

GEORGE BERNARD
SHAW'S
ARMS AND THE MAN

Drama for 4th year
1st. lecture

(GEORGE) BERNARD SHAW (1856 –1950)

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

- Bernard Shaw wrote more plays than Shakespeare.
- He was also a strong supporter of women's rights, a teetotaler, a vegetarian, a music critic.
- One of the most popular speakers of his time, a great wit, a critic of Shakespeare's writing, an advocate of simplifying the alphabet and spelling of English.
- an Oscar winner, a Nobel winner, an avid socialist, and one of the most performed playwrights in the English language.

BERNARD SHAW

- ⦿ He had opinions on almost any topic and gave them quite freely.
- ⦿ To expose the problems of society he did not present a hero versus a villain representing good against evil, but he instead tried to create life-like people who are a mixture of good and evil.

SHAW'S WORKS:

- ◉ Shaw's career as a dramatist began slowly with his plays unappreciated or, as in the case of Mrs. Warren's Profession, banned.
- ◉ He was recognized as a great wit after his production of *Arms and the Man* in 1894, but with the production of *Man and Superman* in 1905 his fame as a serious playwright was established.

- ◉ Other plays by Shaw include *You Never Can Tell* (1899), *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906), *Candida* (1897), *Misalliance* (1910), *Major Barbara* (1905), *Pygmalion* (1913), *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1906), *Overruled* (1912), *Saint Joan* (1923), *The Apple Cart* (1929), *Androcles and the Lion* (1912), and *Heartbreak House* (1920).

ARMS AND THE MAN

- ◉ *Arms and the Man* is set during the very brief Serb-Bulgarian war of November, 1885.
- ◉ In a dispute between the two neighboring Balkan countries, each of whom felt the other had expansionist designs, Serbia was being backed by the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Bulgaria was being backed by the Russian Empire.

- ◉ Shaw chose what seemed like an insignificant little conflict between minor countries as the starting point for his anti-war play.
- ◉ His warnings were prophetic, however, since the conflicts in the Balkans during the late 19th century eventually led to the First World War of 1914-1918.
- ◉ It was only through the senseless horror of this conflict that the British people and the rest of the world came to realize the folly of their romantic vision of war.

Characters of the Play in brief

- Raina Petkoff– She is the young heroine of the play, the only child of Major Petkoff and Catherine Petkoff. She is a high-spirited idealistic girl who initially has romantic notions of love and war but changes her views as a result of events of the play.....
- Catherine Petkoff– She is a middle-aged affected woman who is Raina’s mother. She is “imperiously energetic”, good looking and wishes to impress everyone with her social standing. She tries to pass herself off as a Viennese lady.....

CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY IN BRIEF

- Louka– She is a servant girl in the Petkoff household who is proud and looks down on servility. She is ambitious and wishes to rise in life. Nicola wishes to marry her, but she has other plans.....
- Major Petkoff– Paul Petkoff has acquired his rank in the Bulgarian army more because of his family’s wealth than his ability as a military strategist or leader. He is good- natured, gullible and blustery.....

CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY IN BRIEF

- Sergius— Major Saranoff is a dashing handsome romantic hero filled with bravado and idealistic morals. He, too, has gained his high military rank in the Bulgarian army through charm and family position rather than through common sense or training. He is engaged to Raina but flirts with Louka.....

CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY IN BRIEF

- Bluntschli– He is a Swiss professional soldier who has been appointed Captain in the Serbian army. He is energetic, practical, well-trained and of “undistinguished appearance”. He feels that it is better to be armed with chocolates than with ammunition in the battlefield.....
- Nicola – He is an old servant of the family who is discreet and servile. He is fond of Louka, but disapproves of her bold attitude.....

THE PLOT

- A fleeing member of the Serbian army desperately climbs through Raina Petkoff's bedroom window to escape capture, but he turns out to be a Swiss mercenary officer by the name of Captain Bluntschli. Raina scolds him for being cowardly and informs him of the bravery of her fiancé, Sergius, a cavalry officer who led the Bulgarian victory. Bluntschli informs her of the foolish nature of Sergius' charge in the battle and then explains that chocolates are more valuable in a war than bullets, a statement that outrages Raina.

THE PLOT

- He shocks her even more when he reveals that he is afraid and unwilling to die. However, when soldiers come seeking out the run-away, Raina hides the fugitive, and only her maid, Louka, is aware of her actions. Act II takes place four months later, when Raina's father and fiancé have returned after the war. The two men talk about a young Swiss officer who had impressed them with his practical approach to the exchange of soldiers. The men also laugh about the tale of the officer's escape and how a young girl had given him shelter in her bedroom, little suspecting that it happened in Major Petkoff's own house. Meanwhile in secret, Sergius has been cheating with Louka.

THE PLOT

- Unexpectedly, Captain Bluntschli shows up to return an overcoat that Raina had lent him for his escape, and she panics when her father invites him to stay for lunch. In Act III, while Bluntschli is helping the men plan for the transport of troops, Raina is worried that her father will find the photo she had secretly left in the coat pocket for her “Chocolate Cream Soldier”. When Sergius discovers the bond between Raina and Bluntschli he challenges him to a duel, but Raina interrupts and expresses her real feelings for Bluntschli. Louka succeeds in securing Sergius for herself and Major Petkoff and his wife give consent to Bluntschli to marry Raina.

THE PLOT

- ◉ There's a sharp contrast between the Greek dramatic treatment of themes and that of the 19th C. Compare Virgil's "Aeneid" to Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* regarding the theme of war.
- ◉ George Bernard Shaw takes the title for this play from the opening line of Virgil's epic poem the "Aeneid," which begins "Of arms and the man I sing." Virgil glorified war and the heroic feats of Aeneas on the battlefield. However, Shaw's purpose in this play is to attack the romantic notion of war by presenting a more realistic depiction of war, devoid of the idea that such death and destruction speaks to nobility. Still, *Arms and the Man* is not an anti-war drama, but rather a satirical assault on those who would glorify the horrors of war.

THE PLOT

- Throughout the play, Shaw arranged his material so as to satirize the glories associated with war and to ultimately suggest that aristocratic pretensions have no place in today's wars. Elaborate.
- This early play by Shaw, therefore, cuts through the noble ideals of war and the "higher love" that Raina and Sergius claim to share; Arms and the Man presents a world where the practical man who lives with no illusions and no poetic views about either love or war is shown to be the superior creature.