her that it is because he has now washed, brushed, slept, and taken a meal. Raina remarks that Bluntschli must have made a lovely story about his experience of staying in her room and narrated it to his friends after he had gone back to his camp. Bluntschli tells her that he had told the story to one particular friend. Raina informs him that his friend had passed it on to others, and that it had reached Sergius and Major Petkoff. She

adds that they did not know that it was in her room that Bluntschli had taken refuge. She warns him that if Sergius ever came to know of it, he would definitely kill Bluntschli. Also, she does not wish to deceive Sergius, since her relationship with Sergius is the one really beautiful and noble part of her life.

Raina declares that in her life she has lied only twice, both times for the sake of Bluntschli. Bluntschli then tells her: "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." Impressed by his straightforward nature, Raina tells him that he is the first man she ever met who did not take her seriously and she wonders how he is able to see through her. She is now anxious to know whether he detests her as he has “found her out”. Bluntschli then, says that lying is a part of her youth and charm and he reveals that he is like others, her “infatuated admirer”. Now Raina asks him what he had thought about her putting her portrait in the pocket of the old coat after scribbling some words on it. Bluntschli says that he knows nothing about her portrait and had never seen it. Raina is worried that it is still in the pocket of the coat, and that her father would find it . Then Bluntschli tells her that as he could not carry the coat while on active service, he had pawned it to keep it in safe custody. Raina is furious to hear this and tells him that he has a low shop-keeping mind and thought of things that would never occur to a gentleman.

Louka comes in with a heap of letters and telegrams for Bluntschli and tells him that a messenger is waiting for him**.** After going through the letters and telegrams, Bluntschli tells Raina that his father had died, leaving several big hotels behind him to be looked after. Bluntschli goes out to make arrangements with the messenger to leave immediately for his country. Left alone with Raina, Louka remarks that the Swiss soldier has not much heart for he did not utter a word of grief for his departed father. Raina responds that as a soldier Bluntschli does nothing but kill people, and like all soldiers, he does not care for death. Louka teases her by saying that Sergius, even though a soldier, has plenty of heart. At this, Raina goes out haughtily. Louka prepares to follow her, but just then Nicola comes in.

Nicola tells Louka that he has received some money from Sergius and from Bluntschli. He offers Louka some of it, provided she talks to him as to a human being. After refusing to take the money, she says that he is born to be a servant, whereas she is not. Nicola is offended by her remarks and says that she has great ambition in her, and if any luck comes to her, it comes on account of him, for it is he, who has made a lady of her. Louka teases him saying that he would prefer her to be his customer rather than his wife. Nicola advises her not to be defiant, and says that as a servant should stand by another, he would stand by her. Rising impatiently, Louka tells him that his coldblooded wisdom is taking all the courage out of her.

Before Nicola could retort, Sergius comes in and Nicola cryptically tells Sergius that he has been advising Louka not to cultivate habits above her position. After Nicola leaves, Sergius examines Louka's injured arm. He then tries to take her in his arms, but Louka stops him. Louka teases him saying that she is braver than Sergius, for even if she were the Empress of Russia, she would marry the man she loved - however beneath her his position might be. She adds that he does not have the courage to marry the one he loves who is beneath his position or to allow his love for her to grow. She adds further that he will soon marry a rich man's daughter because he is afraid of what people would say of him. Sergius, retorts that even if he were the Czar himself, he would marry her, if he loved her. He adds that as he loved another woman, Raina, who is far above Louka, he will marry her, not Louka.

At this point, Louka reveals Raina's secret - she tells Sergius that Raina will never marry him, but will marry the Swiss soldier whom she loves and who has come back now. Sergius is shocked and furious to hear this and he tells Louka that he cannot believe anything bad about Raina because her worst thoughts are higher than Louka's best thoughts. Upset by this unexpected revelation, Sergius tells Louka that she belongs to him, and that he will have the courage to marry her in spite of what the whole of Bulgaria says. If his hands ever touch her again, they will touch his affianced bride. As Louka leaves, Bluntschli enters. Still upset about what Louka told him, Sergius accuses Bluntschli of deceiving him and invites him for a duel. Bluntschli responds by saying that as he is in the artillery, he would prefer to use a machine gun and this time he would make sure of the cartridges. Thinking that Bluntschli is joking with him, Sergius asks him to take the matter seriously.

Bluntschli, then tells him that he will fight him on foot and that he does not want to kill him if he can help it. Raina enters at this point and hears part of their conversation. Raina is worried about their planned duel, but Bluntschli assures her that no harm will be done to either of them as he is skilled in the use of the sword and will take care not to kill Sergius. He further assures that he will leave for home soon and then Raina and Sergius could be happy together.

Sergius accuses Raina of being in love with Bluntschli and adds that Bluntschli deceived Sergius, knowing fully well the relations between Raina and Sergius. Bluntschli says this is sheer nonsense and adds that Raina does not even know whether he is married or not. Sergius jumps to the conclusion that Raina's behaviour on hearing this indicates her concern for Bluntschli, who has enjoyed the privilege of staying in Raina's bedroom one night.

Bluntschli explains to Sergius how this happened - pursued by the Bulgarian soldiers, he had to take shelter in Raina's room and she allowed him stay in her room as he had threatened to shoot her if she raised an alarm. Raina thinks at first that Bluntschli's friend to whom he had narrated this story, must have passed it on to Sergius, but Sergius declares that he was not the informant. Suddenly Raina realises it was Louka who had told Sergius about this incident.

She recalls seeing them together through her window earlier that day, now she realises Sergius had been flirting with Louka, and that it was foolish on her part to have taken him to be a god. Sergius, then, remarks: "Raina! our romance is shattered. Life's a farce." He adds that he will not fight with Bluntschli even if he is considered a coward. Raina, then, sarcastically comments that since Sergius's new lover is Louka, he would have to fight a duel with Nicola to whom Louka is engaged.

Hearing this, Sergius once again loses his temper, and starts calling Raina names. Bluntschli tries to stop this quarrelling so that they could talk things over. When Bluntschli enquires where Louka is, Raina answers that Louka must be outside the door, eavesdropping. Sergius opens the door in order to prove Raina wrong, and, as rightly sensed by Raina, finds Louka standing just outside the door, listening to the conversation. In his rage, he drags her in and flings her against the table. Louka tells Raina that her love is stronger than Raina's feelings for her "chocolate cream soldier".

Petkoff enters without his coat. He tells Raina that somebody else with a differently shaped back had been wearing his coat; it has burst open at the back and is being mended. When Nicola brings back the coat, Raina pretends to help him in putting on the coat, cleverly takes

her portrait from the pocket, and throws it on the table before Bluntschli, who covers it with a sheet of paper, while Sergius who looks on in amazement.

