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The Reality of War The play opens with a romantic view of war held by the Bulgarians, especially the young Raina and Sergius. They will learn from experience and their lessons from Bluntschli that war is not glorious. Raina and Sergius have learned their ideas of war from books. They speak of knights and ladies and the combat of honor between equals. Sergius says that war is like a tournament (Act II, p. 31). His idea of leading the victorious cavalry charge was a mistake from the point of view of modern warfare, for horses cannot override cannon and guns. Sergius resigns from the regiment, disillusioned that the other soldiers do not take him seriously. He refuses to play the modern game of war; it is for a tradesman, he complains (Act II, p. 29). Catherine Petkoff is even more locked into an old-fashioned conception of war and patriotism. She is upset when peace is declared and asks her husband if he couldnt have annexed Serbia and made Prince Alexander Emperor of the Balkans (Act II, p. 24). Major Petkoff explains they would have had to subdue Austria first (the allies of the Serbs). Catherine has no idea what war is or what it costs. Her ideas are as flimsy as Rainas. The two women are excited as they hear about the victory at Slivnitza and that Sergius is a hero. Catherine wants to worship Sergius and tries to persuade her husband about his promotion. Major Petkoff remarks that Sergius will not be promoted because everyone knows he is rash and incompetent. Bluntschli tries to shock Raina into reality by reminding her that if the Bulgarians find him in her room, they will butcher him before her eyes. There will be blood everywhere. He appeals to the mother in her by asking for a place to sleep and food to eat. He admits he is frightened for he has had no sleep in three days. At this point, she heroically makes an effort to save him. The Bulgarians are shown as nave about war. Major Petkoff admits that neither the Bulgarians nor Serbs knew anything about war until their officers (the Austrians for the Serbs, and the Russians for the Bulgarians) taught them. Petkoff says, thered have been no war without them (Act II, p. 29). Russia and Austria were considered Great Powers, more advanced and powerful countries that exerted a political influence on lesser powers. They jumped into the border dispute between Serbia and Bulgaria because they were worried about the balance of power. The Serbs and Bulgarians had once been friends. Neither were experienced with modern warfare. As a professional soldier, the Swiss mercenary, Bluntschli, is the last word to his Bulgarian friends on the sober reality of war. He describes the soldiers point of view of how to stay alive by carrying more food than ammunition, and by avoiding the front lines. He beats Major Petkoff at horsetrading. Bluntschli is scorned at first because of his middle-class notions of war, but his practical knowledge of how to move troops and keep them supplied is soon appreciated by Sergius and Petkoff. Bluntschli as a Swiss Republican has modern democratic ideas that contrast sharply to the older feudal ideas of aristocracy held by the Bulgarians. They are used to a society of privilege and class stratification. They are impressed, however, by Bluntschlis modern power, knowledge and wealth. Unlike them, he holds no lingering feuds after the war, but is more interested in managing his hotels. Business can be a force of economic stability across national boundaries, more powerful than war. He is ready to sign on Nicola, a former enemy, as one of his managers. The Ideal vs. The Real Raina lives in a make-believe world, and she is aware of it, though she believes it is a more noble world than the one other people live in: the world is really a glorious world for women who can see its glory and men who can act its romance (Act I, p. 4). She and Sergius declare one another knight and lady, an example of the higher love (Act II, p. 31). Raina is always found posing, dreaming, or making a dramatic entrance. Her mother and father note her uncanny ability to come into a room at the right moment: Yes, she listens for it, Catherine says (Act II, p. 28). Life for Raina is what she picks up at the opera season in Bucharest. Extending sanctuary to an enemy was in the opera she saw, and so she saves Bluntschlis life. Bluntschli believes Raina is underage because of her romantic pretense. He is surprised to learn she is twenty-three. He admits he admires her thrilling voice, but he cannot believe a single word she says, he declares to her. He points out in his direct way in Act III that her life is a lie. Raina is relieved to be accepted as she is, a real person with faults. She is surprised to find she has more affection for her chocolate cream soldier who admits to hunger, cold, fear, and cowardice than for Sergius, who is full of noble bombast. She tells her mother to marry Sergius, because he is more to her taste. Both Raina and Sergius find it fatiguing to keep up their higher love. Each of them is a secret realist at heart. Shaw makes the case for love being simple and real. Louka