

George Bernard Shaw: Arms and the Man MAJOR Handout

NOTE: If something is Shaw-like you would call it "Shavian"

Born: July 26, 1856 in Dublin

Died: November 2, 1950 (lived till 94)

In 1898 Shaw married Charlotte Payne-Townshend. They had no children.

1925 Nobel Prize for Literature (accepted award but not the money)

wrote more than 50 plays and five novels

Shaw on his childhood: "We as children had to find our way in a household where there was neither hate nor love, fear nor reverence, but always personality."

Non-affectionate mother, alcoholic father (ended up thinking he had a good childhood)

Was an outsider as a Protestant in Ireland (a minority among the Roman Catholics)

Ireland influence – they are more interested in what you believe not in how well you think

Was a vegetarian; joined idealistic socialists (Fabians)

Shaw was successful with women (tall and handsome); married in 1898

His pseudonym = Corno di Bassetto (for his music reviews)

BACKGROUND on Serbo-Bulgarian War of 1885

Audiences adored his sarcastic and timely story of the absurdities of love and war, particularly as the play's action occurs during and just after the Serbo-Bulgarian War of 1885, which had occurred just nine years earlier. In November of that year, Serbia's King Milan, who was loyal to Austria-Hungary and the West, declared war on Bulgaria in an effort to gain compensation for Bulgaria's recently having expanded its territory. The expansion was in breach of the western-initiated Treaty of Berlin, which was designed to disunify the Balkans and thereby preempt an even greater Russian influence in Eastern Europe.

ACTUAL Shaw quotes

- 1) "I am in my eighty-eighth year and have still much to learn even within my own very limited capacity" (1944). Shaw never ceased hungering and thirsting after knowledge until he was near death.
- 2) Every man over forty is a scoundrel.
- 3) There is an old saying that is a man has not fallen in love before forty, he had better not fall in love after.
- 4) I understand everything and everyone, and am nobody and nothing.
- 5) Shaw once defined comedy as "nothing less than the destruction of old-fashioned morals."
- 6) I insist on making them (my audiences) think in order to bring them to a conviction of sin.
- 7) Social questions are produced by the conflict of human institutions with human feeling.
- 8) It is your favorite jibe at me that what I call drama is nothing but explanation.
- 9) I am a reasonable, patient, consistent, apologetic, laborious person with the temperament of a schoolmaster and pursuits of a vestryman.
- 10) The presentation of plays through the literary medium has not yet become an art; and the result is that it is very difficult to induce the English public to buy and read plays.
- 11) Shaw on his concept of character in drama: "I deal with all periods, but I never study any period but the present, which I have not yet mastered and never shall; and as a dramatist I have no clue to any historical or other personage save that part of him which is also myself, and which may be nine tenths of him or ninety-nine hundredths, as the case may be (if indeed I do not transcend the creature), but which, anyhow, is all that can ever come within my knowledge of his soul. *The man who writes about himself and his own time is the only man who writes about all people and about all time.*"
- 12) Civilized society is one huge bourgeoisie: no nobleman dares now shock his greengrocer.
- 13) The artist is either a poet or a scalawag: as poet, he cannot see, as the prosaic man does, that chivalry is at bottom only romantic suicide: as scalawag, he cannot see that it does not pay to sponge and beg and lie and brag and neglect his person.
- 14) Hence it is that the world's books get written, its pictures painted, its statues modeled, its symphonies composed, by people who are free of the otherwise universal dominion of the tyranny of sex.
- 15) There are two tragedies in life: one is not to get your heart's desire. The other is to get it.
- 16) He who can, does. He who cannot, teaches.
- 17) Martyrdom is the only way a person can become famous without ability.
- 18) Patriotism is your conviction that this country is superior to all others because you were born in it.
- 19) Peace is not only better than war, but infinitely more arduous.
- 20) I have been dinning into the public head that I am an extraordinarily witty, brilliant and clever man. That is now part of the public opinion of England; and no power in heaven or on Earth with ever change it.
- 21) He who has never hoped can never despair.
- 22) The worst sin towards our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them.
- 23) Liberty means responsibility. That is why most men dread it.
- 24) So effective do I find the dramatic method that I have no doubt I shall at last persuade even London to take its conscience and its brains with it when it goes to the theater, instead of leaving them at home with its prayerbook as it does at present.

