

# Shaw's Arms and the Man: A Study of Superficiality of "Higher Love"

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## Abstract

In Arms and the Man, Shaw exhibits the fanciful idea of romantic love. Love, which is based on old fashioned notions of romance and chivalry, is temporary and also he describes that love which is brought out due to external charm or the esteem of the family is impermanent. He also tells us that love bred by the readings of poetry and visiting to opera is going to be short lived. This type of love is an inferior version of love at first sight because it is not felt for the elemental qualities of partner, so this kind of love is never expected to last long. Their love is not serious or realistic love. It is showy and peripheral love. Their love lacks devotion, intelligence and fails to bring forth among high-flown lovers even rudimentary decency.

Keywords: Realism, romantic love, Satire, higher love

## Research Paper:

In the last quarter of 19<sup>th</sup> century, western civilization had just started making an impact in the Balkans region and the tendency to show-off was very strong among the rich and particularly the neo-rich classes in Bulgaria. In Bulgaria of 1885, a library, a call bell, and a flight of stairs were a prestige symbol. Raina represents the shallow upper class Bulgarian society that has newly come under the western influence.

Raina has a false dignity for her family. She boasts about her library and tells Bluntschli, the intruder, that their house is the only private house that has two rows of windows they have a flight of stairs to get up and down. She tries to impress Bluntschli by telling him that they go to Bucharest every year for opera.

The first act focuses attention on destroying Raina's romantic notion about war. Though the other theme of the play i.e. love has not been overlooked. In the second act Shaw focuses our attention about love and marriage. Shaw satires love because it arises from emotions rather than intellect. He believes that marriage is a biological necessity; it is not compulsion of young hearts dream in his plays. More than his characters it is Life Force,

which is conscious of this biological function of mating the opposite sexes for perpetuation of race. Shaw removes romance from war as well as from love and marriage.

Shaw focuses our attention to extra coloured picture of romantic lovers. When Sergius goes to meet Raina, she takes a good pose, as he turns to look at her, Sergius goes impulsively to meet her. Posing regally, she presents her hand: he drops chivalrously on one knee and kisses it. They advance to the table with splendid elegance bow each other and then they separate.

A little later Bernard Shaw shows a scene of “higher love” between Raina and Sergius. Raina admires Sergius’s heroic action in the war and she calls him “My hero! My king!” Sergius more than fully reciprocates the sentiments, he calls her “my queen” and he tells her that he has gone through the war like a knight in a tournament with the lady looking at him. All his heroism and bravery, he implies, has been inspired by her as if it was for her and her alone that he would live and die. It seems that these brave confessions of love give access of no baser feeling. Raina responds;

You have never been absent from my thoughts for a moment.... when I think of you, I feel that I could never do a base deed or think on ignoble thought. (Shaw 33)

Sergius clasps Raina and says “My lady and my saint ”! , He remarks:

You little know how unworthy even the best man is of a girl’s pure passion. The two agrees that they have found higher love. (Shaw 33)

After showing us highly coloured picture of “higher love”, Shaw shows us the reality of it. At one side Sergius shows his high love for Raina and on the other hand he flirts with poor but attractive maidservant Louka. It happens so because the love of Raina and Sergius does not stand on the solid ground of reality. Readers get shocked to find this propagator of “higher love” who made advancement towards Louka. Sergius confesses to Louka, “higher love” is

Very fatiguing thing to keep up for any length of time one feels the needs of relief after it. (Shaw 34)

On other side Raina too feels the same need for relief:

I always feel a longing to do or say something dreadful to him-to shock his propriety-to scandalize the five senses out of him. (Shaw 34)

This need shows that “higher love” is sheer emptiness and a creature of flesh and blood cannot live on it. The apostle of higher love is now in the clutches of the maid-servant. She administers him to suit her own purposes:

In the process of unmasking the postures of higher love, the play shows us not emptiness beneath, but the possibilities of deeper and more meaningful forms of intimacy. (Purdom 162)

Sergius degrades himself before Louka and she starts humiliating Sergius, She makes him to do whatever she says. Sergius’ so-called “higher love” does not stop him from flirting with her. Now it becomes clear that all his proclamations of love for Raina were false and deceitful. He shows much more affinity in his behaviour for Louka than Raina. Sergius is aware of this aspect of his nature and he struggles in his hesitancy in possessing Louka at once.

