Arms and the Man

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

George Bernard Shaw was an Irish author, playwright, music critic and activist as well as a founder of the London School of Economics. Shaw was born and educated in Dublin. As a young adult he became interested in socialism and activism and began to foster a lifelong interest in what he considered to be the reprehensible cultural exploitation of the working class. He began writing plays in the 1890s, and his writing always contained some elements of socio-cultural critique. Shaw was a very prolific writer, writing over 50 plays in addition to articles, reviews, essays, and pamphlets. His popularity rose in the early 1900s and he started to become a famous, well-respected playwright. In 1925, he was recognized for his work with the Nobel Prize in Literature. He married an Irish political activist named Charlotte Payne-Townshend, and they lived happily together until her death in 1943. Shaw dies seven years later, at the old age of 94, in his home in England.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The late 1800s marked the rise of socialism, Marxism, and worsening class divisions as well as a shift in literature and art away from Romanticism, which no longer seemed suited to describe or make sense of reality. This was the beginning of the Modernist period, where various forms of art would innovate rapidly in an attempt to describe and depict a more complicated reality, show various sides of things at once, and somehow capture the nuances of human life and experience.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The play makes reference to Romanticist literature—Raina's romantic Novels are often mentioned, and Sergius is called a "Byronic hero." Romanticist literature celebrated intense emotion, heroic individualism, irrationality and nature. Shaw does not necessarily condemn these things entirely, but the play does suggest that Romanticist literature simplifies human existence, glorifying dramatic human achievements in love and war without acknowledging the ugly realities that are also present.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Arms and the Man*
- **When Written:** early 1890s
- **Where Written:** Ireland; England
- **When Published:** 1894
- **Literary Period:** Transitional: end of Romanticism, beginning of Modernism
- **Genre:** Comedy
- **Setting:** Bulgaria
- **Climax:** Sergius is discovered to be in love with Louka, and accuses Raina of having an affair with Bluntschli.
- **Antagonist:** Sergius
- **Point of View:** Play

EXTRA CREDIT

Prizewinner. George Bernard Shaw is the only person to have been awarded both a Nobel Prize in Literature and an Academy Award for his work on the writing and production of *Pygmalion*.

PLOT SUMMARY

The play is set in Bulgaria and set during the brief Bulgarian-Serbian war in the 1880s. It opens with the young romantic Raina Petkoff and her mother Catherine talking excitedly about a successful cavalry charge led by the handsome and heroic Sergius, to whom Raina is betrothed. They are thrilled at his success. Their defiant young servant Louka comes in and tells them that there will be fighting in the streets soon, and that they should lock all of their windows.

Raina's shutters do not lock, and shortly after the gunshots start that night, she hears a man climb onto her balcony and into her room. He is a Swiss professional soldier fighting for Servia. Though he fights for the enemy and is not in the least heroic (he fears for his life, threatens to cry, and carries chocolates instead of ammo) Raina is touched by his plight. He angers her when he tells her that the man who led the cavalry charge against them only succeeded because he got extremely lucky—the Servians were not equipped with the right ammo. Raina indignantly says that that commander is her betrothed, and the man apologizes, holding back laughter. Raina nevertheless agrees to keep the man safe, saying that her family is one of the most powerful and wealthy in Bulgaria, and that his safety will be ensured as their guest. She goes to get her mother and when they return he has fallen asleep on Raina's bed.

In the next act the war has ended, and Major Petkoff (Raina's father) arrives home, and Sergius and Raina are reunited. They speak lovingly to one another about how perfect their romance is. But when Raina goes inside, Sergius holds Louka in his arms, clearly lusting after her. Louka believes he is taking advantage of her because she is a servant, and tells him she does not believe she and he are any different simply because he is rich

and she is poor. They part just as Raina returns. Then, to make things more complicated, the man from Raina's balcony, announcing himself as Captain Bluntschli, arrives, to return a coat he was loaned the morning after he rested at the house. Catherine tries to keep him from being seen, but Major Petkoff recognizes him, and invites him inside to help with some of the last remaining military orders.

In the final act, in the **library**, it comes out that Louka, though she had been assumed to be engaged to the head servant Nicola, is in love with Sergius, and he is in love with her. Raina eventually admits she has fallen for Bluntschli, who is at first hesitant, believing her to be much younger than she is. When he finds out her real age (23 rather than the 17 he had thought she was), he declares his affection for her. The play ends happily, with two new couples.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Raina Petkoff – Raina is the play's protagonist, a 23-year-old Bulgarian woman who is betrothed to the "heroic" Sergius, and who speaks in a dramatic, affected manner and (for much of the play) sing Sergius's praises. The Petkoffs are an affluent, powerful family in Bulgaria and Raina works hard to maintain the kind of dignified air that (she imagines) befits her status. She acts like a hopeless romantic, often clutching a **novel** and staring dreamily out the window. But when she meets Bluntschli, after he crawls onto her balcony while fleeing battle, it becomes clear she is not what she seems. Though Bluntschli is the opposite of everything Raina professes to want, she is intrigued by him, and eventually falls for him. She admits to him later that she speaks with such passion and drama not because she feels such things but because she notices it often has an effect and people admire her for it. She eventually agrees to court Bluntschli and breaks off her engagement with Sergius.

Captain Bluntschli – Bluntschli is a Swedish professional soldier who fights with the Servians during the war. He has none of Raina or Sergius's romantic notions about war. He thinks courage is overrated and that war is more often ugly than noble. He carries sweets with him rather than extra weapons, which leads Raina to (affectionately) call him the "chocolate cream soldier." He is an excellent soldier, much more sensible and experienced than Sergius or Major Petkoff, and seems as sensible and cynical as Raina is romantic. However, he is touched by the fact that she takes care of him when he climbs up her balcony, and eventually admits that he is also somewhat of a romantic, and declares his affection for Raina at the end of the play.

Major Sergius Saranoff – Sergius is a typical "Byronic Hero" according to the stage directions, and everything about him seems perfectly suited to a kind of romantic ideal. He is tall, handsome, wealthy, well-spoken, and seems to be deeply in love with Raina. However, though Catherine and Raina believe him to be a heroic soldier, he is in fact a foolish, reckless fighter and his only success so far has come from luck. Sergius eventually also reveals that he is not so genteel as he seems, lusting passionately after Raina's servant, Louka, to whom is betrothed by the end of the play.

Louka – Louka is an opinionated, beautiful young servant working for the Petkoffs . She is expected to settle down with and marry Nicola, the family's head servant. However, she rejects the idea that her being born into a poorer family means she must live as servant to the rich her whole life. At first she rejects Sergius's advances believing he is simply using her because he thinks she is beneath him. When she realizes Sergius disdains his own wealth and "nobility" she admits she has fallen for him.

Catherine Petkoff – Catherine is Raina's mother, an older wealthy woman who is delighted at the prospect of a marriage between her daughter and the wealthy, seemingly heroic Sergius. She cannot see through Sergius's act and thinks him a perfect fit for her daughter. She often treats Nicola unfairly, and seems wrapped up in her own wealth and social status.

Major Paul Petkoff – Major Petkoff, though wealthy in Bulgaria, is a somewhat bumbling and inept man who, despite his rank, doesn't seem to be good at or interested in dealing with military affairs. Though he is immensely proud of his **library** we get the sense that he is not particularly well-read. He is deeply fond of his daughter, and accepts her relationship with Bluntschli at the end of the play.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Nicola – Nicola is the family's longtime servant. He is mistreated by the Petkoffs but never talks back or objects. He believes he was born to be a servant and does not question the class system of social norms.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

IDENTITY, AUTHENTICITY, AND SELF-EXPRESSION

Arms and the Man is very interested in identity—many of its characters (played by actors on the stage) are themselves acting out certain roles, and the play repeatedly questions what constitutes a person's "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 different roles depending on who they are with. Sergius supposes that he is "six different men" all wrapped into one. Raina speaks with a certain kind of passion and drama deliberately, because she finds it has a desired effect on the listener. They both do a good deal of "acting." Shaw also implicitly asks what things (besides behavior) determine identity. Is it our profession? Is calling Bluntschli a "soldier" tantamount to summarizing his identity? The same question could be asked about Nicola being a "servant." Do our families or our names define us? Raina often speaks of herself as though her status as a "Petkoff" is integral to who she is.

These characters triumph, and form happy relationships, once they cease performing for the benefit of their family, friends, etc. and allow themselves to act authentically. Raina is able to let go of her romantic youthful and aristocratic airs and be herself with Bluntschli—who can only admit his love for her after he lets go of his rugged cynicism and admits he has a romantic side. Louka and Sergius also end up together once Sergius admits he is not as sensitive and refined as he acts, and once Louka freely admits that, though she has been acting put off by Sergius, the affection is in fact mutual.

In the late 1800s, Shaw became an advocate for the rights of workers, women, and racial minorities. He observed that certain groups of people were subjugated because of certain aspects of their identities, and in many ways this play serves to deconstruct "identity" as many in the 1800s would have seen it: something grounded in manners, social and economic standing, ancestry, race and gender. He also sees these divisions as not only economically or socially damaging but also psychologically damaging. Shaw questions these divisions in the play just as he questioned them in his activism. The play reveals that if culture shapes our identity for us we fail to be happy. But if we can find a way to be authentic to ourselves, our lives become more honest and our relationships more fulfilling. In many ways this emphasis on the importance of self-expression could be a kind of implicit argument for the importance of the arts, which many perceived to be waning in importance in the increasingly industrialized and scientific world of the late 19th century.