Petkoff suddenly remembers the portrait which he has already found. When he searches his pockets, he finds it gone (since Raina has cleverly removed it). He says that Catherine may have removed Raina's picture with the inscription: "Raina, to her Chocolate Cream Soldier: a Souvenir", that he had found earlier. Major Petkoff suspects that there is something more in this than meets the eye. He crosschecks with Nicola whether he had actually spoiled an ice pudding made by Raina. When Nicola loyally tries to defend Raina, Major Petkoff turns towards Sergius and asks him whether he is Raina's "chocolate cream soldier". Sergius emphatically denies this.

Bluntschli then steps up and says that he is the "chocolate cream soldier". He adds that he is the fugitive in the story that Petkoff and Sergius had heard. Raina saved his life by giving him chocolate creams when he was starving. Raina explains to her father that when she sent her portrait, she did not know that Bluntschli is married; to her great relief, Bluntschli declares that he is not married. Raina informs Petkoff that Louka is the object of Sergius's affections presently. Nicola makes things easier by revealing that he and Louka are not engaged; Louka, has a soul above her station, and he expects her to be his rich customer when he sets up a shop. Louka then asks Sergius to apologize, for she has been insulted by everybody becauseof him.
Sergius apologizes to Louka and kisses her hand. Louka reminds him of his vow and says that his touch has made her his affianced bride. To the bewildered astonishment of all those present, including Catherine who just enters the scene, Sergius puts his arm around Louka and declares that she belongs to him. Catherine rebukes Louka for telling stories about Raina, but Louka affirms that she has done Raina no harm. She had told Sergius that Raina would marry Bluntschli if he came back. Louka tells Raina that it appears that Raina is more fond of Bluntschli than of Sergius.

Bluntschli declares that Raina simply saved his life, but never cared much for him. He adds that a young lady like Raina who is rich, beautiful and imaginative would not fall in love with a commonplace Swiss soldier like him. Also, there is a great disparity in their ages – he is thirty-four, while she doesn't look older than seventeen. Raina tells him that he should know the difference between a girl of seventeen and a woman of twenty-three. She then snatches her portrait from Bluntschli, tears it and throws the pieces on his face. Overwhelmed by the information that Raina is twenty-three years old, Bluntschli requests Major Petkoff to allow him to formally become the suitor of his daughter.

Catherine politely objects to Bluntschli's proposal by saying that the Petkoffs and Saranoffs are two of the richest families in Bulgaria, implying that a common soldier like Bluntschli is not a suitable match for her daughter. Major Petkoff points out that Raina is accustomed to a comfortable lifestyle and hints that Sergius who keeps twenty horses could provide her a comfortable life. Bluntschli is amused to hear this and reveals that his father had left enormous wealth for him. He now owns two hundred horses, seventy carriages, and many other assets.

Petkoff and his wife are impressed by the account of Bluntscli's wealth and are now happy to have him as their daughter's suitor. Raina'spride is hurt and says that she does not want to be sold to the highest bidder. Bluntschli, then, says that he had earlier appealed to her as a

fugitive, a beggar and a starving man, and she had accepted him. Pleased by his gesture, Raina agrees to marry her "chocolate cream soldier". Looking at his watch, Bluntschli becomes business-like once again. He asks Sergius not to get married till he comes back and he assumes that he would be back in two weeks. As Bluntschli leaves, Sergius remarks admiringly, "What a man! What a man!" The play ends here.

3.3.1 Analysis of Act III

In *Arms and the Man,* Act III performs several functions that the 'denouement' of the play in which all the complications and conflicts are resolved, usually serves. The relationship between Sergius and Raina breaks off; Louka and Sergius, and Bluntschli and Raina form new relationships. To this extent, the play draws upon the structure of popular nineteenth century British dramatic forms such as the farce and the well-made play. The play however goes beyond the limitations of traditional dramatic structure, and achieves its serious purpose of breaking down romantic notions and exposing some of the characters as they get rid of false and pretentious poses. At the beginning of the Act, Raina is still holding on to her notion of 'higher love'. She tells Bluntschli, "I want to be quite perfect with Sergius: no meanness, no smallness, no deceit. My relation to him is the one really beautiful and noble part of my life."

Raina is annoyed with Bluntschli, for narrating the story of his stay in her room to his friend, who, in turn, passed it on to Sergius and Major Petkoff. She adds that luckily they are not aware that she is the lady in question and that it was in her room that Bluntschli had stayed. She is sure that if Sergius comes to know of it, he will challenge Bluntschli to a duel and kill him. At this Bluntschli with typical good humour tells her that it would be best not to tell Sergius the whole story. Raina asks him to take the matter seriously and to understand that it causes her great pain to deceive Sergius or to conceal anything from him, for her relationship with Sergius is really beautiful and noble. She claims that she has lied only twice in her life, both times for Bluntschli's sake. Bluntschli knows she is not telling the truth and says, "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." This remark leads to a very important moment in the play:

> "She points to herself incredulously, meaning "I, Raina Petkoff, tell lies!" He meets her gaze unflinchingly. She suddenly sits down beside him, and adds, with a complete change of manner from the heroic to the familiar, "How did you find me out?"

Raina here begins to throw off her romantic mask and discard her 'noble' pose. She presents her true self to Bluntschli and this becomes the basis for true understanding between them. Raina admits to Bluntschli that from childhood onwards, she had adopted "the noble attitude and thrilling voice" and got everybody to believe her.

> "You know, I've always gone on like that—I mean the noble attitude and the thrilling voice. I did it when I was a tiny child to my nurse. She believed in it. I do it before my parents. They believe in it. I do it before Sergius. He believes in it."

She has always been assuming the noble attitude to impress people. As a child she deceived her nurse in this manner. Her parents are deceived by her poses. Sergius, too, is taken in by her poses and pretensions and believes what she tells him. At this Bluntschli says that Sergius

himself assumes such poses and, therefore, it is not surprising that he easily believes her. Raina is worried that now that Bluntschli has "found her out", understood her true nature behind the mask, he would despise her. She is pleased to hear that he is her "infatuated admirer".

Saranoff also finds all his false ideals collapsing before him. In Act II itself, he had started questioning the tactics of the military leadership and the soldier's profession. In Act III, on hearing about Bluntschli's friend who was burnt alive, he exclaims, "Oh, war! war! the dream of patriots and heroes! A fraud, Bluntschli, a hollow sham, like love." Just as his notions of heroic glory on the battlefield are shattered, his romantic ideal of "higher love" also turns out to be hollow:

> SERGIUS.
> (*cynically*). Raina: our romance is shattered. Life's a farce.
> BLUNTSCHLI.
> (*to Raina, goodhumoredly*). You see: he's found himself out now

Raina realises that Sergius has been flirting with Louka and remarks indignantly, "Oh, what sort of god is this I have been worshipping!" while Sergius watches "with sardonic enjoyment of her disenchantment". Just as Raina found her true self beneath her mask, she discovers what Sergius is truly like, beneath his pose.

