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# UNIT 18 ARMS AND THE MAN – 2

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## 18.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this Unit, you should be able to critically analyse Act II of *Arms and the Man*.

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## 18.1 INTRODUCTION

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In the previous unit, we discussed Act I in which Raina Petkoff, Catherine Petkoff, the Swiss fugitive and Louka were introduced. In the present unit, we will critically analyse Act II.

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## 18.2 SUMMARY OF ACT II

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The scene opens in the garden of Major Petkoff's house. It is a fine spring morning. Louka, the maid (who was introduced to us in Act I) and Nicola, the servant are seen discussing something. They are engaged, but not married so far for financial reasons. Nicola asks Louka to mend her manners and be respectful to her mistress. Further, Nicola says that he wants to retain the goodwill of the Petkoffs as it will be of immense help to him when he starts a shop in Sofia after leaving the present job. Louka, who is rebellious by nature, declares that she is not afraid of her masters as she knows some of their family secrets. Nicola, who is realistic, warns her that nobody will believe her once she is dismissed from the service. He adds that even though he too knows some secrets of the family, the disclosure of which may bring about a disunion among the members, he does not disclose them as it will not be good for him. Louka, without heeding his advice, remarks that he has the soul of a servant and that he can never put the soul of a servant into her.

Major Petkoff returns from the war and enters his garden. Catherine, after being told of her husband's arrival, comes into the garden and greets him. Major Petkoff tells her about the ending of the war and the signing of the peace treaty. Catherine says that he should have annexed Serbia and made Prince Alexander the emperor of the Balkans. Then her husband, in a lighter vein, tells her that the task suggested by her would have kept him away from her for a long time. When Catherine complains of sore throat, her husband attributes the cause of sore throat to her habit of taking bath everyday. To Catherine, the major is a barbarian and she wonders how he behaved in the company of Russian officers. At this juncture, the following interesting statements come out from the mouths of Catherine and Major Petkoff.

*Petkoff* : I did my best. I took care to let them know that we have a library.

*Catherine*: Ah, but you didn't tell them that we have an electric bell in it? I have had one put up.

*Catherine*: Civilised people never shout for their servants. I've learnt that when you were away.

*Petkoff* : Well, I'll tell you something I've learnt too. Civilised people don't hang out their washing dry where visitors see it, so you'd better have all that (indicating the clothes on the bushes) put somewhere else.

*Catherine: Oh, that's absurd, Paul; I don't believe really refined people notice such things.*

Later Major Sergius Saranoff knocks at the door. When Nicola goes to bring him in, Major Petkoff tells his wife that the cavalry charge made by Sergius was unprofessional. Major Petkoff wishes to avoid the company of Sergius as long as he can because Sergius pesters him for promotion. Major Petkoff asks his wife to engage Sergius in conversation till Raina takes him off their hands. But, Catherine is of the view that Sergius should be promoted, if not then, at least soon after his marriage with Raina.



Sergius Saranoff, a romantically handsome man with the high spirit and the imagination of a mountaineer, now enters the scene. Major and Catherine Petkoff welcome him. When Catherine says that everybody is made about him because of his magnificent cavalry charge, Sergius makes a profound statement: "Madam: it was the cradle and the grave of my military reputation." Being frustrated about not getting the promotion, Sergius sends in his resignation. Though Major Petkoff advises him to withdraw his resignation, Sergius sticks to his decision. When he asks for Raina, she suddenly appears. After Raina takes a seat, Catherine comes back to the topic of Sergius not being a soldier anymore. Then Sergius says that soldiering is the coward's art of attacking mercilessly when you are strong and keeping out of harm's way when you are weak. And Sergius continues his argument in the following manner: "That is the whole secret of successful fighting. Get your enemy at a disadvantage; and never, on any account, fight him on equal terms."