ROMANTICISM / 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 play's most obvious romantic. Her relationship with Sergius (whom the stage directions call a "Byronic hero" after the Romantic poet Lord Byron) embodies almost all of the romantic ideals: they are both beautiful, refined, and appear to be infatuated with each other. However this romantic, idealistic vision of love does not stand up when reality sets in. The "genteel" Sergius lusts animalistically—even, sometimes, violently—after the servant Louka and Raina is in love with the anti-romantic Bluntschli. Their ideal romantic love is all an act. In reality, love is much more multifaceted, and complicated, than Raina and Sergius make it seem.

Raina and Sergius's flawed romanticism also shows through in their conception of war. Raina waxes poetic about how Sergius is an ideal soldier: brave, virile, ruthless but fair. It turns out Sergius's cavalry charge was ill-advised, and the charge only succeeded because the opposing side didn't have the correct ammunition. Sergius is not the perfect soldier—he is a farce. And the *real* soldier, Bluntschli, runs away from battle and carries sweets instead of a gun. He also speaks honestly about the brutality and violence of war—which involves more drunkenness and abuse than it does heroics and gallantry.

Shaw displays an interest in revealing human realities like love and war for what they really are: often ugly, contradictory, and thoroughly complex. He implicitly criticizes romantic art for avoiding these realities, and giving us a sugarcoated version of human life and human history. Conversely, his work puts forth the argument that art should be able to make sense of and account for human experiences.

CLASS DIVISIONS

19th century Europe was a place where divisions between the classes were becoming sharper and more damaging all the time. Industrialization and a widening wage gap gave rise to a socialist movement determined to protect members of the working class from exploitation. Predictably, Shaw, a socialist and activist, seeks to undermine the significance of class divisions in his play. The book persistently points out that division between the classes is unethical and unjust. The play maintains that in fact there is no inherent difference between a member of the working class and a member of the aristocracy beyond the way they are treated by society.

Louka is the most adamant socialist voice in this play. She insists she does not have the "soul of a servant" and refuses to think of herself as subservient simply because she was born into the working class. She falls in love with Sergius and calls Raina by her first name. In doing so she eschews convention and promotes her own equality.

Bluntschli persistently identifies himself as a poor soldier, and loves Raina because she was kind to him (and in fact fell in love with him) *before* she knew he owned a chain of hotels and

therefore had a claim to a great fortune. Perhaps Raina's greatest virtue is her ability to see past class divisions. This is especially notable considering how wrapped up in the meaning of wealth and aristocracy the Petkoffs are. They speak down to the servants and seemingly cannot go five minutes without mentioning that they have a **library** (an indicator of unusual wealth.) Ultimately, the play depicts those obsesses with their wealth and class to be foolish and shallow, and further suggests that those locked into their class positions are stuck acting a role that keeps them from their true selves, from actual happiness.

YOUTH VS. MATURITY

Shaw's 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 brave—they carry extra ammunition and run into action. The old soldiers carry food instead of ammo and often flee the battlefield. Raina is young—and she seems even younger than she is. Bluntschli does not take her seriously until he realizes she is 23 (and not 17, as he believed). Once he is aware that she is older, he is willing to take her opinions and beliefs more seriously, and agrees to court her. Raina's parents, meanwhile, and their servant Nicola are all "old" (or at least older than Raina, Louka, and Serge, who are all identified as "young"). However, unlike Bluntschli, they are not portrayed as particularly mature. Rather, in their more advanced age, they have simply become entrenched in tradition and the status quo.

Shaw thus paints a complicated picture of age and maturity: youth can be vibrant and incite change, but it can also be silly and naïve. Age can mean realism and intelligence, but it can also mean a kind of disengagement and acceptance of even detrimental social norms. Shaw's heroes in this play are those who have the energy, vitality, and vigor of youth, but the sensibility, maturity, and insight that often comes with old age.

HEROISM

Another 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 hero—he 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 that Sergius's actions are considered by more seasoned soldiers to be farcical. Though Raina and her mother fawn over Sergius, in part because Raina is betrothed to him, others find him more of a clown than a hero.

Bluntschli is a kind of "anti-hero." He is dubbed by Raina to be the "chocolate cream soldier"—a moniker that inspires images of weakness and sweetness—because he typically carries chocolates rather than extra ammo. He is older, more modest looking, and doesn't believe courage is a virtue. But by the end of the play he is revealed to be both a better soldier and a far more desirable husband than Sergius, and wins Raina's affections.

The question of heroism is a rich and diverse one. By wondering about what makes a hero, Shaw engages various lines of thinking. What do heroes mean to culture? Who ought to be a hero? And what of literary heroes?—Shaw was writing in a time of social and political upheaval. The clash between socialism and capitalism was growing more contentious, and the rise of new industrial technologies was exacerbating the already sharp class divisions and changing the cultural landscape. It was accordingly a time of artistic and literary upheaval as well: literary Romanticism no longer seemed fit to make sense of or address contemporary human problems. The Byronic, romantic hero had been forsaken—what would the new literary heroes look like? By engaging these questions about heroism Shaw is asking questions about the future of culture and art.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE LIBRARY

The library in the Petkoff home is often held up as a symbol of their wealth, status, and accomplishment. Libraries are rare in Bulgarian homes, and therefore the library does indicate the family's wealth—but it also ironically symbolizes their lack of better learning, critical thinking, and cultural awareness. The library notably has very few books in it, and Major Petkoff, despite his pride in his library, isn't very well read. Though it indicates financial success it also indicates the emptiness and shallowness embodied by people like Major Petkoff.

RAINA'S NOVELS

Raina is often seen clutching a romantic novel—but, crucially, she is rarely reading it. She uses the books rather like props. They once again indicate shallowness and social performance. That Raina neglects to actually read these novels perhaps suggests the fall of romanticism itself: these books are not truly useful or interesting to her anymore, and she grows beyond them by the end of the play.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Dover Publications edition of *Arms and the Man* published in 1990.

Act 1 Quotes

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.

Related Characters: Raina Petkoff

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

The play has opened to a bedroom in a small town in Bulgaria. The furniture reveals both the wealth and class aspirations of the family who own the house, and on the wall hangs a portrait of a handsome young soldier. On the balcony a young woman, Raina Petkoff, stands "gazing at the snowy Balkans" and pondering both the beauty of the natural landscape and "her own youth and beauty." This brief, rather sarcastic description establishes important facts about Raina's personality. Although not exactly vain, she has an extremely romantic attitude to life. Rather than thinking about the suffering caused by the Bulgarian-Serbian war, she is instead caught up in a reverie about natural beauty. Raina's thoughts thus reflect her own youthful idealism, as well as the preoccupations of romantic literature, which arguably over-simplifies and obscures the realities of life in many ways.

I am so happy—so proud! It proves all our ideas were real after all.

Related Characters: Raina Petkoff (speaker), Catherine Petkoff, Major Sergius Saranoff

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

Raina's mother Catherine has entered, and told Raina the news that there has been a battle in which Sergius, Raina's fiancee, courageously led the Bulgarian forces to victory. Raina is thrilled, and declares that this "proves all our ideas were real after all." This passage further emphasizes Raina's romantic ideals, and suggests that these ideas are shared by Sergius. It also illustrates the distance between these romantic notions and reality. Although Raina declares that the news about Sergius confirms her "ideas were real," this declaration makes Raina seem quite childlike and naïve. After all, the success of one battle is not enough to definitely prove any idea about war; if anything, the reality of war is one of severe violence, suffering, and death, rather than victory and happiness.

The world is really a glorious world for women who can see its glory and men who can act its romance!

Related Characters: Raina Petkoff (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

Having heard the news that Sergius has been victorious in battle, Raina has exclaimed that this proves that her ideas about the romance of war are real. She has confessed to her mother that she sometimes worries that her romantic view of war comes from reading Pushkin and Byron, but in this passage declares that "the world is really a glorious world for women who can see its glory." Once again, this statement has the unintended effect of making Raina seem childlike and naïve. Her sudden certainty that the world is "glorious" shows how sheltered she is from the realities of war, poverty, and suffering.

Furthermore, note the stark gender discrepancies in Raina's view of the world. As a woman, she considers herself a spectator; her role is to "see" the glory of the world, rather than directly participate in it. In this sense, Raina views the world rather like a romantic novel. She observes and delights in its "glory" and "romance," but does not herself play a major role in its workings. A man's role in the world, on the other hand, is to "act its romance." Again, such a statement reflects the naïve, idealized version of men's lives--and particularly the experience of going to war--that women at the time were encouraged to believe.

I am a Swiss, fighting merely as a professional soldier. I joined Servia because it came first on the road from Switzerland.

Related Characters: Captain Bluntschli (speaker), Raina Petkoff

Related Themes:

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis

The sounds of gunfire have erupted, and Louka has urged Catherine and Raina to bolt the windows. The windows of Raina's bedroom, however, cannot be locked, and a soldier in Servian uniform has climbed in. He has spoken threateningly to Raina, but she seems unafraid of him, and reluctantly agrees to hide him when Louka and her mother enter. Once they are alone again, the soldier, Captain Bluntschli, explains that he is not actually Servian but a Swiss professional soldier, who joined the Servian army simply "because it came first on the road from Switzerland." This statement is a direct contradiction of romantic, nationalist understandings of heroism and war.

From a romantic perspective, Bluntschli should be fervently patriotic, and motivated to behave courageously in battle out of fierce pride and love for his country. In contrast to this ideal, Bluntschli chose Servia at random, and does not seem personally invested in the outcome of the war. His role as a professional soldier undermines the notion that war is a matter of patriotism or courage, as Bluntschli's motivation for participating in the war is purely economic. Indeed, this reflects broader trends in the shifting understanding of war toward the end of the 19th century. During this period, people were becoming more critical of war, and particularly of the way that men of the working class were made to fight, suffer, and die on behalf of high-ranking officers who would get the most benefit from victory.