and Bluntschli are the antidote both romantic characters need. Bluntschlis ability to do away with romantic nonsense with common sense is good comedy and underscores Shaws animosity towards Victorian melodrama, which gave audiences a distorted view of life. Class Prejudice The tension of class rivalry is present throughout the play. Shaw treats it playfully, though it is a serious topic for him as a socialist dedicated to doing away with class injustice. The Bulgarian society is pictured as a primitive holdover of the feudal class structure that Europe was slowly doing away with. England, for instance, was dealing at the turn of the century when Shaw was writing, with melting class distinctions. The working classes had gained the vote and the right to education. Improvement of slums, improvement of factory conditions, and greater representation of the lower classes in government signaled the democratic reform going on in advanced countries. In addition, it was a time of the rising power of the middle class, with the entrepreneurial spirit reigning as the force of the future. Bluntschli represents the middle-class business spirit of Europe; the Petkoffs are the aristocratic great landowners of the past; Nicola and Louka represent the old peasantry, bound to the land and landowners. In the Bulgaria Shaw portrays, the higher classes hold the lower classes in subjugation through power, fear, and custom. Nicola warns Louka that the Petkoffs could destroy her if she defies them: you dont know the power such high people have over the like of you and me when we try to rise out of our poverty against them (Act II, p. 22). Nicola is cunning, but he accepts being the scapegoat of the family because they pay him off. He has dreams of rising out of his position as Louka does. He will buy a shop in Sofia to be independent, but even then I shall always be dependent on the good will of the family (Act II, p. 22). She accuses him of selling his manhood for 30 levas (Act III, p. 55) and swears that Youll never put the soul of a servant into me (Act II, p. 23). Loukas ambition is higher than Nicolas: she wants to marry into the aristocracy. She plays on Sergiuss sense of rebellious individualism to get him to defy social convention. She shows him that underneath his noble rhetoric, they are both human and made of the same clay (Act II, p. 35). Nicola gives Louka lessons on how to change classes through her thinking and actions. He teaches her to stop wearing false hair and make-up, to trim her nails and keep her hands clean. He tells her a lady must act as if she will get her own way. He lies to Sergius and says that Louka has been reading in the library, trying to get education above her station. Sergius himself points out that class discrimination spills over into military life. Both the upper and lower classes fight the enemy with equal courage. The poor soldiers, however, fear their own upper class officers who can keep them in their place: they put up with insults and blows (Act III, p. 58). The Petkoffs are initially contemptuous of Bluntschlis middle-class or bourgeois background. He is no gentleman. Sergius calls him a commercial traveler in uniform (Act II, p. 30). Raina accuses him of having a low shopkeeping mind (Act III, p. 53). They change their minds when he turns out to be a problem solver (getting the troops home), and rich (inherits hotels). Petkoff says he must be the Emperor of Switzerland, but Bluntschli points out that my rank is the highest known in Switzerland: I am a free citizen (Act III, p. 72). If Louka is the rebellion of the lower classes demanding equal treatment, Bluntschli is the force of democracy. He congratulates Louka on her engagement with the best wishes of a good Republican (Act III, p. 69). Get 1 free answer with LitCharts AINew Identity, Authenticity, and Self-Expression Arms and the Man is very interested in identitymany of its characters (played by actors on the stage) are themselves acting out certain roles, and the play repeatedly questions what constitutes a persons true identity. In addition, the play emphasizes the importance of remaining authentic to yourself: many characters in the play are liberated once they learn to stop posturing or performing for others and express themselves honestly.Both Raina and Sergius act out differentread analysis of Identity, Authenticity, and Self-ExpressionRomanticism / Idealism vs. Realism One of the central criticisms of Arms and the Man is of the tendency of people to romanticize or idealize complex realities: in particular love and war. Literary romanticism began to decline right around the time Shaw was born, and the play in many ways illustrates how and why romanticism historically failed: it could not accurately describe fundamental human experiences. Raina is the plays most obvious romantic. Her relationship with Sergius (whom the stage directionsread analysis of Romanticism / Idealism vs. Realism Shaws play investigates the difference between young and old, inexperience and maturity. Bluntschli repeatedly distinguishes between the young soldiers and the old soldiers. The young ones are reckless, idealistic, and