General Quotes on Shaw

- 25) "the greatest dramatist to write in the English language since Shakespeare"

- 26) “an iconoclast, an outspoken public figure, a shy man, a satirist, and intellectual jester, dramatist, essayist, critic of drama/books/art/music, novelist, vigorous, cunning, high-spirited, flippant, curious, a fearless, challenging spirit, furious eclecticism, skeptic”
- 27) Irish dramatist, literary critic, a socialist spokesman, and a leading figure in the 20th century theater. Also, a strong supporter of women’s rights, a teetotaler, a vegetarian, a music critic
- 28) Shaw’s plays suggest his central qualities: a love of paradox coupled with an ability to phrase it wittily; a desire to shock or to provoke; and, most importantly, an attack on the unthinking way in which people live. In the preface to *Arms and the Man*, he wrote, “To me the tragedy and comedy of life lie in the consequences, sometimes terrible, sometimes ludicrous, of our persistent attempts to found our institutions on the ideals suggested to our imaginations by our half-satisfied passions, instead of on a genuinely scientific natural history”
- 29) Shaw was not an easy playwright to stage, since his plays were sometimes long, and were often called “talky”
- 30) All his life, Shaw had to measure himself against Shakespeare – and he cannot be blamed for suspecting that he would always come in second.
- 31) Shaw was awkward and eccentric in his social interactions, but held passionate, often immutable, beliefs on a nearly infinite number of topics.
- 32) From 1916: “He is a challenging, vital thinker, a keen and fascinating wielder of words, a skilled shaper of story in dramatic mould, a modern critic with a passion for social betterment, who lives up to his belief and is inspirational in his social dream.”
- 33) Shaw composed his plays usually in the framework of one or another of his intellectual-political-economic-philosophical ideas, for example, the technique of successful government (*Caesar and Cleopatra*); the evolutionary development of man’s intellectual and physical capacities (*Man and Superman*); munitions making and the capitalist system (*Major Barbara*); the artist’s role in society (*The Doctor’s Dilemma*); world war and the problem of nationalism (*Heartbreak House*); tradition and change in collision (*Saint Joan*).
- 34) Shaw is in love with life, but only *interested* in human beings.”
- 35) Shaw described himself as “upstart son of an alcoholic downstart.” (grew up in something close to genteel poverty; neither wife nor his children attended George Carr’s funeral (his father))
- 36) Shaw holds the curious, half-humorous melancholy which is peculiar to the *disillusioned idealist*. Shaw has always had too keen a sense of reality not to be aware of the conflict between it and his social and moral ideals.
- 37) Shaw’s ruling passion was the advocacy of peace; like JFK, he believed that, “Mankind must put an end to war or war will put an end to mankind.” Aldous Huxley (*Brave New World*) was right when he declared that our world “desperately needs” Shaw’s wisdom. No one could sum up Shaw’s achievement more aptly than did Thomas Mann, who wrote: “He did his best in redressing the fateful imbalance between truth and reality, in lifting mankind to a higher rung of social maturity. He often pointed a scornful finger at human frailty, but his jests were never at the expense of humanity.”
- 38) About *Man and Superman* (which was subtitled “A Comedy and A Philosophy”): “And this is the story upon which Shaw hangs his 175 pages of play – it would take seven hours to perform it in its entirety – his 37 pages of introduction, and his 69 pages of appendix.”
- 39) In his plays, often the conflicts are never-ending.
- 40) The folly of romance, the crime of criminal punishment, the economic oppression of woman, the cupidity of doctors, the prosaic reality of florid history – these are his theme.
- 41) The heroes are often reflections of Shaw himself: vivacious, sophisticated, and lucid.
- 42) (In 1898) Shaw had struggled always to be free of sexual entanglement to devote himself to the higher moral passion.
- 43) When Shaw was in his early forties, something happened – something of an inner spiritual nature. I do not wish to imply any specific “conversion” experience. There is nothing on the later side of this turning point that cannot be found in embryo on the earlier side. Still it is a perceptibly different Shaw who imposes himself on a new century, one who has gone beyond “the art of destroying ideals” to explore a personal cosmology – one might even say a theology.”
- 44) Shaw was writing largely out of his passion for politics, and, due to their high levels of social commentary and issues-debating characters, his works were just as often chided for being “preachy” as they were praised for being witty and sensitive.

