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ANTI-ROMANTICISM IN SHAW'S *ARMS AND THE MAN*

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George Bernard Shaw, one of most significant English playwrights, is a realist, that he untangles the reality behind phenomena. In his plays, he presents the essential reality underlying all social institutions, conventions, and beliefs like democracy, war, religion, morality, romance, respectability, justice, personal righteousness, idealism, heresy, and marriage. His real interest lies in exposing the hard reality behind the veil of misleading shows. He strikes at every existing convention and exposes its absurdity and uselessness.

Shaw is determined to analyse the conventional morality and the performance of people under scientific principles. Shaw's theory of Creative Evolution is different from that of others. He believes that there is a power working under Nature for the betterment of human race. He calls this spiritual power as 'Life Force'. He defines his Life Force as vitality with a direction which wishes to produce a race of superman of high intelligence.

Shaw is unromantic and anti-sentimental. To him, sentimentalism is excessive and fake and he exposes its triviality in his plays. He aims to originate his drama from what he regards as genuine scientific history. Since romance is more eccentric to scientific history, Shaw's dramas are entirely devoid of romance and sentiment. According to Shaw, Life Force is the only reality; romance and sentimentality are merely absurd.

In one of his plays, *Arms and the Man*, Shaw exposes the false sentiments which people have attached to romantic love, and shows that love is an artificial thing and is not real at all. He calls this play an 'anti-romantic comedy', because he breaks the conventional idea of false romanticism in it.

Summary of the Play:

Raina is the daughter of Mr. Petkoff, a rich man of Bulgaria. Raina is betrothed to Sergius, a tall, romantic, handsome man. At the time when the play opens, a war is going on between the Bulgarians and the Serbs in which Raina's father and Major Sergius are at front, fighting against the Serbs. Raina is informed by her mother that the war is won by Sergius by leading cavalry charge. Raina is delighted and proud of his victory and goes off to bed with the thoughts of her hero.

While the Bulgarians are chasing the Serbs and the Austrians, a Serbian officer enters the bedchamber of Raina for hiding himself. Though he is the enemy of her country, Raina pities his deplorable state and hides him when the room is searched by the officers. To Raina, it is amusing to see a soldier as selfishly unchivalrous and depends upon a woman for his safety. Raina is shocked to hear from the soldier that the Serbs were beaten by the Bulgarians in the cavalry charge because wrong ammunition was sent to them, and if it was the right one, the Bulgarians were sure to be defeated, and the conduct of the man who led the charge (she knows it was Sergius) was most unprofessional. The news shatters Raina who holds high esteem for Sergius. Besides, she is influenced by the common sense of the soldier and puts a photograph of her as a souvenir in the coat given to him.



The war is over and the treaty is signed. Petkoff and Sergius have returned home. While Sergius and Raina are left alone, they express their love in higher tone which they claim as “higher love”. But Sergius flirts with the maid Louka at the moment Raina’s back is turned that he needs some relaxation after making superior love with Raina. Meanwhile Captain Bluntschli, that fugitive soldier, comes to Raina’s home to return the coat, given to him when he took refuge there. Major Petkoff, who knows him as a Captain, requests him to stay there till his departure for Switzerland, and he too readily accepts the invitation. While conversing with Bluntschli for the second time, Raina is fully impressed once again by his way of plain-speaking and frankness, and is pleased when he said that he is fascinated by her.

Besides, Louka reveals Sergius that Raina is in love with Bluntschli. This provokes Sergius and he calls Bluntschli for a duel. Instantly Raina realises the relationship between Sergius and Louka. Then Sergius proposes to Louka, and Nicola, her fiancé, readily agrees to give her up as she would be a big customer to his shop. Petkoffs agree to marry Raina to Bluntschli only after recognising him as a wealthy man. At the end things are settled well and all are happy with these unions.

Higher Love:

Raina and Sergius claim to have what they call ‘higher love’ for each other. Shaw’s intention is to show that they do not have any real attachment for each other. They only talk in sentiments, and shower hyperbolic praises on each other. Their love is spoken outwardly but it does not come from heart and does not go to heart. The following conversation between them shows the nature of their love:

RAINA. (Placing her hands on his shoulders as she looks up at him with admiration and worship) My hero! My king!