bravethey carry extra ammunition and run into action. The old soldiers carry food instead of ammo and often flee the battlefield. Raina is youngand she seems even younger than she is. Bluntschli does not take her seriously until he realizes she is 23 (and notread analysis of Youth vs. MaturityAnother of the central questions of Arms and the Man concerns the nature of heroism. What makes a hero? What does it mean to be a hero? What responsibilities does such a label convey? At first, Sergius is painted as a herohe led a successful cavalry charge, displaying immense (in fact foolhardy) bravery. He is physically strong, courageous, and handsome. He thus embodies a very traditional kind of heroism. But it is made clear thatread analysis of Heroism View Wikipedia Entries for Arms and the Man We at Literature PADI join the rest of the world in mourning the passing of a literary titan and one of Africa's greatest literary exports, Ngg wa Thiong'o. May your soul find solace under the mkoma tree where we shall all commune with Gky and Mumbi. In Arms and the Man by George Bernard Shaw, one can witness a captivating clash between romantic and anti-romantic perspectives, each offering a unique lens through which to view lifes intricacies. Arms and the Man explores the themes of war and love, courage and heroism, class and marriage, imagination versus reality, innocence versus experience, and realism versus idealism. In Arms and the Man, the intertwining of war and love emerges as a prominent and captivating theme. From the very outset, the play draws a striking comparison between these two concepts. As the story unfolds, contrasting and complementary aspects between war and love are revealed. Louka skillfully juxtaposes the audacity required for a reckless cavalry charge, led by Sergius, with the bravery needed to defy societal norms by entering an unpopular marriage. Louka draws a parallel, equating the criticism faced by the couple with the peril faced by a regiment in the midst of a barrage of gunshots. Similarly, Louka is caught eavesdropping on Sergius, Bluntschli, and Raina, reminiscent of Bluntschlis past experience of covertly listening to an enemy camp during a time of war. In both scenarios, the stakes are high, with love and life hanging in the balance. Both love and war possess the capacity to evoke idealistic sentiments, as exemplified by Rainas romanticized perspective in the opening scene. However, in these realms, discretion becomes an indispensable safeguard against regret and catastrophe. The play revolves around courage and heroism, particularly as they manifest in the context of war. The plays title itself, Arms and the Man, alludes to the examination of the relationship between a soldier and the weapons he carries, providing a glimpse into this compelling theme. Two contrasting attitudes towards heroism are presented in the play. Sergius epitomizes the character driven by a relentless pursuit of heroism, often blinded to the unnecessary risks he takes. In stark contrast, Bluntschli, the pragmatic soldier, fights only when compelled, finding greater value in chocolate than in cartridges on the battlefield. He candidly shares his viewpoint with Sergius, distinguishing himself as a professional soldier who recognizes the importance of preserving ones life, stating, I fight when I have to, and am very glad to get out of it when I have to. Youre only an amateur: you think fightings an amusement. Bluntschlis perspective challenges the notion that heroism solely lies in reckless bravery, emphasizing that a true war hero is one who exhibits wisdom and lives to fight another day. This portrayal reminds us that a soldier is, fundamentally, a human being whose actions are often driven by the instinct for survival. The measure of heroism lies not merely in the fallen soldier but in the soldier who employs practicality and discretion, transcending the idealistic notions of heroism. While the idealist might perceive this approach as an act of cowardice, the realist recognizes it as a pragmatic path to heroism, blending common sense with valor. Louka stretches the boundaries of military courage into the realm of romance, challenging Sergius to transfer the blind courage he exhibits on the battlefield to the domain of love. In Arms and the Man, the exploration of courage and heroism offers a profound insight into the complexities of human nature and the multifaceted nature of bravery. Theme of class and marriage is yet another important theme in George Bernard Shaws Arms and the Man. The play delves into the notion that an ideal marriage is one arranged within a particular social class. It is expected that Raina should wed Sergius, her equal in social standing, while Louka should be destined for marriage with Nicola, given their shared role as servants. However, circumstances unfold in unexpected ways, challenging these established norms. Sergius defies societal expectations by condescending to marry Louka, a departure from the anticipated union with Raina. Conversely, Raina finds herself drawn to her chocolate cream soldier, Bluntschli, before even realizing that he has