Segius who has been addressing her reverentially as "my queen", and "my saint", and treating her with "holy awe" up till this point now calls her names and taunts her. The dramatist, thus, demonstrates the hollowness of romantic love. The true natures of all the characters are revealed through their encounters with each other; in fact they learn to see themselves as they truly are beyond false pretensions.

Bluntschli emerges as the typical Shavian hero who is governed by the head and not by the heart. His cool-headedness is something that even Sergius admires: "Ah, well, Bluntschli," he says, "you are right to take this huge imposture of a world coolly."In Act I, Shaw presented characters who are caught up in falsified notions of romantic love and of military glory. In Act II, the collapse of these ideals begins and the process is brought to a conclusion in Act III, where the characters throw off their affected poses.

Check your progress 1

1. Explain in your own words how the relationship between Raina and Bluntschli develops in the play.

3.4 THE MAJOR CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY

Bluntschli

When Bluntschli first enters Raina's room, he is described as a man of about thirty-five years, of middle stature and undistinguished appearance, with strong neck and shoulders, roundish obstinate looking head and clear, quick eyes. He is shabby, unkempt, hungry and exhausted, but has all his wits about him in spite of his desperate situation. His face reflects a humorous disposition and his energetic body indicates that he is not a man to be trifled with.

Bluntschli regards the cavalry charge of Sergius, and his displays of valour as acts of madness. He represents the anti-romantic view of war. His experience of war and soldiering has taught him not to believe in heroism. He has no glorious visions of war, and believes that every soldier should try his best to save his own life. According to him, it is the duty of a soldier to live as long as he can, and avoid getting killed on the battlefield. This contrasts with the view that there is glory to be gained by dying on the battlefield. When Sergius invites him to a duel, he says, "I am a professional soldier: I fight when I have to, and am very glad to get out of it, when I haven't to, you are only an amateur: You think fighting is an amusement."His realism is reflected in his realisation that food is moreimportant on the front than ammunition. Bluntschli's realism is tempered by his sense of humour.

Bluntschli is a shrewd judge of human nature. He knows that a young lady will not like to appear before outsiders when she is not properly dressed. So he uses this knowledge to his advantage and uses Raina's cloak as a weapon to protect himself. It is this shrewdness that makes it possible for him to "find out" Raina, and judge her true nature. He says, "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." Raina, then admits that she has been able to deceive others but not him. He sees through her affectations and posing and she asks in wonder, "How did you find me out?"

Bluntschli is practical and anti-romantic to a large extent. In this regard he is antithetical to Raina and Sergius, who are romantic, sentimental, and who live in a world of unreality. His honest, unromantic nature influences Raina, in getting rid of her false ideals. Further, he is a thorough gentleman: he tells Raina that he does not want to bring disgrace to her by remaining in her room all night.So, he agrees reluctantly, to leave and climb down the pipe into the street. Moreover, he is man of quick understanding and penetrating insight. His intelligence isacknowledged by everybody he comes in contact with. Petkoff and Sergius are impressed by his shrewdness and his skill in handling military matters. They openly admire his military leadership qualities and skills.

He is always business-like, and this aspect of his nature seems to have deprived him of delicate feelings. Louka points out rightly that he does not utter even a word of sorrow when he came to know the news of his father's death. Even his departure is cool and business-like – after offering himself as a suitor to Raina, he gives a few instructions to Petkoff, and departs after fixing a time for his return.

Raina Petkoff

Shaw introduces Raina in this manner: "On the balcony a young lady, intensely conscious of the romantic beauty of the night, and of the fact that her own youth and beauty are part of it, is gazing at the snowy Balkans." This introduction suggests Raina's youth, beauty, and dreamy, romantic nature.

Raina is a young lady whose notions are derived from her reading of romances and novels. As Bluntschli rightly puts it, her imagination is "full of fairy princes and noble natures and cavalry charges and goodness knows what!" Having read Byron and Pushkin, and a lot of fiction, she is extremely romantic in her view of life.

Wa,r in her view is an opportunity for the gallant soldier to earn glory, even if it is by dying. For this reason, she thinks that Sergius has performed a supremely heroic deed by leading a triumphant cavalry charge against the Serbians – it is Bluntschli who later informs her that the Bulgarians won the battle by accident, and not through Sergius's leadership skills.

Raina has unrealistic ideas regarding love also. Almost all her dialogues with Sergius are artificial and affectatious, and are suffused with the notion of "higher love". Both Raina and Sergius are posing and pretending; they behave as though they are searching for something divine. Also, their love does not stand the test of time, since it has no foundation in real feeling.

In Act I itself, Raina is attracted towards Bluntschli, who is realistic and practical, yet witty and humorous. She is brave and shows no fear when a stranger intrudes into her chamber, instead she boldly argues with the intruder. She does not become nervous when the Russian soldier enters her room to search for the Serbian officer.

She is impulsive, yet kind hearted and noble. When the Swiss soldier is depressed, she is moved, and feeling pity for him, tries to cheer him up: "Come: don't be disheartened. (She stoops over him almost maternally.) Oh, you are a very poor soldier, a chocolate cream soldier! Come, cheer up!" This sympathy and pity that she feels on seeing Bluntschli's helplessness and her admiration for his sound logic and realistic temperament, gradally lead her to loving him. She is intelligent enough to realise that she had all along been deceiving others and herself with her affectations, and is willing to discard that pose.

She has a trusting nature and has absolute faith in Sergius. Even though she sees Sergius and Louka together through her window, she does not yield to serious misgivings. When the truth about Sergius's interest in Louka is revealed, her break with Sergius is completes and she accepts Bluntschli as her suitor.

Sergius Saranoff

In his extremely detailed description of Sergius Saranoff, Shaw says, "(He) is a tall romantically handsome man with the physical hardihood, the high spirit, and the susceptible imagination of an untamed mountaineer chieftain." Shaw describes him as some sort of Byronic hero marked by a "half tragic, half ironic air, the mysterious moodiness, the suggestion of a strange and terrible history that has left him nothing but undying remorse."

Sergius lives in an unreal world, and like Raina, constantly assumes a pose. He joins the army and goes to the battlefield, with the aim of earning glory. He imagines himself to be some sort of a knight and thinks that the cavalry charge led by him against the Serbian soldiers was a heroic deed. But Bluntschli who is not only realistic and practical, but also an excellent military leader, is appalled by Segius's ignorance of military tactics. Bluntschli says that his cavalry charge, about which the ladies are wildly enthusiastic, was an act of madness and Sergius should be courtmartialled for it. Bluntschli advises him to leave the military profession. Also, Sergius is upset when he does not get a promotion and decides to resign from the army.

He, too, like Raina indulges in the fantasy of "higher love" and addresses Raina as 'my queen', and 'my saint'. His treats Raina as a model of perfection and believes that she does

not have any shortcomings or weaknesses. It is ironical that after a scene of higher love with Raina, he flirts with Louka to relieve himself of the strain caused by maintaining the pose of 'higher love'. He is himself aware of contradictory tendencies within himself that seem to pull him in different directions; he tells Louka, while holding her in an embrace, "I am surprised at myself, Louka. What would Sergius, the hero of Slivnitza, say if he saw me now? What would Sergius, the apostle of the higher love, say if he saw me now? What would the half dozen Sergiuses who keep popping in and out of this handsome figure of mine say if they caught us here?"