SERGIUS. My queen! (He kisses her on the forehead)

RAINA. How I have envied you, Sergius! You have been out in the world, on the field of battle, able to prove yourself there worthy of any woman in the world: whilst I have to sit at home inactive - dreaming - useless - doing nothing that could give me the right to call myself worthy of any man.

SERGIUS. Dearest! All my deeds have been yours. You inspired me. I have gone through the war like a knight in a tournament with his lady looking down at him!

RAINA. And you have never been absent from my thoughts for a moment. (Very solemnly) Sergius, I think we two have found the higher love. When I think of you, I feel that I could never do a base deed. Or think an ignoble thought.

SERGIUS. My lady and my saint! (He claps her reverently).

RAINA. (returning his embrace) My lord and my ...

SERGIUS. Sh-sh! Let me be the worshipper, dear. You little know how unworthy even the best man is of a girl’s pure passion! (Shaw, *AAM*, 33)

There is nothing real in their love that it consists only of acting, pretending, and posing. Sergius thinks that Raina is a divine being who inspires him. Raina in turn worships him as a god. There is no instinctual attraction between them. But Sergius finds his woman in Louka, and Raina finds her man in Bluntschli. As a result, when Louka tells Sergius that she heard a voice of man who was with Raina in her bedroom at night, his dream is shattered. When Raina recognises the relationship between Sergius and Louka, her dream of higher love is exhausted. Thus Shaw demonstrates the unworthiness of love.



Romantic Temperament of Raina:

Shaw portrays Raina as a girl with romantic temperament. In the opening scene, she is seen as admiring the beauty of the snowy Balkans. She shouts with delight at her mother, when the latter informs her of their victory in the battle. She ecstatically hears the account of how Sergius became the hero of the hour and the idol of the regiment. She is happy at the news and proud too. Her heroic ideals have come out to be true in Sergius. She says to her mother: “Sergius is just as splendid and noble as he looks! That the world is really a glorious world for women who can see this glory and men who can act its romance! What happiness! What unspeakable fulfilment! (Shaw, *AAM*, 4)

Then she takes out the portrait of Sergius from the chest of drawers and adores like a priestess worshipping a god. She does not have any instinctual attraction towards him. She speaks with admiration to the picture. Innes puts it:

..., the implication that Raina is aware of herself as the image of a romantic heroine, a slightly exaggerated enthusiasm in her exclamation marks and an implied question in her assertion ‘that Sergius is just as splendid and noble as he looks!’ Yet the audiences are clearly expected to take this picture at face value. By creating identification, Shaw is able to attack the spectators’ ‘romantic imagination’ in revealing the pretentious unreality of the characters’ ideals. At least, this is the overt intention (Shaw, *AAM*, 26).

Her disillusionment begins when Bluntschli, the frank, straightforward man enters her room. On seeing him, her maternal instinct rouses and she sympathises with him that he is in a miserable state as frightened, tired, hungry, and sleepy. She wants to save his life and so she hides him behind the curtain when the room is searched. She provides chocolates for his appetite and even allows him to sleep on her bed.

At first, the ideas of Bluntschli are unacceptable to her, but gradually she realises the actuality of life. Her thought is that all soldiers must be brave and ready to die at all times for the country. So she considers him unchivalrous who ran away from the battle field and seek shelter in a lady’s bedchamber. But she is illuminated by Bluntschli to see with practical sense that the soldiers are also human beings who want to save their own lives. Instead of dying in the battle, if a soldier saves his life, he can fight another battle. This is not to be taken as cowardice. Carrying chocolates to the field seems absurd to her, but then she realises that a person must eat to get energy in order to fight.