inherited a vast fortune from his late father. This revelation ultimately sways Catherine and Petkoff, Rainas parents, to accept Bluntschli. Social class, often defined by wealth and status, becomes a determining factor in the characters perceptions and choices. The play highlights the prevailing societal disapproval of marriage across different social classes. Sergius decision to shift his affections from Raina, an aristocrat, to Louka, Rainas maid, is portrayed as an act of remarkable courage. Nicola reflects on Louka, acknowledging, She had a soul above her station, and I have been no more than her confidential servant. Ironically, Raina, who initially embraces the concept of class-based marriages, undergoes a transformation by the plays conclusion. She finds contentment with her chocolate cream soldier, Bluntschli, irrespective of his newfound wealth or social status. Arms and the Man unravels a profound theme that revolves around the stark contrast between imagination and reality. In the play, a noticeable disparity emerges, exposing the stark disparities between how things appear and how they truly are. Raina, for instance, holds a fervent belief that Sergius, her fianc, embodies the epitome of heroism and nobility, incapable of any base actions. However, Sergius himself confesses to the emotional strain of pursuing a lofty ideal of love and the need for relief from its burdens. He acknowledges the existence of various versions of himself within his own being, presenting a stark departure from Rainas idealistic perception. Raina herself initially presents as an idealist and romantic, until Bluntschli confronts her with an alternate perspective. In despair, she surrenders, fearing that her true self has been exposed, questioning whether Bluntschli now despises her. Yet, he reassures her that his sentiment towards her is one of infatuation rather than contempt. This revelation highlights that beneath Rainas idealistic facade lies a deep-rooted realism, with Bluntschli successfully seeing through her faade. Bluntschli himself confesses to possessing an incurably romantic disposition, which occasionally leads him to engage in foolish actions. However, his realist nature tends to overpower his idealistic tendencies. This conflict between appearance and reality particularly resonates with those labeled as idealists within the play. The exploration of the chasm between imagination and reality exposes the complexities of human nature and the often-hidden facets of individuals true selves. Also emphasized in the play is the interplay between innocence and experience, closely intertwined with the dichotomy of realism and idealism. Innocence is associated with a lack of experience, evoking idealistic tendencies, while experience signifies a realistic approach to life, derived from a profound understanding of its complexities. Raina embodies innocence, while Bluntschli stands as the epitome of experience. Their encounter in the opening scene sets the stage for a clash between these contrasting qualities. Bluntschli even perceives Raina as an adolescent girl barely seventeen, unaware that she is, in fact, a fairly experienced lady of twenty-three. It is noteworthy to observe the transformative growth experienced by both Raina and Sergius throughout the play. They evolve from a state of innocence, characterized by idealism, to a state of experience, marked by realism. This journey showcases their maturation, as they grapple with the complexities of life and shed their youthful naivety. The theme of innocence versus experience underscores the universal human struggle to reconcile the purity of innocence with the realities of the world. Arms and the Man also delves into the theme of realism versus idealism. It explores the notions of perfection and imperfection in various facets of life, such as war, love, courage, and heroism. The idealist yearns for perfection in all things, often harboring grand illusions, while the realist embraces the inherent imperfections of humanity and remains grounded, rarely experiencing disappointment. Characters like Sergius and Raina, who embody idealistic perspectives, are prone to disillusionment when confronted with the harsh realities of life. Conversely, characters like Louka and Bluntschli embody remarkable stability as the realists within the play. They maintain a pragmatic outlook, acknowledging the flaws and imperfections that permeate human existence. This contrast between realism and idealism is further enhanced by the conflict between romantic and anti-romantic attitudes presented in the play. The realist embodies an anti-romantic stance, while the romantic is intertwined with idealistic tendencies, perceiving life through rose-tinted glasses. Bernard Shaw himself describes Arms and the Man as an anti-romantic comedy, as it is the realists who ultimately triumph. The play concludes with a noticeable absence of lingering idealism, as even Catherine, a character initially resistant to change, is won over and supports the proposed match between Raina and Bluntschli. Join Our Social Media Channels:

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