As soon as he comes to know of Raina's involvement with Bluntschli, Sergius realises that his ideals were collapsing; he says that their romance is shattered and life is a farce. Sergius is a conceited man, and Louka is shrewd enough to exploit his vanity and his false sense of honour. She accuses him of not having the courage to marry the person whom he loves, since he is afraid of what people would say. He then declares to Louka, "If I were the Czarhimself I would set you on the throne by my side." Louka ensures that he keeps his word.

He lacks understanding of military affairs as well as human nature. Though he has committed a blunder on the battlefield, he thinks he has done a great heroic deed. He fails to come out with a plan for sending regiments, and when Bluntschli does the same job meticulously, he hides his inability with the remark:"This hand is more used to the sword than to the pen."

His vanity is reflected in statements such as: "I never apologize", "I am never sorry" and "Nothing binds me." Even though Sergius has some negative qualities, he is also a gentleman. Though he is captivated by the charms of Louka, he is strict with her when she talks against Raina. He says: "Take care, Louka, I may be worthless enough to betray the higher love; but do not you insult it." Later he says: "You have stained by honourby making me a party to your eavesdropping. And you have betrayed your mistress." The contrast between Sergius and Bluntschli is very obvious, and in many ways, he is a foil to Bluntschli.

Louka

Louka, the maid of the Petkoffs, is described in Act I, in the following manner: "a handsome, proud girl in a pretty Bulgarian peasant's dress with double apron, so defiant that her servility to Raina is almost insolent. She is afraid of Catherine, but even with her goes as far as she dares." Though she is a woman of humble origins, she has a soul above her station and is keen on marrying a rich man. She does not heed Nicola's advice regarding her behaviour. Louka repeatedly tells Nicola that he has the soul of a servant whereas no one could ever put the soul of a servant in her. There is a world of difference between the views of Louka and those of Nicola. Though they are supposed to be engaged, Nicola, being a shrewd judge of human nature, knows that it would be better to have Louka as one of his rich customers, when he sets up a shop, rather than make her his wife. She longs to be elevated to a higher status in life and achieves this when Sergius decides to marry her.

Louka's behaviour is marked by defiance and insolence. Her defiant attitude towards Raina is conspicuous in Act I of the play itself. When she comes into Raina's room to inform her about the disturbances, she behaves in a careless manner. She is uncivil towards Bluntschli also; in Act III she flings his letters and telegrams on the table before him. She uses her beauty and attractiveness to make Sergius interested in her. Louka shrewdly exploits Sergius's vanity and uses it to her advantage and finally wins him. Her sharpness and

observant nature are evident in Act I. Catherine and the Russian officers are deceived by Raina regarding the presence of the intruder. But Louka observes the pistol lying on the ottoman and realizes that the intruder is hidden behind the curtains. She rightly perceives that Raina loves Bluntschli and that if Bluntschli came back, Raina would marry him and not Sergius. In short, though Louka is defiant and insolent by nature, she is also clever, witty and shrewd.

3.5 THE TITLE OF THE PLAY

The title of the play *Arms and the Man* is taken from Dryden's translation of the opening lines of Virgil's *Aeneid*:

> "Arms and the Man I sing, who forced by fate,
> And haughty Juno's unrelenting hate."

*Aeneid i*s a Latin epic of war, military exploits and adventure. In it war is glorified and man is shown to be a creature who can attain heroic proportions. In *Arms and the Man* Bernard Shaw gives an ironic twist to Virgil's lines. Shaw glorifies neither war nor the life of the soldier. His view in the play is that it is meaningless for men to fight wars to gain glory and honour.

Through the character Bluntschli, Shaw makes it clear that for most soldiers, war and weapons are not the instruments of achieving glory, but a means of earning their livelihood. Bluntschli is a professional soldier, willing to fight in any country for payment. He would prefer not to fight, and would rather save his life in the battlefield by taking a safe position. In the battlefield, chocolates he says, are more important than cartridges, since they provide quick nourishment.

Bluntschli's professional military background and experience makes him question the unprofessional way in which the Bulgarians led by Segius attacked the Serbs. He says that only an amateur would lead a cavalry charge against a battery of machine guns, without calculating the danger of the situation. If the Serbs had the proper ammunition, and the guns had gone off, Sergius and his regiment would have been completely wiped out. Thus we get a realistic perspective of war that does not glorify it or see it as the opportunity to gain honour and fame. A soldier, in Shaw's view, should ideally try to save his life, rather than die a glorious death on the battlefield. As discussed above, the plot revolves around war, and it deals with men and their arms, though in a sense different from that of Virgil's lines. Hence, the title *'Arms and the Man'* is appropriate for the play.

3.6 *ARMS AND THE MAN* AS AN ANTI – ROMANTIC COMEDY

Arms and the Man is the first in the series of "pleasant plays"**.** Its subtitle is: "An Anti-Romantic Comedy in Three Acts." Raina lives in a world of romance and considers herself to be in love with Sergius. Her ideas about love come from reading Byron and Pushkin, and from operas she has seen during her visits to Bucharest.

In a recent battle at Slivnitza, Sergius has led a triumphant charge against the Serbs, and is reported as 'the hero of the hour, the idol of the regiment'. In true romantic fashion, Raina picks up a picture of Sergius and gazes at it proudly. While adoring the picture of Sergius

with ‘feelings that are beyond expression', Raina does not show it any mark of affection. She does not kiss it but looks upon it as if it were something holy.

The entrance of Bluntschli at this moment begins to destroy her romantic dreams. Bluntschli is free from romantic illusions about war, and does not view it as the means to win glory. His robust commonsense strikes at the root of Raina's affectations - her lofty ideals, her aristocratic manner and her pride in her family’s social status. Slowly but surely, she realizes the folly of her romantic illusions.

In the second Act, the focus is on the exposure of romantic notions of love and marriage. The Act begins with a scene of higher love between Raina and Sergius. Raina adores Sergius for his heroic action in the war and calls him 'my hero, my king', while Sergius calls her 'my queen'. He tells her that all his deeds have been inspired byher and he has gone through the war like a knight in a tournament with his lady looking down at him and encouraging him. They agree that they havefound 'the higher love'. Amost immediately, Sergius confesses to Louka that the higher love is 'very fatiguing’ to keep up for long. Louka exposes the ‘higher love’ of Sergius and Raina to ridicule and shatters their noble sentiments and poses. ‘Higher love’ is thus revealed to be a sham and those who claim to experience higher love, simply fool themselves. In *Arms and the Man,* Shaw proves that romantic ideas of love and war are nothing but delusions, and therefore *Arms and the Man* is an anti-romantic comedy.