It is shocking to her that what she hears from Bluntschli that leading a cavalry charge against a battery of machine guns is not bravery, but foolhardiness, and the person who ordered such an action must be punished. Her disillusionment regarding war is complete when Sergius comes from the field not like a hero, but condemned by the High Command for his unprofessional and undisciplined conduct. It shatters a little the image of higher love of her for Sergius. Moreover she is fully impressed by Bluntschli and mentions him as “chocolate-cream soldier” for his eagerness for confectionaries, and she even puts her photograph in the coat given to him. When she meets Bluntschli for the second time, she is again amazed by his frankness and truthfulness. Here follows the conversation between Bluntschli and Raina:

BLUNTSCHLI. (dubiously) There’s reason in everything. You said you’d told only two lies in your whole life. Dear young lady: isn’t that rather a short allowance? I’m quite a straightforward man myself: but it wouldn’t last me a whole morning.

RAINA. (staring haughtily at him) Do you know, sir, that you are insulting me?

BLUNTSCHLI. I can’t help it. When you strike that noble attitude and speak in that thrilling voice, I admire you; but I find it impossible to believe a single word you say.



RAINA. (gasping) I! I!!! (She points to herself incredulously, meaning “I, Raina Petkoff, tell lies!” He meets her gaze unflinchingly. She suddenly sits down beside him, and adds with a complete change of manner from the heroic to a babyish familiarity) How did you fine me out?

BLUNTSCHLI. (promptly) Instinct, dear young lady. Instinct, and experience of world.

RAINA. ... I did it when I was a tiny child to my nurse. She believed in it. I do it before my parents. They believe in it. I do it before Sergius. He believes in it (Shaw, *AAM*, 52-53).

She pretends to be a genuine woman saying that she has lied only two times in her lifetime, only to save his life. But Bluntschli is able to find her correctly and he tells her that the way she speaks in a dignified way and thrilling voice is splendid; but those noble sentiments are not true. Though it provokes her first that he meant her a liar, she admits then that she has been lying from her childhood days, but no one finds her out like him. Raina is delighted by the cleverness of Bluntschli who judges her perfectly and does not take her seriously. She is charmed by him and is fully taken by his side. This sudden change in her attitude is observed by Bentley:

Raina passes over forever from Sergius’s world to Bluntschli’s: as a result of nothing in the Scribean arrangement of incidents but of words, words, words. It is here that, to many, the Shavian drama seems vulnerable. In drama, actions are supposed to speak louder than words. Writers on the subject invariably know their etymology “drama” derives from a Greek verb meaning “to do” - and use it as a cudgel. Their error is a vulgar one: action need not be external. It can often be carried by words alone. Shaw used to remark that his plays were all words just as Raphael’s paintings were all paint (Shaw, *AAM*, 62).

Bluntschli, Shaw’s Ideal Hero:

Shaw portrays Bluntschli as his superman hero. According to Shaw, a perfect hero is a genius, who possesses the power of seeing and judging things without the help of conventional standards, who acts in the way guided by his own instinct, and who realises the original morality and has the will to act upon it. Bluntschli is a professional soldier and he is led by instincts and not by emotions. He takes part in the battle out of an inexplicable instinct, and the same instinct makes him flee from the battlefield to save his life.

So Bluntschli behaves in a manner according to whatever he thinks at the point of time. For instance, he makes use of an unloaded pistol to frighten Raina, but when he is sure that she is harmless he reveals that it is unloaded. He wants to escape from the Bulgarians to save his life, but when he is sure to be caught in Raina’s room, he is ready to give a devil’s fight. Innes writes about his valour:

..., the apparently unmilitary Bluntschli, whom Raina despises in the opening scene for carrying chocolates instead of cartridges and for admitting to fear as a reason for not preserving her reputation by climbing back down the drainpipe, accepts Sergius’s challenge to a duel over Raina with equanimity because of his skill as a fencing instructor (Shaw, *AAM*, 27),

Thus Bluntschli is endowed by Shaw with a reason of a very high order, and is used by Shaw to show that the effect of instinctive action is not temporary or trivial. Bluntschli is resolute to succumb to the great appeal of Life Force, as he is self-acting man with a highly developed mind.