> There are only two sorts of soldiers: old ones and young ones.

Related Characters: Captain Bluntschli (speaker), Raina Petkoff

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

Captain Bluntschli has begged Raina to let him stay inside a while before returning to the battle. Although Raina allows him to stay and gives him chocolate, she is scornful of his timid attitude, and declares that she herself is braver than him. She tells Bluntschli that he is unlike Bulgarian soldiers, inferring that they are more courageous, but Bluntschli disagrees, saying the only types of soldiers are "old ones and young ones." Once again, Bluntschli seems remarkably dismissive of nationalistic allegiances and romantic views of battle. He appears to consider divides between men of different nations as meaningless, pointing to the constructed nature of national identity. On the other hand, he does believe that men are distinguishable by age; as he will later argue, older men with more experience of war are less likely to be bold and reckless.

> Oh you are a very poor soldier—a chocolate cream soldier! Come, cheer up.

Related Characters: Raina Petkoff (speaker), Captain Bluntschli

Related Themes:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

Captain Bluntschli has told Raina about the comic behavior of the Bulgarian forces, who--led by Sergius--charged ahead with such bravado that the Servians burst out laughing. Raina is offended, revealing to Bluntschli that she is engaged to Sergius. Bluntschli apologizes, but when Raina tells him he must leave he almost begins to cry. Pitying him, Raina calls him "a chocolate cream soldier" and decides to try and cheer him up. Raina's statement here exemplifies the unusual dynamic between her and Bluntschli. It is clear that Raina is more used to playing out the traditional gender roles of men and women, with Sergius embodying the ideal of a dominant, fearless soldier, and Raina a supportive, romantic woman. However, her affection for Bluntschli suggests that there is something appealing about his honest vulnerability.

Act 2 Quotes

> She is so grand that she never dreams that any servant could dare to be disrespectful to her; but if she once suspects that you are defying her, out you go.

Related Characters: Nicola (speaker), Catherine Petkoff, Louka

Related Themes:

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

In the garden of the Petkoff's house, Nicola, an older manservant, is chastizing Louka for her bad manners. Nicola has admitted that Catherine Petkoff is so snooty that she probably doesn't even realize Louka is behaving disrespectfully, but if Catherine were to ever realize this, Louka would be fired immediately. Nicola's words reveal the complex social dynamics between servants and their employers. According to him, Catherine's elitist arrogance makes her naïve; she thinks so little of servants that she cannot imagine they might defy her. This is a powerful concept in light of the fact that this play was written in the midst of severe class tensions, and shortly before the Bolshevik revolution in Russia. Nicola's words suggest that the rich have blinded themselves to the realities of life with their privilege, but this blindness cannot last forever.

> You have the soul of a servant, Nicola.
> Yes: that's the secret of success in service.

Related Characters: Louka, Nicola (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

Nicola has warned Louka about being disrespectful to Catherine, claiming that if Louka continues along this path she will be fired, but Louka is dismissive of Nicolai's warnings. Both servants have revealed they know important secrets about the Petkoffs, but Louka remains disdainful of Nicola's loyalty to the family. She tells him he has "the soul of a servant." Louka's harsh words reveal her resentment of her lot in life; despite the rigid class system in which she was born, Louka considers herself equal to the family she serves. In fact, the idea that anyone would not see themselves as equal to others is abhorrent to her, as is conveyed by her harsh remarks to Nicola. For Louka, being a servant should never be the defining aspect of one's identity.

> Sergius Saranoff...is a tall, romantically handsome man...the result is precisely what the advent of the nineteenth century thought first produced in England: to wit, Byronism...it is clear that here is Raina's ideal hero

Related Characters: Major Sergius Saranoff, Raina Petkoff (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

Raina's father, Major Paul Petkoff, has entered the house with news that the war has ended. Shortly after, Sergius arrives, and Paul quietly tells Catherine that Sergius will not be promoted until it is certain that Bulgaria will not be fighting in a war again soon. When Sergius enters, the stage directions describe him as "a romantically handsome man" and "Raina's ideal hero." Indeed, he is described as Byronic, referring to the quintessential romantic figure of Lord Byron, the famous poet and lover. Although this description presents Sergius in positive terms, this positive impression is undermined by Paul's earlier words to Catherine, which suggest that Sergius's courageous persona is merely an act, and doesn't reflect his actual skills as a solider.

Once again, the play shows that romantic ideas about life do not hold up in reality. In some ways, Sergius's presence onstage seems to have emerged directly from Raina's romantic novels; he resembles her "ideal hero," suggesting that this ideal is so powerful it overwhelms the reality of who Sergius actually is.

> 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 on him!

Related Characters: Major Sergius Saranoff (speaker), Raina Petkoff

Related Themes:

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

Sergius has announced that he no longer wants to be a soldier, declaring that soldiers never want to engage in battle on equal terms. He has also mentioned hearing a rumor that two Bulgarian women sheltered a Swiss man fighting with the Servian army; Catherine and Raina have

pretended to be horrified, although of course in reality they are the two Bulgarian women being described. In this passage, Sergius grandly dedicates his deeds to Raina, and compares himself to "a knight in a tournament with his lady looking down on him." Sergius's words confirm that he and Raina live in a fantasy world filled with heroic archetypes and over-the-top romance, leaving them out of touch with reality.

Sergius also emphasizes the idea that Raina is a spectator to the drama of his life, just as she is a spectator to the events of the romantic novels she reads. Sergius's performance of bravado is executed for Raina's benefit; indeed, the fact that Sergius believes Raina is "looking down on him" while he is in battle explains why he behaves in such a theatrical, swaggering manner.

❝ 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.

Related Characters: Raina Petkoff (speaker), Major Sergius Saranoff

Related Themes:

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

Sergius has told Raina that everything he does is for her, and that when he was in battle he imagined her watching over him. Raina then declares that she and Sergius have found "the higher love," and that thinking of him makes her unable to "do a base deed, or think an ignoble thought." Once again, Raina uses exaggerated romantic language to discuss hers and Sergius's relationship. She speaks in superlatives and seems to conceive of her love as having an almost mystical power. However, at this point the audience knows that Raina has also secretly hidden Captain Bluntschli, and they will soon find out about Sergius's relationship with Louka. Raina's words in this passage therefore ironically foreshadow the exposure of hers and Sergius's relationship as hypocritical and false.

❝ Which of the six of me is the real man? That's the question that torments me. One of them is a hero, another a buffoon, another a humbug, another perhaps a bit of a blackguard. And one, at least, is a coward—jealous, like all cowards.

Related Characters: Major Sergius Saranoff (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

Sergius has declared his love for Raina in exaggerated, dramatic terms, and the couple embrace. However, Louka then comes outside and Raina exits, and it immediately becomes clear that Sergius is infatuated with Louka. Louka has resisted his advances, causing Sergius to grow frustrated. In this passage, he ponders the idea that there are six versions of himself, all different from one another. Note that of the five examples he gives, only one––"a hero"––is positive. The rest are decidedly negative, suggesting that Sergius's arrogance and bravado perhaps conceal internal self-doubt and low self-esteem.

Indeed, Sergius's rhetorical question at the beginning of this passage points to the multifaceted, contradictory, and confusing nature of identity. It is clear to Sergius that on some level he identifies with each of the figures he describes, but has no way of determining which is "the real man." This in turn suggests that perhaps there is no "real man" beneath his torment. At the same time, it is also possible that Sergius's confusion arises from his habit of thinking in terms of archetypes. He seems to believe that all people exist in "types" that can be summarized in one word ("hero" or "buffoon") that share the same characteristics ("jealous, like all cowards"). These types resemble literary tropes, indicating once again that Sergius's understanding of reality too closely resembles a romantic novel.

Act 3 Quotes

❝ 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.

Related Characters: Raina Petkoff (speaker), Major Sergius Saranoff, Captain Bluntschli

Related Themes:

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

Sergius and Bluntschli have been working together at the desk in the library; when they are finished, Sergius and Major Petkoff depart to deliver the orders, leaving Raina

and Bluntschli alone. Raina tells Bluntschli that if Sergius finds out that she hid him when he climbed onto her balcony, Sergius would kill him. Bluntschli clearly finds this idea ludicrous, which angers Raina. In this passage, Raina stresses that she wants there to be "no meanness, no smallness, no deceit" in her relationship with Sergius. Although Raina's feelings for Sergius seem to be earnest, her words are rendered hollow by the fact that there is already clearly deceit in their relationship. Both Raina and Sergius have been lying to each other throughout the play.

Raina's claim that her relationship with Sergius "is the one really beautiful and noble part of my life" is typically melodramatic in its romanticism. It also emphasizes the lack of sovereignty and agency Raina has over her own life. Rather than being fulfilled by her own thoughts and desires, Raina lives for her relationship to Sergius, whom she idealizes as a perfect, manly hero.

❝ Do you know, you are the first man I ever met who did not take me seriously?
You mean, don't you, that I am the first man that has ever taken you quite seriously?

Related Characters: Raina Petkoff, Captain Bluntschli (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

Raina has told Bluntschli that she doesn't want there to be any deceit in her relationship with Sergius, but Bluntschli points out she has already lied about hiding him on her balcony. Bluntschli has admitted that he is attracted to Raina, even if he doesn't believe a word she says. Raina tells him that he is the first man not to take her seriously, but Bluntschli insists that the opposite is true––that he is the first man to take her "quite seriously." This passage reveals the strange, contradictory logic underlying gendered social relations among the upper class at the time.