3.7 LET US SUM UP

We began this Unit with a brief summary of Act III of the play and then proceeded to analyse the significance of Act III in the structure of the play. We then discussed the major characters as well as the title of the play. We concluded the Unit with a discussion of *Arms and the Man* as an anti-romantic comedy. In the next unit, we will discuss the major themes and concerns of the play in detail.

Check your progress 2

1. Discuss the significance of the title of the play.

Glossary

Denouement: the final part of a play in which all matters are explained or complications resolved.

UNIT 4 *ARMS AND THE MAN*: THEMES AND CONCERNS

Structure

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the first Unitof this block, we discussed the life and work of George Bernard Shaw, and in the next two Units we read andfamiliarised ourselves with Shaw's play *Arms and the Man*, its characters and some of its themes. In this final Unit of the block, we will be discussing the major themes and concerns of this play in detail. Before proceeding to study this Unit, you should definitely read the original play. Also try to watch a good production of the play on the internet.

4.2 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit you should be able to:

1. Identify and critically analyse the major themes of the play
2. Explain why *Arms and the Man* is considered to be an 'anti-romantic comedy.'

4.3 THE RECEPTION OF *ARMS AND THE MAN*

Arms and the Man was written between 26th November, 1893 and 30th March, 1894, and first performed on 21st April, 1894.The play is set against the background of the Serbo-Bulgarian war of 1885.

Michael O'Hara assesses the significance of this play thus: among Shaw's plays, *Arms and the Man* was the first play to be performed in the famous West End of London (where some of London's leading theatres are located), the first to be performed in both the United States and Germany, the first to inspire a musical version (with the title 'The Chocolate Soldier'), the first to become a full-length film, and the first to be directed by Shaw himself (145). It is clear that the play made Shaw a noted figure not just in British theatre but also on the international scene – it thereforemarked an important stage in Shaw's career as a playwright.

When the play was first performed in London, it created a huge sensation. However, a large section of the audience also found the play somewhat confusing.The actor Yorke Stephens,

who played the role of Bluntschli, the Swiss captain in the playon the opening night (21st April, 1894) writes,

> "As for the first night of *Arms and the Man* - who will ever forget it? The whole house was bewildered. They didn't know when to laugh, or where, or how. … every evening was a still more puzzling ordeal. The play created a certain sensation, there is no doubt about that, but the great outer public simply couldn't understand - or didn't take the trouble to understand - what it was driving at"(130).

After the first performance of the play, Shaw was requested to make a speech to the audience. When someone greeted him with disrespectful shouts, he remarked with characteristic wit, "I assure the gentleman in the gallery that he and I are of exactly the same opinion, but what can we do against a whole house who are of the contrary opinion?" (Quoted in Satran 12) According to the famous poet W.B. Yeats, the first performance of *Arms and the Man*was sensational: "from that moment,"writes Yeats, "Bernard Shaw became the most formidable man in modern letters"(127-28).What Yeats emphasises here is that with this performance of *Arms and the Man,* Shaw was acknowledged as one of the most powerful voices in the literary world of his time.

What Shaw himself writes in one of his letters, about the opening performance shows how he realised that the audience had failed to arrive at his message in the play: "I had the curious experience of witnessing an apparently insane success … and of going before the curtain to tremendous applause, the only person in the theatre who knew that the whole thing was a ghastly failure" (*Collected Letters 1874-1897*, p 462).

Many critics wrote against the play after its first performance; some of them felt that it was mocking soldiers and the military. In the July 1894 issue of the '*New Review*', Shaw wrote a long article titled 'A Dramatic Realist to his Critics', in which he countered the criticisms raised by theatre enthusiasts and critics, against the play.*Arms and the Man,* is not as complex as many of Shaw's later plays, such as *Man and Superman,Back to Methuselah* or *Saint Joan*. Why then did the first performance of this play create mixed reactions among its viewers? Also, why did the playwright, who also directed the first production, view it as a "ghastly failure"?

Critics offer several explanations: according to David Satran, although Shaw intended the play to depict the harsh reality of war and soldiering through the experiences of Bluntschli, he immediately realized that "the play and its hero had been misread as farce."Many members of the audience failed to understand that characters like Bluntschli were meant to force them to rethink their false ideals of love and war. Instead they ridiculed such characters for falling short of their romantic expectations and idealizations. Therefore, "the play failed in its critique of the romanticizing oflove and war"(Satran 12).Thus, many people in the audience mistakenly saw the place as a farce, and Bluntschli as a comic character. They failed to see that through a down-to-earth character like Bluntschli, Shaw was presenting an anti-romantic view of war. Another critic David Sauer expresses the view that the play failed in evoking the expected response from the audience, because of the complexity of Raina's character, which "makes difficult both acting the play and responding to it." (Sauer 163).

Thus, even though *Arms and the Man* proved to be Shaw's first commercial success on the London stage, Shaw was concerned that a large section of the audience failed to understand

its message. This also created in him a new awareness of his role on the London theatre scenario. David Satran points out that Shaw's aim as a playwright and director, was to transform the theatre, " a popular, middle and upper-class venue into a site for social dialogue and political action" (Satran 13).However the reception of *Arms and the Man*, continues Satran, made it clear that he faced a huge challenge in bringing about such a transformation. The London theatre goers, Shaw realised , were not yet prepared for bringing about such a transformation, mainly because the kind of plays that they watched, did not encourage such abilities in them. Shaw felt that the public would have to be trained in such skills by playwrights like himself. He felt that the conventional drama, with its conveniences of plot and fondness for exaggeration, could never succeed in helping his audience free itself from its belief in false ideals. "His audience having been spoon-fed on little else other than farce and "well-made" plays, has come to demand little more than much of the same." He therefore sets out to improve the taste of his audience (Satran 13 -18).

Here Satran emphasises Shaw's general dissatisfaction with the kind of plays that were being presented on the London stage, and his conviction that a new kind of drama had to be introduced. You may remember that in Unit 1 we had discussed how Shaw was extremely critical of nineteenth century British drama, especially of the well-made play and the farce, whixh were the most popular forms of dramatic entertainment. Shaw focused in the rest of his writing career, on the task of educating the London theatre audiences, and in creating in them the capacity to fully exploit the political potential of theatre.

Check Your Progress 1

Write a short note in your own words on the reception of the first performance of Shaw's play *Arms and the Man*in London.

4.4 BERNARD SHAW'S VIEWS ON WAR

Shaw held strong views on war and military leadership, which he constantly expressed through his letters, speeches, pamphlets and plays. His view, as expressed in these different media, was basically that all war is a"crime based on the determination of the soldier to stick at nothing to bring it to an end and get out of the daily danger of being shot" ('The Human Review', 1901, January). As theatre critic Christopher Innes notes, in the early years of the twentieth century, in response to the Boer war, Shaw wrote a number of essays for periodicals, as well as public letters to newspapers, and delivered several major lectures, attacking jingoistic militarism. In the years before the First World War, he published several essays on disarmament, arguing for an international agreement to outlaw war. Shaw published his thoughts about war, especially in the context of World War I, in his pamphlet "Common Sense about the War" as a supplement to the 'New Statesman' on November14, 1914 (Innes 203). In fact, his pacifist views made him extremely unpopular and nearly got him arrested during the years of World War I (Sternlicht 4).