Influence of Life Force:

Shaw applies his theory of Life Force in this play. Raina is intelligent, beautiful, and healthy; accordingly she can be the mother of superman. Therefore Life Force impulsively insists her to select



a man of common sense as her mate so that they can produce a superman. Bluntschli is a straightforward, realistic man with sparkling wit and rational outlook. He is a suitable man with superior brain. He and Raina can raise life a step up in the ladder for the evolution of the superman. So the Life Force guides Raina to select Bluntschli as her husband, rejecting the romantic fool Sergius. As a result, Raina feels attracted towards Bluntschli from the very beginning. As she has intelligence and common sense, Bluntschli's talk appeals to her. Even while he shocks her, she comes close to him. She still worships Sergius, but she feels a mysterious attraction for Bluntschli. His truthfulness, sincerity, and frankness have won her heart. Though she is not fully aware of the fact that she started loving him, she gently places her photograph with the message, "Raina, to her chocolate-cream soldier: a souvenir" in the pocket of the coat in which she sends him back. Thus the supremacy of Life Force has worked upon them.

Sergius, a Romantic Fool:

Major Sergius Saranoff is portrayed as a romantic fool by Shaw. He created this character to put forth the false ideas of the society regarding love and war. Of course, Shaw believes that all romantic soldiers are stupid. Here Sergius fights for success and glory. He is a dare-devil who led a cavalry charge against machine guns. He would create excitement out of nothing, for his soldiering is: "the coward's art of attacking mercilessly when you are strong and keeping out of harm's way when you are weak" (Shaw, *AAM*, 30).

He makes 'higher love' with Raina and behind her back, he flirts with Louka which is a relaxation for him that his love with Raina is a very tiring thing. He is fickle and is not true to himself too that he tells Louka:

I am surprised at myself, Louka, What would Sergius, the hero of Slivnitza, say if he saw me now? What would Sergius, the apostle of the higher love, say if he saw me now? What would the half dozen sergiuses who keep popping in and out of this handsome figure of mine say if they caught us here? ... (Shaw, *AAM*, 34)

Sergius is a man full of emotions that he needs inspiration from a lady to go to the battlefield, and goes through the war like a knight in a tournament with his lady looking down at him. Holroyd observes his sincerity in his ideals:

... Sergius be seen not as a blusterer and humbug, but a man of tortured sensitiveness who lives up to his ideal better than most men: 'a movingly human figure', ... The love-scenes with Raina, both struggling to keep up the high tone, are conducted as if 'they are holding their breath under water'. For Sergius' theory of what a perfect lover, patriot, soldier, gentleman should be is a passion with him; he is straightforwardly sincere in his devotion to heroic ideals (Shaw, *AAM*, 304-305)

When his high love with Raina is demolished, he never hesitates to take the hands of Louka, a servant-maid. Innes observes: "Even through openly acknowledged as fraudulent posturing, Sergius' heroic attitudes are approved because they cut through class barriers and unite him with the servant-girl" (Shaw, *AAM*, 27)

The heroic figure in Captain Bluntschli is contrasted with the romantic fool in Sergius by Shaw to put his points and counter-points. Captain Bluntschli is a man of instinct, cool, calculative, unsentimental, guided by common sense and experience rather than passion, emotion or imagination. He is a practical man and is not moved by feelings. Even the news of the death of his father does not move him to tears, but his mind goes immediately to the practical problems of how he is going to run



the hotels left by his father. Sergius is basically a fool and a slave of passion. Bluntschli is a professional soldier; he fights when he has to, and is very glad to go out of it when he has not to. Sergius is a frivolous man who thinks fighting is an enjoyment. Thus Shaw portrays Bluntschli as the representative of practicality and Sergius as the representative of outworn conventions.

Love between Sergius and Louka:

Sergius, the fiancé of Raina, finds his woman in Louka. He wants a relief after making 'higher love' with Raina which is "very fatiguing thing to keep up for any length of time" (Shaw, *AAM*, 34). He gets relaxation only from Louka. Sergius wants to marry Raina but he flirts with Louka, because he believes that she would not mind being kissed as she is an inferior being.

Louka, the servant-maid of Petkoffs, is a young and charming girl. She is self-respecting, ambitious, and proud of her beauty and has set her target very high. As this poor girl is benefitted neither from birth, nor from education, nor from money, she wants to win a husband from upper class of society to raise high in the social ladder.