Further Sergius remarks that soldiering is a trade and he has no ambition to shine as a tradesman. He adds that he has accepted the advice of a Captain who arranged the exchange of prisoners with them at Pirof. Then Petkoff remarks that the Swiss soldier overreached them about the horses. Confirming Petkoff's remark Sergius adds that the Swiss soldier is every inch a soldier. He was so thoroughly professional and clever that in his hands he (Sergius) and Petkoff were simply like children. Sergius then narrates to them the story of the Swiss soldier, how after the battle of Slivnitsa being pursued by the Bulgarian soldiers, he climbed the water-pipe of the house of a Bulgarian officer and entered the bedroom of a young Bulgarian lady; being enchanted by the Swiss soldier, she entertained him; the next morning he was sent by the lady and her mother on his way disguised in an old coat belonging to the master of the house who was away at the war.

There being now no doubt about the identity of the Swiss soldier, Raina asks Sergius to put a stop to the story after remarking that his camp life has made him so coarse that he is repeating such a story before her. Agreeing with her daughter, Catherine says that if such women really existed, they (i.e. she and Raina) should be spared the knowledge of them (i.e. of such indecent women). Sergius begs to be excused for his mistake, but Major Petkoff says that Raina, being a soldier's daughter, should be able to withstand a little strong conversation. Petkoff then asks Sergius to join him in the library for he has to discuss the issue of the three regiments that are to be sent back to Philippolis. But Catherine asks Sergius to remain with Raina and wants her husband to see the electric bell.

As soon as the senior couple leave the place, Raina places her hands over the shoulders of Sergius and calls him 'my hero' and my king! She admits that she is entirely unworthy of his love, for while he has won glory in the battlefield, she has been doing nothing at home. Sergius replies that he could achieve it only because she inspired him all the time.

Being elated at the words of Sergius, Raina says that both of them have found 'higher love' and that when she thinks of him, she can never do a base deed or think an ignoble thought. When Sergius wants to be the worshipper of Raina, the saintly lady, she responds by saying that she loves him, she trusts him, and she knows that Sergius will never disappoint her. At this moment of higher love, Louka enters the scene to clear the table. (When you come to know about the relationship between Louka and Sergius, you will realise how ironic Louka's entry is while Sergius and Raina are on the plane of higher love.)



The moment Raina goes into the house to collect her hat for going out with her beloved, the attention of Sergius is arrested by Louka. Standing in front of Louka, he asks if she knows what higher love is. On her replying in the negative, he explains to her that higher love is very strange, and so he feels the need of some relief after a dose of higher love. Then Sergius makes the following pithy statement: "I am surprised at myself, Louka, what would Sergius, the hero of Slivnitza, 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? The above statement is meaningful because it deals with the existence of a number of selves and consequently, the presence of contradictions in human nature.

Later, after putting his hand around Louka's waist, Sergius asks her whether she considers him handsome. After a feigned protest, Louka advises him to go behind a bush where they may not be seen by prying eyes. Having hidden from the house, Louka tells him that Raina is sure to be spying upon them. Being offended by Louka's words, Sergius says that though he is worthless enough to betray the higher love, but he cannot tolerate anybody insulting it.

When Sergius tries to kiss her, Louka avoids him and tells him that just as he is making love to her behind Raina's back, Raina made love to another man behind Sergius's back. He again feels offended and tells her that as a gentleman he is not going to discuss the conduct of the lady he is engaged to with her man. His jealousy is, however, aroused and so he asks her to tell him the name of his rival. Then Louka says she is sure that if the gentleman comes again, Raina will marry him, whether he likes it or not and adds that she knows about the affectatious behaviour of Raina and Sergius. At this juncture, Sergius is so much annoyed that he catches hold of her arm tightly and, as result, her arm is bruised. He then turns away from her and declares that she is an abominable little creature of common clay. Feeling her bruised hands, Louka says indignantly that whatever clay she is made of, he is also made of the same and adds that Raina is liar and cheat. When Sergius apologizes for hurting her and offers money to make amends, she refuses to accept them.

When she asks him with tears in her eyes — to kiss her arm, he refuses to kiss it. Louka, then, leaves the place with her tray.