4.5 THE THEME OF WAR

Arms and the Man (1894) was probably the earliest play in which Shaw expressed his anti-war position – in later plays like *The Man of Destiny* (1895), *The Devil's Disciple* (1896), *Major Barbara* (1907), and *Saint Joan* (1924), he continued to critique war and the military.

As Mendelsohn points out in the essay 'Shaw's Soldiers', Shaw's deep interest in military matters, appears in a number of his plays in which he constantly examines questions of bravery, cowardice, military genius, romantic glory, and death on the battlefield (30).

Apart from popular plays by Shaw, such as *Arms and the Man, Major Barbara, The Man of Destiny*, and *Saint Joan*, some of his lesser known plays also engage with themes of war and military glory. An example is the play *O'Flaherty VC* (1915), set against the background of Ireland during the First World War. In a study comparing *O'Flaherty VC* with Sean O'Casey's play. *The Silver Tassie*, Heinz Kosok points out how both these plays, are critiques of all wars:

> "… both plays go beyond the specific situation of Ireland in that they are uncompromising anti-war plays which use the front-line experience of the First World War to call into question any type of war, conducted for any imaginable reason. Although in each case one character is awarded the Victoria Cross, such concepts as "courage" and "heroism" are revealed to be myths created for obvious propaganda purposes, while the dominant emotion of the front-line soldier is shown to be fear…. In this final aspect, the universal appeal against war, any war, these two plays go beyond the attitude revealed in most plays that were written in England. Perhaps it needed the authors' specific Irish perspective to unmask the complete futility of war." (Heinz 25).

Here the critic rightly points out how, in many of his plays, Shaw tried to show 'courage' and 'heroism' as myths, since the soldier on the front-line, like Bluntschli in this play, would be primarily interested in saving his own life. In fact, in many of his plays, we find Shaw, the committed pacifist, working to "unmask the complete futility of war" and trying to show the world, how meaningless and terrible it is.(Refer Unit 1 to see how in the play *Heartbreak House* Shaw expresses his frustration with the intellectuals of Europe, for failing to prevent the catastrophe of World War I)

Check Your progress 2

What were Shaw's views on war? How does Shaw express his views on war in plays other than *Arms and the Man*? Write your answer in your own words.

4.5.1 The Title of the Play

As we discussed in the previous Unit, the title of the play is an ironic reference to the opening lines of Dryden's translation of Virgil's *Aenid*:

"Arms and the man I sing, who, forc'd by fate,
And haughty Juno's unrelenting hate,
Expell'd and exil'd, left the Trojan Shore."

As W.H. Semple, points out, at the beginning of the *Aenid*, Virgil makes it clear that war will be his main theme (*Armavirumquecano*), and gives hints of all the battles to follow in the various Books of this great epic. Ultimately, he condemns war in scathing language and shows his awareness of the pathetic futility of war ("War and Peace in Virgil's *Aenid*"). Shaw uses the first few words of the *Aenid* in an ironic sense – his play also focuses on "arms and

the man", but it is not a glorification of man's heroic exploits and military valour, but an attempt to reveal the harsh reality of war, its essential meaninglessness and brutality. We also have to remember that, despite the fact that the *Aenid*is largely devoted to the theme of war, Virgil also expresses his awareness of the horror of war.

4.5.2 De-romanticising war in *Arms and the Man*:

Christopher Innes sees *Arms and the Man*, as an inversionor parody of the 'military melodrama' which was very popular in the nineteenth century (207). How does Shaw create such a parody of military melodrama in *Arms and the Man*? He does this by making the play a satire of romantic notions of love and war, which were the typical characteristics of military melodrama. His satire of romanticised views of war is created by contrasting the indiscreet Sergius Saranoff, who is very theatrical in his displays of military valour, with the cautious and down-to-earth Bluntschli. Sergius Saranoff himself acknowledges that Bluntschli, despite his lack of valorous pretensions and bravado, is an excellent fighter and leader. The play forces the thinking members of the audience to revise their views about the ideal soldier.

David Satran explains how in *Arms and the Man*, Shaw gradually builds up his satire of theatrical, "romanticized notions of war", and examines what it means to actually be a soldier on the battlefield.

> "To achieve this end, he offers his viewers a Swiss captain to portray the reality of a professional soldier's experience both on and off the battlefield. Shaw casts Bluntschli as a mercenary in service to the Serbians during their November 1885 invasion of Bulgaria. *Arms and the Man* opens with a Bulgarian cavalry charge that compels him to scale Raina Petkoff's window and hide in her bedchamber. Once there, he disappoints the young woman's every expectation of how a soldier should behave. Instead of behaving nobly and heroically – as she believes her beloved Sergius Saranoff did, by leading the charge against the Serbs – Bluntschli cowers in her bedchamber, making every effort not to be found." (Satran 13)

This contrast between the heroic, gallant Sergius, who successfully led a charge against the Bulgarians, and the Swiss captain Bluntschli, who tries to hide in a lady's bedroom so that his enemies do not discover him, is presented through the reactions of the young Raina.It is only later in the play that we learn that the Bulgarian charge led by the impetuous Sergius, had won their victory merely through a stroke of luck, since the Serbs led by Bluntschli had accidentally been sent the wrong-sized cartridges. The description of Sergius's charge that Bluntschli gives, unaware that Raina is betrothed to him, is one of the comic highlights of the play:

> He did it like an operatic tenor—a regular handsome fellow, with flashing eyes and lovely moustache, shouting a war-cry and charging like Don Quixote at the windmills. We nearly burst with laughter at him…. And there was Don Quixote flourishing like a drum major, thinking he'd done the cleverest thing ever known, whereas he ought to be court-martialled for it. Of all the fools ever let loose on a field of battle, that man must be the very maddest. He and his regiment simply committed suicide—only the pistol missed fire, that's all.
> (Act 1, *Arms and the Man*)

Raina is furious to hear her hero being mocked in this manner, and makes it known that she is betrothed to Sergius. Bluntschli is apologetic for having spoken disrespectfully about her fiancé and remarks "(shamefacedly, but still greatly tickled)… But when I think of him, charging the windmills and thinking he was doing the finest thing … (chokes with suppressed laughter)."