Clearly, Raina feels that her romantic performance of the smitten, devoted woman is necessary for men to take her seriously. As Bluntschli points out, however, anyone who believes and indulges this performance is not taking Raina seriously at all, but instead buying into a fantasy image of what women should be like. When Raina relaxes and becomes more honest with Bluntschli, however, he is able to communicate with her as an equal, addressing who she really is as a person as opposed to the archetype she is trying to imitate.

❝ How easy it is to talk! Men never seem to me to grow up: they all have schoolboy's ideas. You don't know what true courage is...I would marry the man I loved, which no other queen in Europe has the courage to do...You dare not: you would marry a rich man's daughter because you would be afraid of what other people would say of you.

Related Characters: Louka (speaker), Major Sergius Saranoff

Related Themes:

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

Nicola has offered Louka some of the money Sergius gave him, but she has refused, telling him that he is more of a servant than a husband. Nicola leaves, and Sergius enters. Louka questions whether Sergius is actually courageous; when Sergius insists that he is, Louka responds by telling him "you don't know what true courage is," because he is choosing to marry "a rich man's daughter" rather than Louka, the woman he loves. Here Louka emphasizes her resolutely principled attitude to the world, suggesting that she is the moral centre of the play. Although she loves Sergius, she does not speak to him with the over-the-top romantic words of Raina. Rather, she addresses him harshly, holding him to account for his hypocritical behavior.

This passage also contains an important claim about the true nature of courage. According to the traditional, romantic ideals that characterize the society depicted in the play, courage consists of masculine, patriotic acts, such as boldly fighting for one's country. Louka, however, suggests that these are "schoolboy's ideas," and that real courage consists of daring to live and love honestly, committing oneself to the principle that all people are equal, and not adjusting one's behavior to the expectations of others.

❝ I could no more fight with you than I could make love to an ugly woman. You've no magnetism: you're not a man, you're a machine.

Related Characters: Major Sergius Saranoff (speaker),

Captain Bluntschli

Related Themes:

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

Louka has told Sergius that Raina will marry Bluntschli, and Sergius has reacted furiously. Sergius challenges Bluntschli to a duel, and Bluntschli amusedly accepts. Sergius, Bluntschli, and Raina argue with one another, and in doing so reveal that Sergius and Raina's declarations of love are in fact false, as they are both in love with other people. In this passage, Sergius announces defeatedly that he can't fight Bluntschli, as Bluntschli is not a man but "a machine." This statement emphasizes the impression that Sergius is a comic character who would say anything rather than admit that his aggressive bravado is a false performance.

The fact that he chooses to insult Bluntschli by calling him a "machine" highlights Sergius's suspicions of Bluntschli's honest, straightforward demeanor. It is likely also a reference to the fact that Bluntschli is a professional soldier, with no patriotic allegiance or emotional attachment to war. Indeed, Sergius's words posit Bluntschli as representative of the future, and suggest that this future is dominated by a cold, transactional, and mechanical approach to life. At the same time, the play shows that Bluntschli's "mechanical" honesty is preferable to Sergius's romantic, patriotic posturing.

> The world is not such an innocent place as we used to think.

Related Characters: Major Sergius Saranoff (speaker), Raina Petkoff, Louka

Related Themes:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

Sergius, Bluntschli, Raina, and Louka have slowly revealed their secrets to one another. Major Petkoff enters, and everyone tries to pretend that everything is normal. However, when Raina tries to steal the portrait from Major Petkoff's jacket pocket, he reveals that he has already seen it, and asks if she regularly sends "photographic souvenirs to other men." Sergius replies that "the world is not such an innocent place as we used to think." These words confirm the idea that Sergius and Raina were indeed a "couple of grown-up babies," caught up in childish fantasies that obscured the true nature of reality. As Sergius's statement suggests, honesty is the only way to destroy these illusions, which may appear "innocent" but which in fact consist of false performances and deceit.

> My rank is the highest known in Switzerland: I am a free citizen.

Related Characters: Captain Bluntschli (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

Although at first hesitant to marry Raina because of her age, when Bluntschli finds out that Raina is actually twenty-three, not seventeen, he asks her parents if he may propose to her. They respond that Raina is accustomed to great wealth and a high rank, and Bluntschli describes the fortune he possesses from his hotels. Major Petkoff, awed, asks if Bluntschli is "Emperor of Switzerland," but Bluntschli replies that he has the highest rank in Switzerland: "a free citizen." This claim emphasizes the fact that Bluntschli has decidedly modern ideas about class, money, and equality. Although he is hugely wealthy, to Bluntschli this is less important than being free.

Indeed, Bluntschli's words here align him less to the Petkoffs and more to the other wise character in the play: Louka. Both Bluntschli and Louka possess the belief that being a free and equal citizen is far more important than rank and wealth. Furthermore, both suggest that high rank can in fact inhibit one's freedom, as it can make people obsessed with society's expectations, leading them to behave in a false, posturing manner.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ACT 1

The curtain opens on a bedroom, in a small town in Bulgaria in 1885. The room is "half rich Bulgarian, half cheap Viennese." Paltry furniture is intermixed with lavish Turkish decorations. There hangs a large photograph of an extremely handsome man in an officer's uniform who has a "lofty bearing" and "magnetic glance."

The setting alone suggests a conflict of identity and class division—the room is split between sensible and lavish, paltry and rich, Bulgarian and Viennese. Appropriately, the portrait (which we will find out later is of Sergius, an "ideal" romantic hero) literally presides over the identity struggle embodied by the décor.

On the balcony there is a beautiful lady (Raina), who looks out into the sky as though she is appreciating its beauty, and as though she knows her own youth and beauty contribute to the magical quality of the night. She is decorated in expensive furs, which are worth approximately three times what the furniture in the room is worth. Her reverie is interrupted by her mother Catherine Petkoff, who is "determined to be a Viennese lady" and therefore wears a fashionable tea gown everywhere.

Raina's first appearance is appropriately romantic, almost to the point of cliché: She stands, young and beautiful, on a balcony, gazing at the stars. The expensive furs she is draped in continue to highlight the fact that this is a household that is not only wealthy, but strives to be perceived *as wealthy—perhaps these characters want to seem even wealthier than they are. Catherine certainly seems to care about appearing high-class, dressing in Viennese fashions though she is Bulgarian.*

Catherine chastises Raina for being up and out of bed so late, and Raina tells her she couldn't help but look at the stars, which are so beautiful tonight. Catherine tells Raina there has been a battle, and Raina is visibly excited. When Catherine says the battle has been won by Sergius, Raina is ecstatic. Catherine says that Raina's father has sent news that Sergius, against orders from Bulgarian commanders, led a great cavalry charge against the Russians and their Servian allies, which resulted in a pronounced victory for the Bulgarian side.

Raina's response to the news of a battle is unusual—where we might expect her to respond with fear, dread, or at least a somber kind of attention, she instead becomes increasingly excited. We discover that she is elated by the prospect of Sergius winning a battle. Already we can see that she is in the habit of reducing herself and others to their accomplishments, their ability to appear *a certain way.*

Raina is rapturously happy to hear of Sergius's success. She remarks that it "proves our ideas were real after all." Her mother indignantly asks her to explain this remark, and Raina admits that she sometimes doubts whether their belief in patriotism and heroism is grounded in something real. She begs her mother not to tell Sergius that she ever doubted him, but her mother refuses to make such a promise. Raina explains again that she simply worried their ideas were born of their love for the writings of Byron and Pushkin, and whether these ideas could hold up in real life. But, she assured her mother, she is convinced now.

This section of the play outlines the underpinnings of Raina's entire romantic belief system. She knows she is idealistic and romantic, even acknowledging that her view of the world is based on the romantic writing of Byron and Pushkin. This may perhaps seem wise and mature of her, but her youth is revealed by her assumption that Sergius's single victory is sufficient to "prove" that her Romanticism—a way of looking at the world that prioritized emotion, individual experience, and heroism—and idealism is grounded in reality—this kind of near-sightedness is markedly immature.

Raina dismisses her worries as the result of cowardice, and affirms that Sergius is as splendid and noble as he looks. She happily muses that "the world really is a glorious world for women that can see its glory and men that can act its romance!"

Raina—significantly—refers to her worries as "cowardice." The reverence of bravery as the utmost virtue is a highly typical of Romanticism. Her following declaration is also typically idealistic: the world itself is a glorious place, and men must "act" its romance.

Louka interrupts them, a young and pretty servant girl who is clearly defiant, and whose demeanor seems almost insolent. She also looks excited, but not in the rapturous way of Catherine and Raina, and she is clearly contemptuous of their romantic demeanors. She tells them that there will soon be gunfire in the streets, as the Servian army is retreating. She advises that all of the doors and windows of the house should be locked.

Louka's youth, unlike Raina's, manifests in her insistent defiance. Though she is a servant, she clearly disdains servant work, and her lack of reverence for upper class citizens is obvious from the start. Her entrance also marks the beginning of the play's conflict. The War that Raina has been distantly romanticizing will soon be in her backyard.

Raina expresses her sadness that the Bulgarians, her people, are cruelly slaughtering fugitives, and wonders what the point of such an exercise might be. Catherine ignores her and in a businesslike manner goes to make everything safe downstairs, insisting that Raina keep her shutters locked. Raina expresses her desire to leave the shutters open, and Louka points out that a bolt is missing so that the windows actually can't be locked and can simply be pushed open if she likes. Raina chides her for breaking Catherine's rule and Louka leaves defiantly.