Shaw’s IMPACT ON DRAMA

- 45) For revolutionizing the English stage, disposing of the romantic conventions and devices of the “well-made” play and instituting a theater of ideas grounded in realism
- 46) developed a theater that challenged established political and social beliefs.
- 47) Shaw has the unusual distinction of being a playwright whose works were successful in book form before appearing on the stage.
- 48) Shaw was closely associated with the intellectual revival of the English theater.
- 49) Shaw was driven by *weltverbesserungswahn*: a rage to better the world. His vivid characters and clever dialogue only disguise his moral purpose, called Puritan by some: to expose the dilemmas, absurdities, and injustices of society. Shaw turned away from the 19th century concept of the English theater as a source of light entertainment, and made acceptable the drama of ideas. In this he altered the course of 20th century drama.
- 50) Shaw is often considered to be a great dramatic teacher, with the theater as his classroom.
- 51) Shaw’s youthful serious plays were exceedingly good pastiches of Ibsen... Nevertheless, he was not born to write serious plays. He has too irresponsible a sense of humour.
- 52) Ibsen, except in his early poetical dramas, deals chiefly with the war between new schemes of human happiness and old rules of conduct ... Shaw is frankly a disciple of Ibsen, but he is far more than a mere imitator... He greatly exceeds the Norwegian in wit and invention.
- 53) Shaw is in no sense a preacher.