From Bluntschli's report of Sergius's "gallant charge", it is clear that if the Serbs had received the right cartridges, the outcome of the battle could have been very different; Sergius's "heroism" is thus built on very shaky grounds. Raina herself does have an uneasy sense of self doubt about Sergius's heroism at one point, when she says:

> "Raina: Well, it came into my head just as he was holding me in his arms and looking into my eyes that perhaps we only had our heroic ideas because we are so fond of reading Byron and Pushkin, and because we were so delighted with the opera that season at Bucharest….I wondered whether all his heroic qualities and his soldier ship might not prove mere imagination when he went into a real battle. I had an uneasy fear that he might cut a poor figure there beside all those clever Russian officers."
> (Act 1 *Arms and the Man*)

On hearing about Sergius's triumph, she realises that she was wrong in having "doubted him", and that he is "just as splendid and noble as he looks."Raina worships her heroic Sergius and expresses her admiration for him in the most sublime language, while contemptuously referring to Bluntschli, as 'the choclate cream soldier'. As he hides in the young lady's bedroom, Bluntschli becomes, as Satran points out a 'foil' to the triumphant Sergius.

> "Though Bluntschli manages to evade the Bulgarians' charge, he unwittingly finds himself performing as Saran off 's foil. His sudden appearance presents everyone watching with an unplanned opportunity to rethink commonly accepted views on soldiering, war, and masculinity. For Raina these views had until then been informed in equal parts by Saranoff's posturing and a regular diet of romance novels and opera performances, while the audience, Shaw rightly suspected, was likely to have a similarly narrow set of influences. Together the two men offer Raina competing conceptions of what it means to be a soldier, and through them Shaw aims for the play to challenge the audience's ingrained beliefs." (Satran 15).

Satran here makes the very important point that the audience's and Raina's views about war and military glory are derived from "romance novels and opera performances", and are therefore not grounded in reality. Shaw's attempt is to highlight the absurdity of such romantic and unrealistic views of war, which for the soldier on the field who comes face-to-face with death is a traumatic experience. When he seeks refuge in Raina's room, Bluntschli is not only hungry and exhausted, he is also a nervous wreck; as he tells Raina, after facing constant shell attacks on the field, he is "as nervous as a mouse," and would start crying if she scolded him like a child. He represents the plight of the soldier who actually had to face the stresses and hardships of the battlefield. It is through the contrast between the vastly different soldering styles of the two men, Sergius and Bluntschli, that Shaw makes Raina, and through her, his audience, revise their romantic, theatrical ideas about what it actually means to fight it out on a battlefield.

However, it is only a discerning spectator who would realise what the playwright was demanding from his audience. The general mass of the audience fed, like Raina, on a diet of melodrama, would find Bluntschli to be, as Raina says, “a poor soldier”, a pathetic failure, a farcical character. This is why the audience at the early performances laughed over the play, making Shaw remark that the performance of *Arms and the Man* was “a ghastly failure”.

Probably, what made Bluntschli look even more like a farcical character, is his practice of carrying chocolate in his pockets, instead of cartridges. He tells Raina, "I have no ammunition," and immediately goes on to add, "What use are cartridges in battle? I always carry chocolate instead; and I finished the last cake of that hours ago." To an audience that expects a soldier to be a gallant, swashbuckling hero, a soldier who goes to battle with chocolate in his pockets, must have appeared truly comic.

Raina is "out- raged in her most cherished ideals of manhood" when she asks, "Do you stuff your pockets with sweets - like a schoolboy - even in the field?" (401). Bluntschli humorously points out that an experienced soldier could be identified by what he carried in his pockets: “you can always tell an old soldier by the insides of his holsters and cartridge boxes. The young ones carry pistols and cartridges, the old ones grub.”

Raina fails to understand the practical wisdom of Bluntschli’ sremark. Satran explains that though the play's audience may not have known it, soldiers like Bluntschli did in fact carry chocolate on the battlefield to provide themselves with ready nourishment. “Altogether caught up in idealized notions of war, soldiering and masculinity, Raina dubs Bluntschli a “chocolate cream soldier” to signify his supposed immaturity, lack of character and failure to fulfil her ideals: “Oh, you are a very poor soldier, a chocolate cream soldier.” (15-16). Raina realises only much later that the ‘chocolate cream soldier’ is actually the true fighter and military leader as compared to her supposedly valorous hero, who is as Bluntschli says as foolish as Don Quixote on the battlefield.

One of the issues raised by critics against the play was that it deliberately mocked soldiers and brave men who went to war by portraying them as comic “chocolate cream soldiers”. To such critics Shaw responded in the following manner in his essay ‘A Dramatic Realist to His Critics’: “The notion that there could be any limit to a soldier's courage, or any preference on his part for life and a whole skin over a glorious death in the service of his country, was inexpressibly revolting to them.” Shaw emphasises here that his critics had a very unrealistic view of war and soldiers, since they could not accept the fact that any soldier would prefer life to a “glorious death in the service of his country.”

Shaw argues that the difference between real warfare and warfare on the stage lies in the fact that in real warfare, there is real personal danger, the sense of which is constantly present to the mind of the soldier, whereas in the article warfare there is nothing but glory. “Hence Captain Bluntschli who thinks of a battlefield as a very busy and very dangerous place, is incredible to the critic who thinks of it only as a theatre in which to enjoy the luxurious excitements of patriotism, victory and bloodshed without risk or retribution.” (‘Dramatic Realist’35,). In *Arms and the Man* as well as many other plays, Shaw attempts to compel his readers to accept the reality that the battlefield is “ a very busy and very dangerous place” and definitely not a theatre for “patriotism, victory and bloodshed.”

In his study 'Shaw's Soldiers,' Mendelsohn explains that Shaw's criticism of the military establishment was based on his belief that with generally, any soldier is unaware of anything beyond fear and self preservation, often commanded by incapable, inefficient, and indifferent officers, and blindly guided by outdated or inadequate regulations (Mendelsohn 31).

> "*Arms and the Man* is the early comedy in which Shaw has the most fun with this perception of the military. Using as his principal targets the foolish Major Petkoff and the romantic blunderer Sergius, Shaw tweaks the noses of the Army establishment of his - or any other - day. Petkoff and Sergius, drawn away from the high society, abandon the comforts and luxuries of home life in a self-centered attempt to cover themselves with glory; what happens to their troops is of no great consequence. (Mendelsohn 31-32)

Though Shaw was generally critical of the military, most critics agree that in *Arms and the Man*, he does not satirise the real soldier. He attacks "romanticism and pomposity, but the careful reader also perceives that he is not denigrating bravery and strength" (Mendelsohn 29). In the same spirit, David Satran says, "Bluntschli, with his daring escape and chocolate eating, does not satirize the soldiering profession; rather, he satirizes its romanticization. The play is not against soldiers, nor does it ever speak ill of them"(Satran23).

Thus, we have to remember that in this play, Shaw does not ridicule the profession of the soldier, he satirises the romantic views of war that were prevalent among some sections of his audience, and formed the theme of military melodramas. In fact, Shaw projects a realistic view of the extreme dangers and trauma of the life of the soldier on the actual battlefield.