We catch a glimpse of Raina's romantic façade breaking down—once she is confronted with some of the reality of war, her patriotic fervor breaks down a little—she questions the Bulgarians. The interaction with Louka is also revealing: Raina believes it is fine if she contemplates disregarding her mothers wish and leaving the windows unlocked, but chides Louka for the exact same line of thinking. Louka perceives this inequality and leaves.

Raina speaks to the portrait of Sergius, telling him she shall never be unworthy of him anymore, and calling him her "soul's hero." She selects a **novel** from a pile of books by her bed and opens it, preparing to read herself to sleep. But instead she turns back to the portrait, calling, "my hero! My hero!" suddenly shots ring out and Raina plugs her ears, turns off the lights, and hides in her pillow.

Raina reverts to her typically romantic self, speaking to Sergius's portrait and using highly idealistic language. She settles down to read a novel, but doesn't actually; her inattention to the book shows she is only superficially interested in it—it suits her romantic image. But reality intrudes once again, in the form of gunshots.

There is the sound of the shutters opening and closing, and a figure enters Raina's room. The man lights a match and Raina demands to know who is there. He threateningly warns her not to call out if she wants to remain unharmed. Raina lights a candle and sees that the man is in a horrible state, ragged, thin and unkempt. Yet he appears to still have all his wits about him. He points out his Servian uniform and tells Raina that if he is caught he will be killed. He asks her if she understands the gravity of his situation and she dismissively says she doesn't—but she has heard that some soldiers are afraid of death.

The reality of the war literally climbs through Raina's window, This soldier is not at all the heroic image she might expect: he is ragged, thin, and dirty. When he tries to impress upon her that he is Servian, and that his life is at stake, she clearly begrudges him his desire to live, as though a true soldier would not fear death. This extreme idealism when put up against the un-heroic realism of the soldier has a comedic effect onstage (because Raina seems ridiculous) and this kind of humor will persist throughout the play.

The man grimly but in a good-natured way tells her that all soldiers are afraid of death. He warns her against raising an alarm, but she indignantly asks him why he imagines she is afraid of death. He grants her that she might not fear death, but that she would certainly fear being seen by a bunch of cavalry men in her nightgown, and snatches her cloak from the nearby ottoman, exclaiming that her cloak is a better bargaining tool than his rifle.

This man sizes Raina up immediately—he correctly assumes that she is the kind of person who would fear social disgrace more than death. The action—this bizarre kind of hostage situation—becomes almost farcical, underscoring how detached Raina's romantic ideas about soldiers and war are from reality.

Raina scornfully tells him he is not behaving like a gentlemen. There are footsteps outside Raina's bedroom door and a knock. Giving up, the man kindly throws Raina her cloak, and his intimidating manner gives way to a weakened and fearful one. He tells Raina he is done for and that she should look away, for it will not take long. Raina, touched by his compassion, hides him in the curtains. The man tells her that if she keeps her head he might have a chance, because nine soldiers out of ten are born fools.

Raina voices her disgust—she expects "heroic" soldiers to act like "gentlemen," and this man is acting disrespectfully. When a knock arrives, he relents, but in so doing acts even more unlike a soldier—he shies away in fear, and seems weak and vulnerable. We would expect that Raina would be even more offended at this violation, but instead she feels compassion for him, and helps him—her character is more complex than it seems, though there is a sense also that she *wishes to be heroic.*

Louka enters to say that neighbors have seen a man crawling up the water pipe into Raina's rooms. Raina insists she heard nothing. Catherine calls a Russian officer into the room, and Raina stands in front of the curtain as he searches the balcony. Upon seeing nothing he begs Raina's pardon and exits with Catherine. Louka remains. Raina tells Louka to keep her mother company. Louka looks at the ottoman, then the curtain, then exits, laughing to herself. Raina, offended, slams the door after her in a huff.

Though Catherine and the soldier notice nothing, it is clear Louka is clever enough to realize what's going on. She sees through Raina's trick just as she sees through the egotistic posturing of the upper class. Raina can hardly believe Louka has the gall not to believe in her trick—but to Louka, the Petkoff's entire way of life is a kind of elaborate trick, and she is always seeing through it.

The man emerges from his hiding place, expresses his undying gratitude to Raina and explains that he is Swiss, a professional soldier, and that he bears no allegiance to the Servians. He begs Raina to let him sit a minute longer before he must go back out into danger. She gasps, points to the ottoman and notices his revolver has been lying out in the open this whole time. Her gasp scared him, and she sarcastically suggests he take his revolver to protect himself from her. He explains the gun is not loaded—he carries sweets instead of ammunition. Raina is outraged at this.

The man further breaks down idealistic conceptions of war by revealing he has no allegiance to either side. As a "professional soldier" he fights not for glory or honor, but for a much more banal purpose: to make a living. What's more, he doesn't even carry a loaded gun, preferring to carry sweets instead. This is selfish, indulgent, and weak (and also kind of practical in that he carries what actually brings him pleasure)—a kind of trifecta of anti-heroic traits, and the idealistic Raina is predictably outraged.

The man wishes he had some chocolates now, and Raina goes to her drawers and scornfully thrusts a box of chocolate creams his way. He is exorbitantly grateful, and explains that all old soldiers carry food while the young ones carry ammunition. Raina contemptuously says that even though she is a woman she is probably braver than him, and the man says this is true, but only because Raina has not been under fire for three days. He then tells Raina that if she should scold him too much, he will start to cry.

Though he has just violated her ideal of manhood, Raina gives the man chocolate creams. Though her disposition suggests a kind of huffy outrage, her actions betray her complexities, her compassion, and her willingness to accept this man despite his eccentricities and flaws.

Raina is moved by this vulnerability, and apologizes. She then draws herself up and says that Bulgarian soldiers are not like him. But he argues that there are only two different types of soldier, young and old, and that no matter where they're from they are the same. He then remarks that is ludicrous that Bulgarians have managed to beat them, but notes that their victory was basically accidental.

Raina collects herself and, in a more typical, patriotic fashion, asserts that no Bulgarian soldiers are like this man (for they must be more heroic). The man undercuts her, and says that a soldier's country makes no difference, only his age. This brings direct attention to the difference between youth and maturity, which has already been implicitly highlighted earlier.

Raina skeptically demands that he explain himself, and he describes a cavalry charge, led by a handsome young man who was immensely brave. His bravery caused the other side to break out in laughter, for they could see that the charge was stupid and foolish. But then they realized they didn't have the correct ammunition, and the charge resulted in devastating losses for the Russian and Servian side (though it shouldn't have). The man sums up the cavalry charge by saying that the leader and his regiment "committed suicide—only the pistol missed fire: that is all."

Here it is revealed that Sergius's victory—which, the reader should recall, previously "proved" that Raina's Romantic ideals were grounded in reality—was not heroic, and was instead rather stupid, and very lucky. This is perhaps the most unpleasant example (for Raina) of reality intruding on her romantic fantasy. Her naïve belief in Sergius's glory and heroics is shattered.

Raina is disheartened by this, but remains steadfastly loyal to Sergius. She points out his portrait to the man, who recognizes him as the leader of the charge. He can barely keep from laughing, for the image of Sergius leading the charge as though it were the noblest and bravest thing a soldier has ever done is deeply funny to the man. Raina angrily tells him that she is betrothed to Sergius, and he apologizes. She tells him he must leave after saying such horrible things, but the idea of going back down the balcony and facing his own death reduces him almost to tears.

But Raina must remain loyal (or at least appear to remain loyal) and she defends her betrothed from this man's cruel remarks. Though he can hardly keep from laughing, the man does apologize when he realizes he has criticized Raina's future husband, showing that he is at core polite and has affection for her, though he undoubtedly thinks her silly. A picture begins to emerge of two people who are more than they appear to be.

Raina is "disarmed by pity" and comforts him, calling him a "chocolate cream soldier" and tells him to cheer up. He says he is exhausted, and wishes only for sleep—he has not had an undisturbed sleep since he joined the fight. But he realizes he must go, and tells Raina that if he should die that will give him all the rest he needs. Raina anxiously begs him not to go; she wants to save him.

Raina is moved by the soldier's tears, which once again reveals that her worship of the romantic hero is not entirely honest—she clearly has affection for this "chocolate cream soldier" though he represents the opposite of everything she professes to value in a man.

She tells him she is a Petkoff, and that her name carries much weight in Bulgaria—as their guest he can come to no harm. Their home has a staircase, and even a **library**. The man pretends to be deeply impressed, though it is clear he finds Raina's speech silly. Raina promises that she will answer for his safety, and offers her hand to him. He says that he better not take her hand, for his is so dirty. She praises him for being gentlemanly, and insists he take her hand anyway.

Raina launches into a speech about how noble, wealthy, and respected her family is. She equates being upper class with being respectable and genteel. Her speech sounds absurd to the man (and likely to the audience)—her immaturity is shining through during this speech. However, though she speaks with great reverence for the upper class, she allows him to take her hand though he is poor and dirty—she does not believe in the class system as much as she professes to.

The man tells Raina she better inform her mother, for he does not wish to be a secret guest for too long. Raina agrees, and tells him he must stay awake while she goes to fetch her mother. He tries his best, but falls asleep on her bed as soon as she exits. Catherine comes back and sees him asleep on the bed and calls him a brute—Raina begs her mother not to wake him, saying "the poor dear is worn out." Raina's mother cannot believe that her daughter has called this man "dear" but allows him to remain asleep.