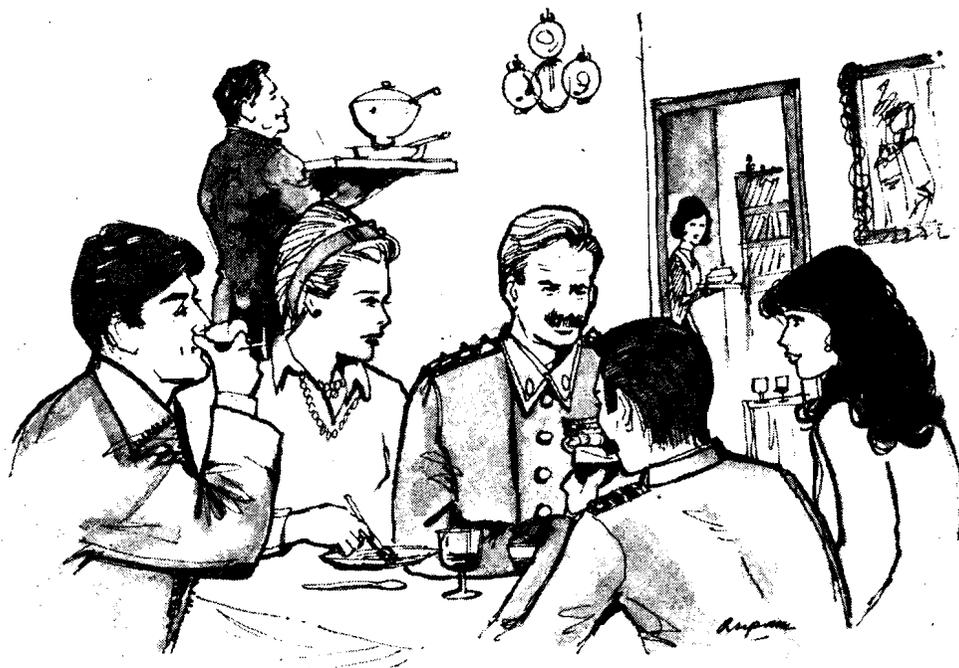
Raina returns and asks Sergius whether he had been flirting with Louka. Sergius denies it and asks her how she can think of such a thing. Raina tells him that she meant it as a jest. Then Catherine comes and asks Sergius to help her husband who is in the library. After Sergius goes towards the library, Catherine tells Raina that the first thing her father asked for was his old coat in which they had smuggled off the Swiss soldier. Raina remarks that it was really bad on the part of the Swiss soldier to tell them that he had stayed with a lady and she adds that if he had been there, she would have filled his mouth with chocolate creams to silence him. As Raina's remark smacks of love for the Swiss soldier, Catherine bluntly asks her how long had the Swiss soldier stayed with her before she came out to tell her about him. When Raina answers in a roundabout manner, Catherine expresses her apprehensions about the consequences if Sergius comes to know of the incident. But Raina firmly replies that she is not afraid even if Sergius comes to know of the chocolate cream soldier. After declaring this, Raina leaves.

After Catherine recovers from the shock, Louka comes in to inform her that a Swiss soldier by name Bluntschli wants to see her. Catherine, then, orders Louka to bring the man at once into the garden and instructs her to shut the door of the library. When Captain Bluntschli, who is smartly dressed and clean comes, Catherine asks him to leave at once, for, if her husband discovers the secret, he will not spare her and her daughter. Also, she asks him to leave the bag containing the coat, and assures him that the bag will be sent back to him at his address. As Bluntschli hands her the card (which contains his address). Petkoff comes there followed by Sergius and welcomes him as my dear Captain Bluntschli. He tells that he had seen him through the window of the library and was wondering why his servants didn't bring Bluntschli to the library. Sergius also welcomes him and offers him hand with warmth. Catherine, who is afraid of the disclosure of the secret, rises to the occasion and says that she was just asking Bluntschli to join them for lunch. Sergius tells him that they will not allow him to go so

soon for they need his advice regarding the sending of the three regiments to philippopolis. Bluntschli immediately says that the forage must be the trouble.