- 54) The average man clings fondly to two ancient delusions: (a) that wisdom is always solemn, and (b) that he himself is never ridiculous. Shaw outrages both of these ideas. One cannot expect a man, however keen his sense of humor, to laugh at the things he considers eminently proper and honorable. Shaw's demand that he do so has greatly restricted the size of the Shaw audience.
- 55) In all the history of English stage, man has exceeded him in technical resources not in nimbleness of wit.
- 56) James Joyce said, "Shaw creates a dramatic form which is much like a dialogue novel."
- 57) Drama is a symphony of the passions. The melting mood is their sway of the hearer. Shaw's plays have one passion, and one only – that of indignation. Indignation against hypocrisy and lying, against prostitution and slavery, against poverty, dirt and disorder... Shaw's service to drama is first and foremost the revelation of a personality engaged in criticism of life. With one passion and much wit he has given this criticism dramatic force. Yet, Shaw's comic spirit must be writ small; it has a narrow range.
- 58) [With Shaw], the bitter pill of the moralist is coated with the sugar of the artist.
- 59) Shaw is a censor of the sociological evils arising from the structural defects of modern society and modern civilization.
- 60) Bernard Shaw is the most versatile and cosmopolitan genius in the drama of ideas that Great Britain has yet produced. No juster or more significant characterization can be made of this man than that he is a penetrating and astute critic of contemporary civilization. He is typical of this disquieting century – with its intellectual brilliancy, its staggering naivete, its ironic nonsense, its devouring skepticism, its profound social and religious unrest. The note of his art is capitally moralistic; and he tempers the bitterness of the disillusioning dose with the effervescent appetizer of his brilliant wit.
- 61) Shaw really admitted his own incapacity for play-writing when he affirmed that the average audience was a set of soapy stupids, "part of them nine-tenths chapel-goers by temperament, and remainder ten-tenths blackguards." For the stage at its best is only a mirror held up before the face of the watching house. The big play is composed of little players; it must comprehend them even when they don't comprehend it."
- 62) Shaw is resolved to build a play not on pathos, but on bathos.
- 63) Shaw's plays are cleanly, antiseptic, stimulating; his laughter clears the air.
- 64) Most of his plays are dramatic debates.
- 65) Shaw cannot, thank God, be serious for very long: the more logical his argument, the more certain he is to accompany it with a wink.
- 66) Shaw is a pragmatist. He wants not so much to discover truth as to increase it.
- 67) Shaw was thought to be "an irresponsible joker"; but his kind of joking is a characteristic of the Irish; and Shaw in his temperament is Irish of the Irish... We Irish are often thought to be irresponsible, whereas, in point of fact, we are critical realists, while Englishmen often mistake sentimental mutterings for everlasting truths.
- 68) Carried along by his determination to make the theatre a vehicle for truth, Shaw began by accepting (apparently) the nowadays almost universal literary assumption that "truth" is identical with "unpleasantness", and that once the veil of socially acceptable appearances has been ripped away, the underlying reality consists entirely of things which are sordid, ugly, and cruel.
- 69) He opened the way for a new drama which discussed social issues. A number of new writers would have little or no chance if Shaw had not been a pioneer in showing that a 'problem play' could drive into issues of genuine public importance.
- 70) Shaw is not, even when he would like to be, an impressionist, a Chekhov turning life before our eyes to no end but that observed is sufficient. Look, we live, we are, say Chekhov. While Shaw declares briskly: Pull up your socks! Fall in line there. Come along now. Double-quick march and we'll overtake the future by morning! One loves Shaw for that optimism... It is true that both are dealing with the same dying society of "nice people", but where Chekhov's interest was the "nice people," Shaw's interest was the dying society and the birth pains of the new.
- 71) Shaw performed a definite service in establishing the fact that our stage can be serious in intent ... without giving up the specific object – to entertain its patrons.
- 72) It is the business of comedy to note imperfection rather than perfection in man and society, to note imperfection even where merit is also present.
- 73) All great art is propaganda, Shaw insisted, by which he meant it was for the propagation of ideas. Accordingly, his dramas are designated by such terms as "the comedy of ideas," the "discussion play" and "corrective comedy," terms that apply likewise to the work of Ibsen and Chekhov. The discussion play and the comedy-of-ideas plays are based on the premise that ideas can be as dramatic as love-making or murder on stage; for action, to be dramatic, need not be overt. Shaw separated the terms "material action" and "intellectual action." Material action progresses from outward action (rising action, climax, denouement). In intellectual action the overt action is subordinated to events resembling "real life, where nothing begins and nothing comes to an end." As for "corrective comedy," it is another way to describing dramatic satire.
- 74) Shaw regarded himself as a teacher and he regarded his plays as a means by which he might educate his generation.
- 75) *What Shaw learned was that before he could persuade an audience to think, he must first provoke laughter.*
- 76) For the sake of reality, Shaw was always prepared to violate realistic structure and to be arbitrary with his plot or to discard plot altogether. He was ever ready to stop the overt action for a good discussion or good lecture...
- 77) According to Shaw, A Doll's House created a new form of drama by introducing a new movement in it. Shaw explained: "Formerly, you had in what was called a well-made play an exposition in the first act, a situation in the second, and unraveling in the third. Now you have exposition, situation, and discussion; and the discussion is the best of the playwright." For Shaw, modern drama and true realism started in 1879 when Nora made her husband sit down and discuss the nature of her marriage to him.
- 78) (Connecting to Durrenmatt,) "we owe Shaw for his capacity for writing comedy that is serious and serious drama that is comic."
- 79) "The age of the epic is past. Today we sacrifice Fortinbras to get "Hamlet" into two hours and a half."

80) Shaw had various messages he send through Pygmalion. The first is about his arch enemy, the upper classes: by having a flower seller pass as a duchess just by learning how to speak and act properly, Shaw exposed the foolish pretensions of high society. In other words, class is only speech deep.

