**Arms and the Man Essay Questions**

**How are women portrayed in Arms and the Man?**

The play’s portrayal of women is complex. Both Raina and Catherine are often presented as frivolous or foolish, particularly when exhibiting class pretentions. Yet Shaw makes Sergius and Major Petkoff just as - if not more - ridiculous. Multiple times throughout the play, women are shown to be powerful: Raina and Louka using their wit to control the men around them; Catherine shepherding the bumbling Petkoff through life; Louka successfully pushing Sergius into marrying her. Regardless of any social limits they may face, women in *Arms and the Man* wield informal power and shape the events of the play.

**Discuss the different conceptions of bravery presented by the play.**

*Arms and the Man* presents two competing conceptions of bravery: the romantic and the realistic. The first belongs to Sergius at the beginning of the play and focuses on theatrical and dramatic actions taken during battle; this understanding pushes Sergius to lead a suicidal charge against a row of machine guns. The second is first articulated by Louka and focuses on personal integrity in the face of social pressure. Sergius demonstrates this second form of bravery when he agrees to marry Louka, a servant well below his social station with whom he has fallen in love.

**Explain the symbolic value of Bluntschli’s chocolate rations and Raina’s chocolate creams.**

Chocolate serves as a dual symbol in *Arms and the Man*. When in the form of Bluntschli’s gritty rations it represents pragmatism; chocolate with low dairy content was often used by soldiers in wartime, who prized its durability and caloric density. When in the form of Raina’s chocolate creams, it represents romanticism; chocolate creams were an expensive, fragile treat enjoyed primarily by the upper classes. Raina misunderstands the meaning of Bluntschli’s decision to carry chocolates; such a choice was not childish, but eminently reasonable given chocolate’s value as a ration and the fact that the Captain was issued the wrong cartridges.

**According to the play, what characteristics make a person a good soldier?**

Captain Bluntschli represents Shaw’s ideal soldier. The Swiss mercenary is dispassionate, competent and, above all, pragmatic. Bluntschli harbors no romantic ideals; he views war as business to be efficiently dispatched. If Bluntschli demonstrates what a soldier should be, Sergius and Major Petkoff demonstrate what he shouldn’t be. Sergius is filled with poetic ideas about bravery and honor; worse, he acts on those ideas without regard for effectiveness or safety. Major Petkoff is the picture of incompetence, unable to coordinate troop movements or even run his own household.

**How does George Bernard Shaw view romanticism?**

Romanticism serves as the play’s theoretical villain. It is romantic ideals that lead Sergius to naively charge a line of machine guns and that trap him and Raina in an exhausting relationship. In *Arms and the Man* romanticism is always a reflection of ignorance; once a character gains knowledge, they abandon their poetic ideas. Sergius returns from the war a cynic and both he and Raina abandon their engagement after being made aware of their hypocrisy, pairing up with more practical partners. It can be assumed that Shaw had a low opinion of romanticism.

**Discuss the different views of war presented by the play.**

Sergius, Raina and Catherine all, at least initially, view war as a kind of stage where an honorable man can, through bravery and purity, achieve glory. Bluntschli presents a much less dramatic and more practical understanding. For the Swiss captain, being a soldier is just a profession and war is just a business. In his view, the ultimate goal of war is not to win glory or prestige, but to survive. Eventually both Sergius and Raina adopt Bluntschli’s views: the actual experience of war destroys Sergius’ ideals and the captain educates Raina.