Petkoff appreciates the way Bluntschli saw the whole thing at once. Raina returns at this juncture and recognising Bluntschli exclaims spontaneously "Oh! The chocolate cream soldier!"

Then Bluntschli stands rigid; Sergius being amazed looks at Raina and then at Petkoff, who looks back at him and then at his wife. Then, Catherine, with commanding presence of mind, saves the situation by introducing Bluntschli to Raina as though she didn't meet him earlier. Raina then explains her remark by saying that she had made a cream cake in the form of a beautiful soldier which was spoiled by Nicola who put a pile of plates on it. Turning towards Bluntschli, she says she hoped that he did not think that she called him the chocolate cream soldier.



After hearing Raina's remark, Petkoff is angry with Nicola and says that the servant must have taken to drinking, for two reasons: he was foolish, in the first place, to bring Bluntschli to the garden instead of taking him to the library, and in the second place, to spoil Raina's chocolate soldier. At this moment, Nicola appears with a bag and places it respectfully before Bluntschli. Being asked by Petkoff as to what for he brought the bag there, Nicola replies that he brought it there at his lady's orders; but interrupting him Catherine says that she didn't order him to bring the bag there. After a moment's bewilderment, Nicola accepts his fault and begs to be excused for it. When he picks up the bag and moves, Petkoff shouts at him. "You'd better go and slam that bag too down as Miss Raina's ice pudding." As that statement was too much for Nicola, the bag falls down from his hands. He then picks it up and goes. Catherine and Raina try to soothen Petkoff's anger, Captain Bluntschli is then pressed by all of them to stay with them till he left for Switzerland. Bluntschli finally agrees to stay.

### Self Check Exercise 1

- 1) Write a note on the first encounter between Raina and Bluntschli. (150 words)
- 2) Write a summary of Act II in your own words. (200 words)

### 18.2.1 Critical Comments

In Act II, as it happened in Act I, characters are introduced. Sergius, who was referred to in Act I, appears on the scene. Nicola, the servant also appears on the scene for the first time. The plot develops further, complications arise due to the arrival of the Swiss soldier, Bluntschli and due to Louka's knowledge of Raina's secret. In this Act, Shaw satirises higher love by making Sergius — who is on the plane of higher love — to flirt with Louka. We shall get some more insights by analysing some of the meaningful and thought provoking statements which we come across in Act II.

1) *Catherine: Civilised people never shout for their servants. I have learnt that while you were away.*

*Petkoff: Well, I'll tell you something I've learnt too. Civilized people don't hang out their washing to dry where visitors can see it; so you'd better have all that (indicating the clothes on the bushes) put somewhere else.*

*Catherine: Oh, that's absurd, Paul. I don't believe.*

The above dialogue occurs in Act II and the participants are Catherine and Major Petkoff. After Petkoff's returns from war, his wife tells him that in his absence an electric bell has been installed in the house. Being unaware of the latest electrical equipment, Petkoff does not know what an electric bell is for. Catherine explains to him that an electric bell is a device for calling servants. She tells him further that while he was away, she learnt that civilized people never shouted for their servants. To this Petkoff responds by saying that he has also learnt about what the civilized people do and what they do not do: civilized people don't hang the clothes which have been washed to dry where visitors can see them. Catherine retorts immediately by adding that refined people do not notice such things.

The above dialogue is a satire on the so-called elite of the society. The Petkoffs, who are supposed to be sophisticated and refined, learn what the civilized people do instead of setting an example for others. It means that they are not really civilized but they pretend to be civilized.