General CRITICISMS on Shaw

- 81) "originality was hardly Shaw's strength"
- 82) A frequent and central criticism directed at Shaw as a dramatist is that his characters are intellectual rather than human creations.
- 83) Like Ibsen in his last play, Shaw does little else than resuscitate characters and motives that have done dusty in his earlier plays. The ineffably superior hero, witty, disillusioned... They are but variations of Mr. Shaw's stock [character] types.
- 84) If Mr. Shaw's play were a real play we should have no need to explain the action-plot by laborious reference to the idea-plot.
- 85) In short, Bernard Shaw is still haunted with his old impotence of the unromantic writer; he cannot imagine the main motives of human life from the inside.
- 86) Inability to portray sexual passion convincingly is a limitation of Shaw's art: he is no flesh painter.
- 87) Some of his plays are wellnigh impossible of performance in a paying manner without elaborate revision and expurgation.
- 88) Mr. Shaw, on the practical side perhaps the most humane man alive, is in this sense inhumane. He has even been infected to some extent with the primary intellectual weakness of his new master, Nietzsche, the strange notion that the greater and stronger a man was the more he would despise other things.
- 89) Mr. Shaw's socialism has made him unsociable.
- 90) He has mastered the trick of showing up one character vividly at the expense of another, but he has not mastered the trick of letting one character speak for itself and by itself, and without this visible foolish act of friction.
- 91) Shaw's pages bristle with ideas; and every living idea is a challenge. This is why his plays are so much more interesting than most plays. They answer no questions, but they ask many. For some in the audience the end of his play is the beginning of mental activity. Instead of giving us food, he gives us an appetite.
- 92) Shaw is always "all there"; he possesses his subject and cannot be possessed by it; his sense of humor is never in complete abeyance; the strain of argument is always present; he is too interested in things in general to give his natural sympathy for individuals much play – being, like Nature, careful of the race, but careless of the single specimen; he despises the senses and, in so far as Art appeals to the senses, he despises Art.
- 93) Mr. Shaw, in his later pieces, leaves you with the sensation that he knows only too well what he means, but he will never admit that you are capable of understanding him.
- 94) I doubt whether there are more than 12 distinct persons in the whole of Mr. Shaw's work.
- 95) Shaw's body of works plainly betrays his dislike of sex and his evasion of it.
- 96) Shaw was very sure both of his knowledge and his opinion and delighted in ramming both down the throat of the British reader.
- 97) Human psychology is something with which Shaw never bothers. He is never concerned with the way people do behave, but only with the way they would behave if they were characters in a Shaw play.
- 98) It cannot be said that he excels in constructing plays or creating characters, but no one has written more brilliant and witty dialogue.
- 99) Many of his plays degenerate into endless dialogue, in which the brilliancy of the verve cannot hide the artificiality of the situation.
- 100) His dramatic method is far from being subtle.

CONNECTIONS TO SHAKESPEARE:

- 101) SHAW said: "In Shakespeare's plays the woman always takes the initiative. In his problem plays and his popular plays alike the love interest is the interest of seeing the woman hunt the man down. (When she is baffled like Ophelia she goes mad and commits suicide) ... I find in my own plays that Woman, projecting herself dramatically by my hands behaves just as Woman did in the plays of Shakespeare."
- 102) In other words, like Shakespeare, in his plays women are typically the pursuer.
- 103) Shaw: Hence it has been pointed out that Shakespeare has no conscience. Neither have I, in that sense.
- 104) To Mr. Shaw as to Shakespeare organic plot-development is a matter of indifference, as compared with the systematic exhibition of ideas.
- 105) Shaw's great tirades, though in prose and filled with humor, have about them the aria quality of Shakespearean soliloquies.
- 106) Shakespeare has presented every aspect of human life, and we do not know whether he was a Christian or atheist, an aristocrat or a democrat, an optimist or a pessimist... Now Shaw is wholly subjective: even if he had not written the brilliant Prefaces, every play and every person represent the author. That he did write the Prefaces is a proof of his aim; so far from concealing himself, he uses every means to reveal himself.
- 107) Shakespeare primarily was interested in people. Mr. Shaw primarily is interested in doctrine.
- 108) Precisely as Shakespeare gives himself to his 'living characters, so Shaw gives himself to his ideas.
- 109) Shaw, like Ibsen and unlike Shakespeare, was intensely interested in the pressure of economic, political and religious institutions on his characters, finding it rich in dramatic situations and conflicts.

MISC STUFF on Shaw

- 110) Dramatic desire = to communicate the human condition (like Ibsen); often he would shock or say the unexpected (or unpopular things) in order to make people think
- 111) Shaw: "When Ibsen came from Norway with his characters who thought and discussed as well as acted, the theatrical heaven rolled up like a scroll."