Raina even forgives this man—filthy, tattered—for falling asleep in her bed, an act that not only would be considered improper (for Raina has let a stranger in her bed) but also offensive to upper class sensibilities. Raina's mother has a more predictable reaction: she calls this man a "brute." But Raina calls him a "dear"—she can see through his exterior and finds herself caring for him.

ACT 2

It is March, 1886. Louka and Nicola, a middle-aged manservant, are in the garden of the Petkoff's house. Nicola is lecturing Louka about her manners, saying that if she does not improve, Catherine will fire her. Louka, defiant as ever, tells Nicola she doesn't care what Catherine thinks of her. Nicola argues that he will never be able to marry Louka unless she is on good terms with the family. Louka asks him if he will always side with the family, and Nicola says he is dependent on their good word. Louka tells him he has no spirit, and Nicola dismisses her as simply being too young.

Nicola is the first character in the play who is attached to his servitude the same way Catherine is attached to her wealth and status. Nicola's job depends on the "good word" of the Petkoffs, but we get the sense that his identity depends on it, too. Louka has already demonstrated her disdain for this kind of thinking; she almost has more vitriol for Nicola, the willing servant, than for the Petkoffs, her upper-class employers. That she is supposed to marry Nicola is a mark of class thinking, a sense from both the family and Nikola that Louka will of course marry within her same class of servants.

Louka agrees she is young, but says she knows secrets about the Petkoffs that could ruin them. Nicola reveals that he knows secrets too, mentioning he knows about something that would end the engagement of Raina and Sergius if it ever got out. Louka is incredulous and asks Nicola how he knows about that—she has never told him. Nicola insists she must be a better servant, and Louka disgustedly tells him he has "the soul of a servant."

Louka believes her secrets—which the readers must assume involve her knowledge of the night Raina rescued the Servian soldier—give her a weapon against the Petkoffs. Nicola mysteriously knows about this night too. But Louka's surprise at his knowledge is overshadowed by her disgust at his unflinching, unquestioning loyalty.

A loud knocking on the gate announces that Major Paul Petkoff, Raina's father, is back from the war. Nicola quickly tells Louka to fetch coffee, and Louka mutters to herself that Nicola will never put the soul of a servant into her. Major Petkoff enters, a cheerful but rather undignified man of about 50. Louka goes to fetch Catherine, who kisses Paul and is delighted to hear that the war has ended.

When Louka says she will never have the "soul of a servant" she means she will never let servitude or her birth into the working class define her entire existence, as Nicola has done. Major Petkoff's appearance breaks down the significance of class divisions even further—he is described as bumbling and undignified.

Catherine and Paul catch up, bickering amicably about changes to the house, including a bell that rings for the servant and Catherine's habit of hanging laundry out where everyone can see it. Soon Sergius knocks at the door, and Nicola goes to let him in. Major Petkoff mentions to Catherine that Sergius will never be promoted until they are sure that Bulgaria will not be fighting in a war any time soon.

Catherine and Paul's conversation is about public appearances and the question of how to appropriately call for their servants; they worry about how best to assert themselves as upper-class society members. Petkoff's comment about Sergius not being promoted until there certainly won't be another war is another reference to Sergius's combined heroic stuate and ineptitude—nobody in the army wants him commanding anything during an actual war, but if there's not going to be a war he can make a great figurehead.

Sergius enters, a tall and "romantically handsome" man. He is, according to the stage directions, the picture of Byronism—idealistic, handsome, brooding. He is Raina's "ideal hero." Catherine is delighted to see him. Major Petkoff, less so.

Lord Byron is one of the leading figures of the Romantic movement, whose poems praised beauty, youth, and intense emotion, and who himself lived an adventurous life of literature, love, and battle. Sergius is therefore the perfect "ideal hero" for the romantic Raina.

Sergius announces he has submitted his resignation to the army, because he has won the war for Bulgaria and still been unfairly denied a promotion. He then asks to see Raina, who appears suddenly around the side of the house. Petkoff remarks aside to Catherine that Raina appears always at the right moment. Catherine impatiently tells him that Raina "listens for it," calling it "an abominable habit."

Sergius's uppity declaration of his resignation is rendered ironic and comedic by the fact that the audience has already learned of his ineptitude—we already know that he does not deserve a promotion. That Raina always appears at the right moment also provides crucial insight into Raina's character: she carefully constructs her image and controls how people see her.

Sergius greets Raina with "splendid gallantry" as if she were a queen. Raina greets her father, and listens as Sergius explains why he does not wish to be a soldier anymore—it is, he realizes, a "base," ignoble profession. Then he and Petkoff recall a story they heard about a Swiss soldier fighting for the Servians who was taken in by some Bulgarian women who helped him sneak away in the morning, giving him the coat of the master of the house, who was away at the war.

Sergius rationalizes his decision to resign by construing soldiering and war as though it is beneath him. It might seem obvious to the audience that war is "base", but for an idealistic (and rather foolish) man like Sergius, the baseness and depravity of war is an unexpected and bitter disappointment. War, it turns out, is no place for a Byronic hero (which of course raises the further question of what is the place for such a hero).

Raina and Catherine act horribly offended by this story, and Raina wishes Sergius had refrained from telling her about such horrible women. Sergius launches into an elaborate speech of apology which is cut off by Major Petkoff, who tells him his daughter is being too sensitive. Petkoff asks Sergius inside but Catherine intervenes, saying that they should give Sergius and Raina time alone. Catherine and Major Petkoff depart.

Raina and Catherine are excellent liars. Though we know that the women in the story are Raina and Catherine, the mother and daughter duo effortlessly act offended at the mere existence of such women—women who would deign to help a Servian soldier. That they lie so easily tells us that they lie often. They lie to maintain their image.

Sergius and Raina exchange romantic words. Sergius tells Raina all his heroic deeds have been for her, and Raina blissfully tells him that together they have found a "higher love" which has made even thinking of "base deeds" impossible. They embrace, and pull apart when they hear Louka coming. Raina says she will go inside to get her hat and then they can go for a walk together.

There is a humorous irony in Sergius's remark that all his "heroic deeds" have been for Raina: Sergius's "heroic" deeds were in fact laughably foolish and reckless. Raina's remark that thinking of "base deeds" is impossible is a kind of ominous foreshadowing, for what follows will show that this "higher love" is a façade: reality is far less dignified.

Louka comes outside, and Sergius's demeanor changes instantly—he becomes mischievous and twirls his mustache. He asks Louka if she knows what a "higher love" is—she is shocked and tells him no. He tells her it is a "very fatiguing thing" and Louka offers him some coffee. Sergius grabs her hand, and Louka puts up an act of resisting. Sergius comes to her and grabs her shoulders, asking her what she thinks of the "half a dozen Sergiuses" who keep manifesting themselves in his handsome figure. Louka begs him to let go and he refuses, so she suggests that they at least go somewhere they cannot be seen, as Raina is probably watching them from the window.

Quite suddenly, Sergius's entire act is thrown aside. He becomes almost a caricature of a villain, twirling his mustache and speaking scandalously with Louka. He reveals that his higher love is "a very fatiguing thing"—he is putting on airs and laboring over his perfect romantic image as much as Raina is. At the heart of Sergius's comment is an identity crisis. He feels as though he is several different people at once, and doesn't seem to be able to locate his "true self."

Sergius agrees. He tries to kiss Louka, and Louka tells him she doesn't want his affection—he is making love behind Raina's back just as she is doing behind his. Sergius recoils and demands her to explain herself. He calls Louka "devil" and she surmises that one of the six of him is very much like her. He paces and wonders which of the six is the "real" him—the hero, the buffoon, the blackguard, the coward? He asks Louka to tell him who his rival is.

Sergius's unceremonious and animalistic lusting after Louka is the exact opposite of his hyper-respectful and utterly dignified love of Raina. Though Sergius knows he is more complicated and more depraved than he appears to be, he is shocked to hear that Raina is similarly complicated. His idealistic, romantic vision of her will not allow for this.

She says she doesn't know, for she only heard his voice through Raina's bedroom door. She says she is sure that if the man ever returns, Raina will marry him. Louka claims she knows the "difference between the sort of manner you and she put on before one another and the real manner." This hurts Sergius, and he grabs her again. She tells him he is hurting her, and he tells her he doesn't care. He tells her she has the soul of a servant, and lets her go. Louka's arms are bruised.

Louka, perhaps the most perceptive character in this play, says that she saw true love between Raina and the soldier. This is not the ideal love, the romantic Byronic love, but true human love, which doesn't arise from a desire to keep up appearances or fit a certain script. Sergius lashes out at her for saying so, insulting her in the way he knows will hurt her most. He draws attention to her lower class status in order to demean her. He equates her very soul with her servitude, and asserts his manhood through physical power.

Louka defiantly responds that she and Sergius are made of the same "clay" and that she is worth six of Raina, who is "a liar and a cheat." Sergius apologizes for hurting her, and Louka asks him to prove he is sorry by kissing her bruises. He proudly refuses, and walks away from her. Raina comes out, and Louka proudly passes her on the way into the house. Raina playfully asks Sergius if he has been flirting with Louka, and he criticizes her for thinking such a thing. Just as they are about to leave for their walk, Catherine enters and tells Sergius that Major Petkoff needs him for something. When he leaves, Raina visibly relaxes.

Louka will not be put down by Sergius though. Her remark shows her egalitarian (and ultimately socialist) philosophy. All people are made of the "same clay" and class divisions and birthrights are meaningless. She asks Sergius to kiss her bruises, but Sergius will not, because he cannot stand the thought of doing something so submissive and plaintive for a servant girl. Sergius then shows off his ability to lie to Raina. Raina's demeanor after Sergius leaves suggests that she finds their "love" as fatiguing as he does.

