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### **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 of Arms and the Man**

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.

### **Arms and the Man 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 Serbia. 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 Serbians 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.

## **Character Analysis:**

### **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 Serbians 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.