- 112) Shaw on life: "I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no 'brief candle' for me. It is a sort of splendid torch, which I have got hold of for the moment; and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations."
- 113) Likely in response to critics, Shaw said: "I am interested in human beings, not in doctrines and theories, in the substance, not the shadow. Shakespeare, too, was solely interested in human nature, the material for his art, and he did not care a rap for religion, politics, science, philosophy, and all the rest of the rot wherewith mankind is perpetually doped."
- 114) In spite of Shaw's assertion that "an author should never be seen" and that it is his responsibility "to get out of the way" of his audience, this is precisely what he never seems able to do. Shaw is constantly making his presence or controlling intelligence over the play known. But again, if Shaw is one of the most self-conscious dramatists ever to have written, he is also one of the most elusive.
- 115) Shaw: "It is by jingling the jester's cap that I will make people listen to me."
- 116) For Shaw the great dividing-line in the world was not between rich and poor, nor between socialists and capitalists. It was between those who did some honest work in the world and those who did little or nothing.
- 117) But, as Shaw pointed out to his actors, his plays, like the plays of Shakespeare and other great dramatists, must be played on the lines (and not between the lines) because it is the lines which make them different and better than the theatrical fairy stories and romances they resemble.
- 118) Shaw on the purpose of drama: "to force the public to reconsider its morals"
- ARMS AND THE MAN STUFF:**
- 119) Shaw employs irony in the title of his play, taken from the opening line of the epic poem "The Aeneid" written in 19 BC by Virgil: "Of arms and the man I sing" – in which Virgil glorifies war. Shaw's purpose in the play, however, is to attack the romantic idea of war.
- 120) The comedy of the play depends on contrasts of characters, unexpected turns of events, mistaken identities, surprising opinions, irony, wit and satire. *Arms and the Man* offers social criticism tempered by fine comedy.
- 121) *Arms and the Man* shows that Shaw had abandoned realism for ever. His sole connection with it henceforward was to be a persistent anti-romanticist. Where the realist coolly and fatalistically shows the inevitable sequence of events – Ibsen in his social plays is a realist – Shaw leaps hither and thither among solemn follies and makes them ridiculous. He shows in his play, with a glee akin to that of Moliere, the absurd impulse to lie and to pose which is dominant in men and women. And, instead of allowing the lie to persist, and even to triumph, as a realist might justifiably have done, he makes every lie achieve the ignominy of ludicrous exposure. That is the unmistakable mark of comic genius.
- 122) *Arms and the Man* is typical of the group: the soldier-hero is really a coward in battle, and proud of it. Again conventional standards are held up to ridicule in this fashion, this time the theatrical view of war.
- 123) One of Shaw's personal aims as a dramatist, therefore, was to bring "good" characters to life as well as wicked ones. In *Arms and the Man*, Shaw not only found a way to do it but also concretized a new formula which was to serve him in a great variety of ways throughout the rest of his career as a dramatist. Here, as in most of the plays that follow, dramatic interest is aroused and sustained by revealing through action the contrast between appearance and reality. But what marks a departure from "orthodox" realism is that the truth uncovered is actually more interesting and attractive than the façade of trashy conventions which normally conceals it from our notice. What Shaw first utilizes here is the notion that when people are stripped down to where they "reveal" themselves, they often turn out to be, not worse, but better than expected.
- 124) No one who was alive at the time (1894) and interested in such matters will ever forget the first acting of *Arms and the Man*. It was applauded by that indescribable element in all of us which rejoices to see the genuine thing prevail against the plausible; that element which rejoices that even its enemies are alive. Apart from the problems raised in the play, the very form of it was attractive and forcible innovation...
- 125) It should be clear by now that Shaw is a terrorist. The Shawian terror is an unusual one, and he employs an unusual weapon – that of humor. This unusual man seems to be of the opinion that there is nothing fearful in the world except the calm and incorruptible eye of the common man. But this eye must be feared, always and unconditionally. This theory endows him with a remarkable natural superiority...
- 126) The central idea – that, in mating, the man is pursued by the woman – is one that we have seen Shaw employ in *Arms and the Man*, *The Philanderer*. It is not a new conception. Shakespeare had it, though maybe unconsciously, and its rudiments appear in the works of other men.
- 127) Shaw is an annihilator of the heroic concept, a killer of heroes. The heroic was completely independent from the romantic and was embodied in Captain Bluntschli not in Sergius Saranoff.
- 128) This play was a commentary on the "state of things" as Shaw saw it. The playwright's desire to use his writing as a catalyst for political discussion was natural; his stark leanings toward socialism drove his art.
- 129) Shaw always made fun of the pieties and hypocrisies of his time – in *Arms and the Man* he went after the idea that war and patriotism are always glorious and heroic, pitting the gritty, realistic, professional soldier, Bluntschli, against the puffed-up and romantic Sergius (who became a hero completely by accident)
- 130) Accustomed to the melodramas of the age, however, even sophisticated audiences often did not discern the serious purpose of Shaw's play. Thus, Shaw considered it a failure.
- 131) True success did not come until 1898, when *Arms and the Man* was published as one of the "pleasant" plays in Shaw's collection called *Plays: Pleasant and Unpleasant*, and it subsequently gained popularity as a written work. Included in this collection of plays are lengthy explanatory prefaces, which note significant issues in the plays and which have been invaluable to critics. In place of brief stage directions, Shaw's plays also included lengthy instructions and descriptions. Another unique aspect of *Arms and the Man* was its use of a woman as the central character.
- 132) Set during the four-month-long Serbo-Bulgarian War that occurred between November 1885 and March 1886, this play is a satire on the foolishness of glorifying something so terrible as war, as well as a satire on the foolishness of basing your affections on idealistic