Now in private with Raina, Catherine calls the Swiss man a beast for spreading the story of their hospitality around, and tells Raina that if the story ever gets out, her engagement to Sergius will be over. Raina offhandedly suggests that her mother marry Sergius instead of her—for she seems to care for him more. Raina, almost to herself, expresses her desire to do something shocking in front him, to shake him out of his propriety. She flippantly says she does not care if he finds out about the chocolate cream soldier. She goes back inside.

Raina, it seems, has grown tired of keeping up her act in front of her mother, and scandalously suggests her mother would prefer to marry Sergius in her place. She seems fed up with her romantic act—the audience learns definitively that the Raina they saw in the first act isn't the "real" Raina. She has been keeping up appearances for a long time, and it appears she has finally become fed up.

Louka comes into the garden to tell her a Servian officer has arrived and is asking for her. It takes Catherine a moment to remember they are at peace with the Servians. Louka tells her the officer is asking to see the lady of the house. His name is Captain Bluntschli, and he is Swiss. Catherine is startled and tells Louka to bring him to the garden without letting Major Petkoff or Sergius see him.

We finally learn the name of the strange soldier who climbed into Raina's room that night. Catherine responds by doing everything in her power to conceal him from her husband and future son-in-law. She once again devotes a great deal of energy to maintaining her image.

Captain Bluntschli greets Catherine warmly, and she tells him he was foolish to come, as the Bulgarians still hate the Servians and she might get in trouble. He apologizes, though he seems disappointed, and explains he has only come to return the coat she lent him. Catherine tells him she will grab it from his bag, and send the rest of the bag back to him, if he leaves his address. She then ushers him out the back door of the garden.

Though Bluntschli's reason for visiting is kind and thoughtful, Catherine (using yet another false excuse) tells him he cannot stay, and tries to sneak him out the back door. Recall that Raina told Bluntschli in the first act that their family treated guests honorably. Apparently they only do so if their guests are the right sort of guests.

Just then Major Petkoff arrives, warmly greeting Bluntschli by name and shaking his hand. He does not notice how nervous Catherine is. Sergius joins them and Petkoff apologizes that the servants have brought him to the garden instead of the **library**. He explains that he and Sergius have been working on how to bring troops home from certain remote areas, (now that the fighting is done) and Bluntschli says he believes he could help. Sergius happily tells him to come inside. Just then, Raina arrives, and exclaims in shock, "the chocolate cream soldier!"

It turns out Petkoff already knows Bluntschli, and apparently is fond of him. That they are asking a man who recently fought for the Servians to help them demonstrates that their patriotism is not a fervent as it seems, especially when they need help. This yet again underscores a kind of incompetence on the parts of Sergius and Major Petkoff, who, despite being upper echelon and well respected, cannot complete their work on their own.

Raina collects herself and explains that she had made a chocolate cream soldier that Nicola had accidentally smashed. She apologizes to Bluntschli, adding that she hopes he did not think she was referring to him with such a name. He tells her it is a relief to hear that she was not. Petkoff is fed up with his servants, and brings Nicola outside to scold him for his mistakes (though we know Nicola is innocent.) Nicola accepts the criticism, and Bluntschli is finally taken inside, as Catherine makes a gesture of despair.

Raina makes up for her mistake by blaming Nicola, who has done nothing wrong. This cruel treatment of her servant indicates that Raina believes she is better than Nicola. She thinks of herself as kind and gentle, but she (and the rest of her family) display complete disregard for the thoughts and feelings of Nicola. Nicola, on the other hand, accepts this treatment as though he also believes he deserves it.

ACT 3

The third act takes place in the **library**. There are very few books, and the furnishings are less than impressive. Bluntschli is hard at work at the desk. Sergius sits with him, and is also supposed to be working, but is instead watching Bluntschli work and noting his quick and efficient progress. Major Petkoff is lounging happily on the ottoman, reading a newspaper. Raina is relaxing on a divan under a window, staring outside with a neglected **novel** in her lap.

Bluntschli is the only industrious figure in a room full of people watching, lazing around, and daydreaming. Sergius is somewhat baffled by Bluntschli's ability, and Major Petkoff is basically content to let someone else do his work for him. These are not the patriotic Bulgarian heroes Raina spoke of in Act 1. Raina has resumed her dreamy romantic posturing, staring out the window and holding a novel in her lap without reading it.

Petkoff asks Bluntschli if there is any way he could be of service. Bluntschli, without pausing his writing, tells him he is managing on his own, but thanks him for the kind offer. Sergius petulantly notes that the only work he is doing is signing Bluntschli's orders, like a glorified secretary.

Sergius's youth and arrogance is on full display in this exchange. He has already noted that Bluntschli is more adept than him with writing orders, but still disdains having to assist Bluntschli.

Petkoff asks Catherine to fetch his old coat—he remarks it is not in the closet where he left it. Catherine tells him it is, and asks Nicola to go fetch it. Nicola (who knows the coat is actually in Bluntschli's bag) leaves. Petkoff playfully bets Catherine some jewelry the coat will not be found. Sergius says he will give an Arabian Mare to Raina if the jacket is found. Petkoff notices that Raina has barely been listening, and affectionately tells the room she is dreaming, as usual. Meanwhile, Bluntschli finishes the orders. Sergius and Petkoff go to deliver the orders. Just before Major Petkoff leaves, however, he invites Catherine to come with him, saying "they'll be far more frightened of you than me."

Once again Nicola is used as a kind of pawn in Catherine's dishonest scheming. The exchange following his exit demonstrates how excessively and comfortably the Petkoff's live. While Nicola silently agrees to help Catherine lie to her husband, they sit in a room and bet jewels and horses on the outcome. It is an overt moment of criticism of the life of the upper class: frivolous and almost grotesquely careless with money, even as others suffer through difficult and demeaning labor to make a living.

Raina and Bluntschli are left alone. Raina tells him that the story about the night he climbed up their balcony got out. He apologizes, and explains that he only told one person, and that he thought he could rely on his friend's discretion. She tells him that if Sergius found out, he would kill Bluntschli in a duel. Bluntschli feigns terror, clearly finding the idea that Sergius might best him in a duel utterly laughable. Raina is angry at his levity and tells him that her relationship with Sergius is "the one really beautiful and noble part of my life."

Sergius and Bluntschli are two opposing heroes: Sergius, the ridiculous romantic hero, inept in war, and Bluntschli, a kind of hero-realist, who sees Sergius for what he is, and whose competency far outstrips the young and foolish Sergius. A duel between the two of them would most certainly end poorly for Sergius, but Raina clings to her romantic notions, and idealizes Sergius.

Bluntschli points out that she has lied to Sergius about their meeting, and she says the only falsities she has ever said in her life were because she wanted to save Bluntschli's life, and demands his gratitude. Bluntschli says that hearing lies and getting ones life saved is simply part of being a soldier, and Raina tells him he is incapable of a noble thought. He then tells her that when she puts on her noble attitude and speaks in that "thrilling voice" he admires her but cannot bring himself to believe a word she says.

Bluntschli informs Raina that the reality of being a soldier is that you often have to put your life in the hands of others. This realism clashes with Raina's notion of what a soldier should be—a heroic individual—and she decries Bluntschli's remarks as base and unworthy. He seems to see through her act—he does not believe her, and seems to know she is concealing her authentic self from him.

Raina is flustered, making as if to reprimand him, and acting offended until finally she relents, sighs, and asks "how did you find me out?" He tells her he has good instincts, and she tells him he is the first man who didn't take her seriously. He corrects her, saying he is the first man who has ever taken her quite seriously. She agrees. She cozies up to him, clearly comfortable with him now. She tells him she has always behaved in such a way—her act has always been believed. She wonders if Bluntschli now thinks her a liar and a cheat—he tells her the opposite; that he admires her for her youth and charm and is, like all the other men in her life, infatuated with her.

Raina finally admits that it is all an act—she is not so frivolous and dreamy as she seems. By refusing to believe the act, Bluntschli, in a way, becomes the first person who has ever believed in the "real" Raina, who has ever taken her seriously. Raina is at ease with him because she can finally be herself, and doesn't need to put on a performance or fill a role. What's more, Bluntschli doesn't condemn her for her romantic posturing. He admires her for it, seemingly incorporating this element of her personality into her complex identity.

She asks him what he thought of her portrait, and he grows confused, saying he never received a portrait. Raina reveals that she slipped a portrait of herself, with a note, into the coat pocket when he left. Bluntschli responds that he never looked in the pockets, and it is entirely possible the portrait is still in there. Raina is almost in tears, telling Bluntschli she wishes she'd never met him.

Raina becomes distraught again, however, when she learns that the jig may be up. Though she appreciates that Bluntschli can see her for who she is, she still clings to the identity she's created for her credulous family. She still cares deeply about her family seeing her a certain way.

Louka comes in, delivering written messages to Bluntschli. Bluntschli opens one and declares it is bad news—his father is dead. Raina says this is sad news, and Bluntschli, betraying no signs of grief, says he will have to start home in the hour, as he will have to look after the hotels his father owned. He leaves in a hurry. Louka taunts that Bluntschli is fonder of the Servians than of his own father, knowing this will hurt Raina's patriotic and romantic sensibilities. Raina bitterly suggests that soldiers cannot feel grief. Louka answers by saying that Sergius is a soldier but still seems full of heart. Raina haughtily leaves the room.