4.6 THE THEME OF LOVE

Arms and the Man questions highly idealised expressions of love, just as it questions romanticised views of war; as David Satran points out, in the play Shaw "sets out to challenge conventional beliefs of sacrosanct subjects, love and war foremost among them" (Satran 16). From the beginning of the play, Raina is constantly expressing her 'pure' and 'sublime' feelings for Sergius, addressing him as "my hero." Raina even declares, "My relation to him is the one really beautiful and noble part of my life."

> (*Raina, left alone, goes to the chest of drawers, and adores the portrait there with feelings that are beyond all expression. She does not kiss it or press it to her breast, or shew it any mark of bodily affection; but she takes it in her hands and elevates it like a priestess.*)

RAINA.
(*looking up at the picture with worship.*) Oh, I shall never be unworthy of you any more, my hero—never, never, never.

(*She replaces it reverently*

When Sergius returns after the battle, they greet each other rapturously:

SERGIUS.
(*hastening to her, but refraining from touching her without express permission*). Am I forgiven?
RAINA.
(*placing her hands on his shoulder as she looks up at him with admiration and worship*). My hero! My king.
SERGIUS.
My queen! (*He kisses her on the forehead with holy awe.*)

The critic David Sauer says that when Raina speaks to Sergius of the higher love, she conforms to Shaw's definition of the "Womanly Woman" in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*. Such a woman, says Shaw, deceives herself in the idealist fashion by denying that the love which her suitor offers her has any tinge of physical attraction. It is, she declares, "a beautiful, disinterested, pure, sublime devotion by which a man's life is exalted and purified, and a woman's rendered blest." (Sauer 159).

The interactions between Raina and Sergius are entirely defined by such conventions:

SERGIUS.
Dearest, all my deeds have been yours. You inspired me. I have gone through the war like a knight in a tournament with his lady looking on at him!
RAINA.
And you have never been absent from my thoughts for a moment. (*Very solemnly.*)
Sergius: I think we two have found the higher love. When I think of you, I feel that I could never do a base deed, or think an ignoble thought.
SERGIUS.
My lady, and my saint! (*Clasping her reverently.*)

Almost immediately after this exchange of sublime feelings, it is ironical that we find Sergius flirting with the servant girl Louka and trying to embrace her.

Sergius: Louka, do you know what the higher love is?
LOUKA.
(*astonished*). No, sir.
SERGIUS.
Very fatiguing thing to keep up for any length of time, Louka. One feels the need of some relief after it.

Sergius's words express his difficulty in maintaining the affected pose of 'higher love.' Sergius also seems to realise the emptiness of some of his cherished ideals and exclaims at the end: "Oh! War! War! The dream of patriots and heroes! A fraud Bluntschli, a hollow sham, like love." Later in the play, we find Raina, asking herself, "Oh, what sort of god is this, that I have been worshipping?" when she finds out that Segius has been flirting with Louka. Now that Bluntschli has "found her out", she has discarded her affectation of a "noble attitude and a thrilling voice". She also gets rid of her romantic illusion of 'higher love', which like her views about war and soldiers, is probably derived from her reading of romances. Raina learns to shed such deceptions, and to be honest to herself. She changes and grows to adopt a more mature view of love based on honest, mutual understanding. The audience grows and matures with her and learns "that love requires honesty and respect more than romance; that soldiering is an awful and deadly business;" (Satran 30).

4.7 CLASS DISTINCTIONS IN THE PLAY

Most of the characters in this play, aspire to move to a superior social class, and thus class distinctions and mobility between social classes becomes a major concern of the play. Throughout the play, the entire Petkoff family is seen to be very conscious of the need to appear "genteel'' and cultivated. Both Raina and her mother take utmost care to be well dressed, according to the latest Viennese fashions. In the very first Act, Catherine is introduced as someone who is "determined to be a Viennese lady and to that end wears a fashionable tea gown on all occasions." Raina boastfully tells Bluntschli that the Petkoffs, are "civilised people", not "ignorant country folk" and adds, so that Bluntschli gets a clear picture of how genteel they are: "We go to Bucharest every year for the opera season, and I have spent a whole month in Vienna." Like her parents, Raina is aware of the superior social standing of her family; she boasts to Bluntschli that her house is equipped with all amenities like an inside staircase. However it is their library that is the Petkoffs greatest claim to culture and refinement – all of them are constantly boasting about it, though eventually, it turns out to be a "single fixed shelf stocked with old paper-covered novels". When Bluntschli asks Petkoff to accept him as Raina's suitor, Catherine politely turns him down, as the Petkoff family is one of the finest families in Bulgaria, while Bluntschli is only a common soldier. However, when they learn how wealthy he is, they are willing to overlook this difference in social status.

The servant girl Louka has ambitions to move above her station; she is naturally rebellious and does not show the servility expected of her class. She despises Nicola for having the soul of a servant, and shows her independent nature by declaring that no one could put the soul of a servant into her. Nicola warns Louka about the kind of power that the rich have when the lower classes "try to rise out of their poverty." Louka taunts Sergius that he dare not marry her, as she is a servant, and he is afraid of what society would think of such a marriage. Such taunts provoke Sergius to eventually declare his love for her. Louka, who is naturally rebellious, has been questioning the rigidities of the class system from the beginning, and her proposed marriage to Sergius gives her the opportunity to move to a higher station. As a socialist, Shaw was preoccupied with class and class divisions. In this play, he depicts the complications arising due to strict class divisions in nineteenth century Europe and the problems encountered while trying to overcome them.

4.8 LET US SUM UP

We began this unit by looking at the reception of the play *Arms and the Man* and discussed the issues which made it difficult for large sections of the audience to understand the message of the play. In the next sections we discussed Shaw's views on war and the satire of romantic views of war in *Arms and the Man*. We also saw how this play challenges idealised expressions of love and came to understand how, by challenging romanticised and idealised views of love and war, this play is truly an anti-romantic comedy. The unit also briefly discusses the issue of class and class distinctions in this play.

4.9 GLOSSARY

1. Ghastly: unpleasant.

2. Farce: a funny play based on ridiculous and unlikely situations.
3. Critique : to express your opinions about a work or idea; an assessment.
4. Denouement: the final part of a play in which all matters are explained or complications resolved.
5. Jingoistic: having an attitude that one's own country is best.
6. Disarmament: reducing the size of the army or the number of weapons of a country.
7. Pacifist: a person who believes that war and violence are wrong.
8. Parody: a piece of writing, acting etc. that deliberately copies the style of some other work in order to amuse or ridicule.
9. Melodrama: a play in which the characters and events are so exaggerated that they do not seem real.
10. Bravado: confident behaviour that is intended to impress.
11. Foil: a person whose qualities contrast with the qualities of another person.
12. Swashbuckling: full of action and adventure.

Unit End Questions

1. Justify the title of *Arms and the Man.*
2. Explain why *Arms and the Man* is considered to be an "anti-romantic comedy"?
3. Read any other play that deals with the theme of war, written by a playwright of your choice. Attempt a comparative study of that play and *Arms and the Man.*

4.10 WORKS CITED

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