notions of love. These themes brought reality and a timeless lesson to the comic stage. Consequently, once Shaw's genius was recognized, *Arms and the Man* became one of Shaw's most popular plays and has remained a classic ever since.

133) In the mind of one critic, "The world, as he [George Bernard Shaw] looks out upon it, is a painful spectacle to his eyes. Pity and indignation move him. He is not sentimental, as some writers are, but the facts grind his soul... in a word, art has an end beyond itself; and the object of Shaw's art in particular is to make men think, to make them uncomfortable, to convict them of sin" (Salter 446). As this essay makes clear, his is an especially succinct observation in this scene since there is opportunity for sentimentality and romanticism (since she is framed by a lovely setting) but this is not enough for George Bernard Shaw; he must shift the object of the reader's gaze away from physical beauty to the darker world of class and character.

134) In this play, the subject which occupies the dramatist's attention is that survival of barbarity – militarism – which raises its horrid head from time to time to cast a doubt on the reality of our civilization. No more hoary superstition survives than that the donning of a uniform changes the nature of the wearer. This notion pervades society to such an extent that when we find some soldiers placed upon the stage acting rationally, our conventionalized sense are shocked. The only men who have no illusions about war are those who have recently been there, and, of course, Mr. Shaw, who has no illusions about anything.

NOTE the "missing" scenes in the play: 1) the scene where Bluntschli wakes up in Raina's bed and must escape; 2) a scene where Louka discovers Bluntschli in Raina's bed; etc

CHARACTERS

Captain Bluntschli – a professional soldier from Switzerland; 34; working as an officer for the Servian military fighting for hire against the Bulgarian army. He is worldly, cool-headed, pragmatic, with a sense of humor about his situation and the world. A suppressed romantic with common sense and stability

Raina Petkoff – father is Major in Bulgarian army. She is young and beautiful and intensely conscious of that fact. She has many romantic ideals about love, nobility, heroism in war, courage and beauty.

Catherine Petkoff – Raina's mother; a powerful and commanding presence that even her husband respects. Is a smart capable, free thinking artistic woman over 40

Major Petkoff - cheerful, excitable, insignificant, unpolished man of about 50, naturally unambitious except when it comes to his income and his importance in local society. Gullible and blustery.

Major Sergius Saranoff – engaged to Raina. Dashing and romantically handsome. Not even he can live up to his ideals. Has a slightly cynical air. Possibly the anti-hero in the play; has lived a life full of ornamental honor

Louka – maidservant; handsome but proud/defiant; is afraid of Catherine; very ambitious and has great contempt for those who serve willingly

Nicola – head servant; middle-aged man of cool temperament and low but clear and keen intelligence. Complacent; has no illusions

GB Shaw 1909 essay: "How to Write a Popular Play" (pt1)