Bluntschli is as businesslike and unfeeling as Raina is emotional and romantic. He does not even seem to feel sorrow for his dead father, for he is only concerned about the business side of things: he must take over his father's hotels. Louka continues to undermine her upper class employers whom she resents so much. She cuts down Bluntschli, knowing Raina loves him, and hints at Sergius's infidelity.

Nicola comes in the room, and tries to be affectionate with Louka. She refuses him, and he offers her some of the money Sergius has just given him. She tells him, "keep your money, you were born to be a servant. I was not." Nicola says he deserves credit for teaching her manners and making her into a woman. Louka says he would rather be her servant than her husband. Sergius comes in and interrupts their conversation. Nicola leaves.

Louka turns from ridiculing the upper class to ridiculing Nicola, a complacent member of the working class whom she believes is complicit in the perpetuation of class inequality. She refuses to accept that she should show more deference to the Petkoffs, and denies that Nicola "made her into a woman" just by teaching her how to act as a servant. Louka (correctly, we imagine) guesses that Nicola would rather serve her than marry her, for serving is his only calling.

Sergius examines the bruise that remains on Louka's arm and asks her if he can cure it. Louka says the opportunity has passed. Louka wonders aloud if Sergius is truly a brave man, and Sergius says that one of the only things he is certain of is his bravery. But he says courage is cheap—a bulldog is capable of it. Louka tells him he does not yet know what courage is. She says courage would be a queen marrying for love, and not status. Courage, she says, is "daring to be the equal of your inferior." She says Sergius is not brave because he would be too afraid to marry her even if he loved her, because she is a servant.

Sergius finally recognizes that the Byronic, romantic worship of the courageous warrior is misleading: for bravery in battle is something a bulldog is capable of. Louka reframes courage so that it speaks to the contentious issue of 18th century class relations: bravery is feeling free to love anyone in a society that divides people sharply into categories based on their wealth and status. Her comment is decidedly socialist and likely reflects Shaw's personal philosophy.

Sergius denies this, saying that if he loved her he would do everything in his power to be with her. But, he says, he loves another woman, and adds that Louka is simply jealous of Raina. Louka laughs at this and says Raina will marry Bluntschli, a man worth ten of Sergius. Sergius takes her in his arms and insists he will kill "the Swiss." Louka says it is more likely the Swiss will kill him. He says he cannot believe Raina would be capable of dishonesty—and Louka wonders if Raina thinks he is capable of holding Louka in his arms like this.

Sergius claims to be brave in this way, but his declaration of his enduring love for Raina is a dishonest evasion, and the audience can see he is too much of a coward to admit he loves Louka. Louka points out to him that if he is capable of dishonesty so is Raina. Louka, more than anyone else, understands how complex a person's identity is. Her realism allows her to reason that everyone is dishonest to some degree, and that everyone is capable of treachery. Sergius and Raina, in contrast, can sense that they themselves don't fit the roles they've each separately created for themselves, but don't realize that nobody else fits in their own roles either.

Sergius berates himself, calling himself a coward a liar and a fool. Louka goes to leave, and he tells her she belongs to him. She asks him if he means to insult her—he says "it means that you love me, and that I have had you here in my arms." He then says if he chooses to love her, he will not be a coward, and if he should ever touch her again, he will be touching his fiancé. Louka tells him she will not wait long.

Sergius toys with the notion of committing to Louka, but tellingly he speaks in hypotheticals, and uses strange, equivocal language. Despite his declaration that he will be courageous, he is still carefully hedging his bet and posturing in a certain way. He is not yet acting authentically.

Bluntschli enters as Louka leaves. Sergius confronts him, and challenges him to a duel. Bluntschli amusedly accepts, knowing his skill far surpasses that of the young Sergius. Raina hurries in, having overheard the confrontation, and asks them to explain. Sergius accuses Raina of loving Bluntschli. Bluntschli says this is nonsense as Raina doesn't even know if he is married. Raina looks crestfallen and asks him if he is married. Sergius takes this as evidence of her love.

Raina is finally forced into a situation where she must come clean about her feelings for Bluntschli. Bluntschli is now the one concealing his true feelings, by making an obscure comment that he is potentially married. Yet Bluntschli's evasion makes Raina lets down her guard and her authentic emotion shows through.

Raina guesses that Bluntschli's friend (the one who did not keep the secret of his story) has contacted Sergius, but Bluntschli tells him his friend is dead. Sergius says war and love are both "hollow shams," and tells Raina that Louka was his informant. Raina responds that what she saw in the garden, from a window inside the house, now makes sense to her. (She presumably watched Sergius take Raina in his arms in Act II).

The romantic façade begins to break down entirely. Our romantic hero Sergius calls love and war "hollow shams," a directly anti-romanticist sentiment. And Raina reveals she has seen Sergius and Louka embracing in the garden. The "true love" between Raina and Sergius is finally revealed: it is superficial, immature and artificial.

Sergius despairs, and tells Bluntschli he cannot fight him, for Bluntschli is not a man so much as he is a "machine" and men cannot fight with machines. Raina tells him perhaps he ought to fight Nicola, who is engaged to Louka. This sets Sergius off on a rant. Aside, Raina asks Bluntschli if he thinks she and Sergius are "a couple of grown up babies." Bluntschli asks where Louka is, and Raina tells him she is probably listening at the door.

Sergius is still a showoff, however, and launches into a grandiose speech. His point is valid, however: Bluntschli is so carefully controlled and so unemotional he resembles a machine more than a man. He has been concealing his feelings just as everyone else has. Raina recognizes that her and Sergius's posturing has been essentially immature—indeed the action resembles a kind of schoolyard drama, with Louka listening at the door.

Sergius hears this and in a rage throws the door open and pulls Louka inside. Bluntschli comments that he has eavesdropped before too, but it was justified because his life was at stake. Louka says her love was at stake. Sergius flinches, embarrassed at her in spite of himself. But then he draws himself up and says "I am not ashamed!" Raina contemptuously remarks that Louka is not in love, she is only curious.

Sergius has been taught that servants are below him, and when Louka declares that she and Sergius are in love, he cannot help but feel ashamed. He denies this, however, declaring he is "not ashamed" even though he has just betrayed his embarrassment. Even if he does not feel courageous he is determined, as always, to seem courageous.

Major Petkoff enters, and everyone pretends everything is normal. He is holding his jacket. Raina asks to help him put it on, and as she does, takes her portrait from the pocket. But her father has already seen the photo, and when he reaches in his pocket to show it to her, he finds it missing. Raina eventually must explain that the portrait was for Bluntschli, and Bluntschli admits he was the Swiss fugitive in the story the Major heard.

Everyone immediately reverts back to a careful performance when Major Petkoff enters. But circumstance forces them to explain the situation. Though people do not often volunteer to reveal their secrets and true feelings, circumstance often forces them to in this play. We get the sense that reality will break through idealism and Romanticism whether we like it or not.

The rest of the details emerge. Meanwhile, Nicola arrives and admits he and Louka are not engaged, for she does not want him. Bluntschli remarks he would hire Nicola to run his hotels, for he seems a very capable man. Louka demands an apology from Sergius—he finally agrees, taking her hand and apologizing. She reminds him he promised that should he touch her again she would be his fiancé. He puts his arm around her.

Sergius finally accepts his relationship with Louka, but only after Louka basically traps him with a semantic technicality. Once again it seems that reality will always draw out a person's true nature, even if he or she does not deliberately reveal this nature.

Catherine enters and sees Sergius and Louka. She asks to know the meaning of this. Sergius says he will marry Louka, and Bluntschli congratulates them. Catherine is aghast. Louka, calling Raina by her first name, says that Raina will not be hurt by this, for she will marry the Swiss. Bluntschli says he is too old to take the hand of a seventeen-year-old—he is a vagabond, and, he admits, an incurable romantic, but not the sort of fellow a young girl would fall in love with. Raina says she agrees that he is a romantic idiot, and clarifies that she is not seventeen but twenty-three. Bluntschli is shocked, thinks for a moment, and asks Major Petkoff if he may court Raina.

It is revealed that Bluntschli, in his own idealistic cognitive error, has assumed that Raina is only a teenager. He has constructed her in an idealized way. Romantic literature often equates dreaminess and beauty with youth, and Bluntschli has done just that. Raina corrects his mistake: their roles are reversed. She now corrects his idealistic preconceptions, making clear that she can be beautiful, energetic and dreamy without being a child. Bluntschli accepts this,accepts the reality of her, and immediately treats her "seriously" by asking to court her.

Bluntschli says that by inheriting the hotels from his father he has inherited a great fortune, and would be a good husband. Raina insists she will not be bought, saying she did not give candy to the "Emperor of Switzerland" Bluntschli gets on a knee and asks to whom she did give the candies to: she lovingly responds "my chocolate cream soldier." Bluntschli laughs delightedly, gets up, and makes a military bow, and exits. Sergius has the last line of the play: "What a man!"

Though Bluntschli offers up the fact of his wealth as evidence he would be a good husband, Raina makes clear that she fell in love with a tattered soldier, and her affection will not be "bought." She is done conforming to upper class expectations. Her relationship with Bluntschli represents a kind of transgression of expectations, a union of "real love" rather than "true love." Meanwhile, Sergius, the man held up as a heroic model for all men through the play, now holds up the realist Bluntschli as the man who should actually be admired. And in so doing the Romantic ideals of the play are fully demolished, as those who embodied them have themselves abandoned them in favor of a new, more realistic and more authentic way of seeing and being in the world that emphasizes connections between people as opposed to roles within ideals or classes.

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