Louka is a typical Shavian brand of woman. She is a beautiful and clever girl. But she is poor and belongs to a lower class. She wants to break the social barrier and rise to a high level. So she wants to marry Sergius who could provide a prosperous life to her and her children. Therefore she traps him by using all her tricks endowed by Life Force and at the end she meets her victory.

She even comes down to the level of eavesdropper. She listens at the door and spies on others and is not ashamed of it. According to Shaw, women may do anything ungraceful to achieve their aims. Though this is a filthy characteristic of her, she is justified in her conduct because her future is being decided inside.

Louka is sharp; so she knows very well how to make use of a situation to reach her aim. Thus when Sergius tries to flirt with her by thinking that a servant-maid would not expect any commitment from him, she lays a trap to him. First she pretends to be unwilling with his coaxing. Then she allows him to kiss, but in a place where they will not be seen because Raina is sure to be spying on him. Louka charms him with her witty talk also. Here follows the chat between them:

SERGIUS. If you were with me, would you spy out of windows on me?

LOUKA. Well. You see, sir, since you say you are half a dozen different gentlemen all at once, I should have a great deal to look after.

SERGIUS. (charmed) Witty as well as pretty (Shaw, *AAM*, 35).

Then she smashes his 'higher love' by telling him that just as he flirts with her behind Raina's back, Raina makes love with another man behind his back. Thus Sergius's jealousy is roused by her and him in infuriated and puzzled. He hurts her arm with anger. But then he wants to compensate it by paying her. But she is too self-respecting to accept payment. But she wants him to kiss that spot as amends. When he refuses to do that she wants him to leave her, because she does not want to be trifled with and she has a lot of work to do. This induces him to show love to her seriously.

She entraps him more by saying that she heard voice of Raina's lover from her bedroom. She tells him that she is sure that if her lover comes back, Raina will marry only him, not Sergius and if it is so, Louka persuades, Sergius should marry her irrespective of class distinction.

Louka argues with Sergius cleverly that true courage consists in marrying the person one loves even if he or she is below in status. If she were the Empress of Russia, she says: I would marry the man I loved, which no other queen in Europe had the courage to do. If I loved you, though you would be as far beneath me as I beneath you, I would dare to be the equal of my inferior. Would you dare as much if you loved me? No: if you felt the beginnings of love for me you would not



let it grow. You would not dare: you would marry a rich man's daughter because you would be afraid of what other people would say of you (Shaw, AAM, 60).

At the end of the argument, she skilfully makes Sergius swear to marry her if things happen as she said. Sergius promises her: "I will not be a coward and a trifle. If I choose to love you I'll dare marry you in spite of all Bulgaria. If these hands ever touch you again, they shall touch my affianced bride" (Shaw, AAM, 61).

When Sergius, in the last scene, kisses her hand when offered, she reminds his promise: "That touch makes me your affianced wife." Seeing his shock, she coldly says that if he is not willing he can withdraw his promise. But Sergius, as being fully influenced by her, says: "Withdraw! Never! You belong to me" (Shaw, AAM, 70). Thus Sergius, the romantic fool, falls as a victim to her clever tricks.

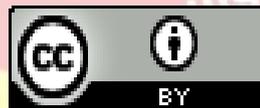
Nicola, Louka's fiancé, readily gives her up to Sergius that she is too high minded to be a wife of servant and thus he is just her confidential servant. His idea is that if she married in the nobility she would become his grand customer to his shop which he intends to start. Innes puts it:

... the servant Nicola's willingness to give up his fiancée to Sergius for financial independence, preferring to have her as a paying customer than as a wife, would mark him as despicable. Yet his renunciation of 'the higher love' is the only realistic option, given Louka's clear attraction to Sergius. So the audience is forced to agree with Bluntschli, the Mommsenite anti-hero, who hails Nicola as 'the ablest man...in Bulgaria'. However, it is worth noting that we accept this unconventional judgement only because our sentiment is appealed to (Shaw, AAM, 26).

To conclude, Shaw, in this play, has proved that the ideas of romantic people like Sergius and Raina are not based on reality. He makes them understand the truth and come out of illusion.

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