The formula for the well made play is so easy that I give it for the benefit of any reader who feels tempted to try his hand at making the fortune that awaits all manufacturers in this line. First, you "have an idea" for a dramatic situation. If it strikes you as a splendidly original idea, whilst it is in fact as old as the hills, so much the better. For instance, the situation of an innocent person convicted by circumstances of a crime may always be depended on. If the person is a woman, she must be convicted of adultery. If a young officer, he must be convicted of selling information to the enemy, though it is really a fascinating female spy who has ensnared him and stolen the incriminating document. If the innocent wife, banished from her home, suffers agonies through her separation from her children, and, when one of them is dying (of any disease the dramatist chooses to inflict), disguises herself as a nurse and attends it through its dying convulsion until the doctor, who should be a serio-comic character, and if possible a faithful old admirer of the lady's, simultaneously announces the recovery of the child and the discovery of the wife's innocence, the success of the play may be regarded as assured if the writer has any sort of knack for his work. Comedy is more difficult, because it requires a sense of humor and a good deal of vivacity; but the process is essentially the same: it is the manufacture of a misunderstanding. Having manufactured it, you place its culmination at the end of the last act but one, which is the point at which the manufacture of the play begins. Then you make your first act out of the necessary introduction of the characters to the audience, after elaborate explanations, mostly conducted by servants, solicitors, and other low life personages (the principals must all be dukes and colonels and millionaires), of how the misunderstanding is going to come about. Your last act consists, of course, of clearing up the misunderstanding, and generally getting the audience out of the theatre as best you can.

Now please do not misunderstand me as pretending that this process is so mechanical that it offers no opportunity for the exercise of talent. On the contrary, it is so mechanical that without very conspicuous talent nobody can make much reputation by doing it, though some can and do make a living at it. And this often leads the cultivated classes to suppose that all plays are written by authors of talent. As a matter of fact the majority of those who in France and England make a living by writing plays are unknown and, as to education, all but illiterate. Their names are not worth putting on the playbill, because their audiences neither know nor care who the author is, and often believe that the actors improvise the whole piece, just as they in fact do sometimes improvise the dialogue. To rise out of this obscurity you must be a Scribe or a Sardou, doing essentially the same thing, it is true, but doing it wittily and ingeniously, at moments almost poetically, and giving the persons of the drama some touches of real observed character...

Arms and the Man Quasi-Study Questions/Assignment; Due _____ (Reading Quiz Day)

Select and write out your favorite 3-5 one sentence quotes from the PLAY

Pg # _____ Speaker:

Quote:

Pg # _____ Speaker:

Quote:

Pg # _____ Speaker:

Quote:

Pg # _____ Speaker:

Quote:

NOTE: Links should be dramatic (techniques, staging, costume, props) or otherwise a critical insight (don't have more than one of the three be on a thematic link)

Make 3-4 one (or two) sentence assertions of links between Arms and the Man & DOAS

1

2

3

4 opt

Make 3-4 one (or two) sentence assertions of links between Arms and the Man & ARCADIA

1

2

3

4 opt

Make 3-4 one (or two) sentence assertions of links between Arms and the Man & Streetcar

1

2

3

4 opt

TRADITIONAL STUDY QUESTION (4pt)

PICK ONE; Circle it; and respond in space below:

- 1) "Arms and the Man is not an anti-war drama, but rather a satirical assault on those who would glorify the horrors of war." Is there a case for saying that in fact the play is an anti-war drama?
- 2) Considering the underlying serious subject matter, would the play have been more effective if the ending had not been so cheerful and tidy?
- 3) What is the difference between Sergius's kind of soldier and Bluntschli's? What point was Shaw making about warfare (romanticized vs practical/realistic views) through the contrast of Sergius and Bluntschli?
- 4) Who really runs the household, Petkoff or Catherine? Who holds the power in the relationships? How do the women in this play prove themselves to be just as powerful and intelligent, if not more so, than the men?

Select 5 of the numbered quotes (choose ambitious, complex numbers to aid your grade) and write a 2-4 sentence reaction and analysis to each quote (do you agree, compare to one of the other 3 plays, how does the quote reveal itself in the play, etc)

1 # ____; Analysis:

2 # ____; Analysis:

3 # ____; Analysis:

4 # ____; Analysis:

5 # ____; Analysis:

ALSO, of those 5 choices, select one you will present for analysis in class discussion and reserve that number with me. See me before end of class Wednesday to reserve