What would Sergius, the hero of Slivnitza, say if he saw me now? What would Sergius, the apostle of higher love, say if he saw me now? What would the half dozen Sergiuses who keep popping in and out of his handsome figure of mine say if they caught us here? (Shaw 35)

But this unwillingness is absurd, because, as he says all this, he moves his arm adeptly round Louka’s waist and asks her, “Do you consider my figure only handsome Louka?” (Shaw 34) This shows that how unstable mind he has. Louka is a very shrewd and practical woman. She has determined that she will entrap Sergius in her magic. She wants to marry a man of means and status. Accordingly, she proceeds very cleverly. She shows her doubt that Raina must be spying on them. To this,” the apostle of higher love,” Louka very cleverly drops the hint that Raina is not faithful to him.

Louka; no I don’t want your kisses. Gentlefolk are all alike; you making love to me behind Miss Raina’s back; and she doing the same behind yours. (Shaw 36)

Sergius who wanted only to flirt Louka, gets angered and bewildered. He tries to maintain his dignity by saying:

a gentle man does not discuss the conduct of the lady he is engaged to with her maid. (Shaw 37)

To this Louka satirizes:

It's so hard to know what a gentle man considers right. I thought from your trying to kiss me that you had given up being so particular. (Shaw 37)

Louka reveals the reality of "higher love" and satires on it. She breaks splendid sentiments and facade of Sergius and Raina. Sergius, the apostle of "higher love", flirts with Louka, the first pretty face he meets, in the absence of Raina. Raina, the queen of Sergius, flirts with the Serbian officer Bluntschli. Bluntschli makes romantic Raina to face reality, she suddenly surrenders set down beside him with a complete change of manner from heroic to a babyish familiarity "Bluntschli is as prosaic as she is romantic", C.B. Purdom says "he ends by toppling her off her pedestal by his imperturbability".(Purdom 158) She asks when she is defeated: "How did you find me out? Instinct, dear young lady ", he promptly replies, "Instinct and experience of the world". (Shaw 54) Eric Bentley estimates that with this query, Raina passes over forever from Sergius' world to Bluntschli's. Raina is bewildered at how he found her out. She confesses that she has always carried by her hypocrisy and fine posture and nobody ever dare to doubt her.

This is an observation commendable of Shaw himself, Louka's love is neither fatiguing nor as false as 'higher love' because Louka herself stands for passionate love.

Also Shaw shows us that real love is stranger than 'higher love'. In the beginning Raina showed 'higher love' for Sergius then she betrays him and she gets attracted towards Bluntschli. Charles A Carpenter's words are worthy to be quoted:

The romantic elements become the targets for Shaw's sharp shooting; he handles them like clay pigeons, setting them up before the audience for the express purpose of shooting them down.  
(88)

Sergius and Raina blame each other of making love to another. Till now they both are disillusioned about love. Sergius, a man of honour, bravery and heart, also finds himself helpless and says: "Raina, our romance is shattered. Life's a farce." However, life with out romance is not a farce. Bluntschli soon after

recalls that life is, “something quite sensible and serious” (Shaw 65) Earlier Bluntschli makes Raina understand the same point in a different way:

Raina : Do you know, you are the first man I ever met who did not take me seriously?

Bluntschli : You mean, don't you, that I am the first man that has ever taken you quite seriously?

Raina : Yes: I suppose I do mean that. (Shaw 15)

This comedy substitutes seriousness and good sense in place of romantic values, which it has shattered.

A.M. Gibbs says:

Shaw's comedy does not simply negate romance. Rather, what he achieves in the play is a rejuvenation of a typical romance structure, by attaching to well- tried dramatic situations an unconventional set of values and affirmations. Instead of romance of conventional fiction, it offers the romance of reality, of the discovery of true feeling beneath the social accoutrements of spurious and assumed feeling. It is in terms such as these that the relations between Raina and Bluntschli are developed in the play, their romantic intimacy increasing as her romantic attitudes are progressively discarded. (72)

Everything becomes clear, in the last and final act. Sergius changes his titles for Raina from “Lady” and “Saint” to “Viper” and “tiger cat.”

By fulfilling the requirements of contemporary theatres, Shaw does everything to destroy romantic ideals and to tell the people the value of realism through the medium of drama. The law of change applies not only to ideas but to social institutions and the drama as well. When Shaw discusses social evolution, he immediately applies the rule to art as well. At the bottom of the law of change is a fundamental tension between the will and the convention.

The point to seize is that social progress takes effect through the replacement of old institutions by new ones; and since every institution involves the recognition of the duty of conforming to it,

progress must involve the repudiation of an established duty at every step. (The Quintessence 17)

Shaw looks upon love and marriage as a biological necessity. Through the example of Raina and Sergius he has showed that 'higher love' is a sham and persons who call themselves higher lovers are pretenders. He finds nothing-higher spiritual in love or marriage, Louka exposes the hypocrisy of love of Raina and Sergius and she dismisses the concept of 'higher love'. Thus Sergius falls in love with maidservant Louka, for getting his love for Raina his fiancée and a woman of high status in society.

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