Let us now consider another:

2) *Soldiering, my dear madam, is the coward's art of attacking mercilessly when you are strong, and keeping out of harm's way when you are weak. That is the whole secret of successful fighting. Get your enemy at a disadvantage and never, or any account, fight him on equal terms.*

The above words were uttered by Sergius in Act II. When Catherine asks Sergius why he has resigned, he remarks that the profession of soldiers is meant for cowards. For, soldiers attack mercilessly when they are strong and keep themselves at a safe distance when they are weak, they should fight when the enemy is at a disadvantage, but they never fight on equal terms. This strategy is, obviously, cowardly.

Shaw, in the above passage, satirises the romantic notions of the heroism of soldiers and the glory of war. The ingenious playwright tells us that soldiers are not heroes, but they are ordinary human beings made of flesh and blood.

Let us take a look at another.

3) *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 out 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 of ignoble thought.*

The above dialogue occurs in Act II. When Major Petkoff and Catherine go away, Sergius and Raina indulge in a state of higher love. First, they call each other 'My King!' and 'My Queen!' Later, Raina tells that while Sergius has been fighting on the front and providing himself worthy of any woman in the country, she has stayed at home doing nothing. To this Sergius responds by saying that whatever he could do was the result of her inspiration. He adds that just a knight would take part in a tournament with his beloved looking at him and inspiring him, he too participated in the war with the thought of her love which inspired him to deeds of valour. Raina, then, says that he has

never been absent from his thoughts and that their love is higher love. She adds that when she thinks of him, she feels that she could never do a base deed or think of wicked thought.

By these words, Raina means that just as the heart of a devotee is purified by the very thought of his god, in the same manner she should be purified as she constantly thinks of Sergius.

**Tournament:** In medieval tales there are accounts of tournaments which were competitions in military valour and skill.

**Higher love:** Spiritual love as contrasted with physical love.

4) *What would Sergius, the hero of Slivnitsa, 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 me here?*

The above words are uttered by Sergius in Act II while talking to Louka. When Raina goes into the house after indulging in 'higher love' with Sergius, the latter starts flirting with Louka, the maid. When he takes her hand, Louka says that she is surprised at his behaviour. Sergius, then, remarks that he himself is surprised at his own flirtation with her. He wonders what Sergius, the hero of Slivnitsa would say if he saw him there. He further wonders what Sergius, the advocate of higher love would think if he saw him there. He adds that as he contains half a dozen different Sergiuses within himself, he is not able to decide what they would say if they caught him flirting with Louka.

Through this passage Shaw conveys to us that man has many contradictions and contains different aspects which may be the exact opposite of the other. Also, this passage is a satire on people who indulge in higher love or spiritual love and pretend that they ignore physical love. We shall now analyse another.

5) *You know how to hurt with your tongue as well as with your hands. But I don't care; now I've found out that whatever clay I'm made of you're made of the same. As for her, she's a liar; and her fine airs are a cheat; and I am worth six of her.*

The above words are uttered by Louka in her conversation with Sergius in Act II. When Louka tells Sergius that he has a rival and if the latter (i.e. the rival) comes back, Miss Raina will definitely marry him. Being annoyed with Louka's words, Sergius catches her arm and hurts her. Thus, he tells her that she is a low level creature who is made of common clay.

Louka retaliates and tells Sergius that he is also made of the same clay as her, that he knows how to hurt with tongue as well as hands, and that Miss Raina is a liar who put on the airs of a respectable person for cheating others and that she (i.e., Louka) is worth six Rainas.

The above words reveal the character of Louka. She is daringly frank; she can criticise boldly even her mistress; and she is proud.

Now let us take a look at another.

6) *You are a foreigner; you do not feel our national animosities as we do. We still hate*

In the above passage, the anxiety of a mother i.e. Catherine is amply reflected. Also the passage indicates how the return of Bluntschli has created a complication.

When Bluntschli comes to return the old coat of Major Petkoff in which he was smuggled out by Catherine and Raina, Catherine receives him in the garden. Catherine tells Bluntschli that as a foreigner he does not know about the dislikes and anger of Bulgarians, that the Bulgarians still hate the Serbs, that her husband, Major Petkoff feels like a lion who is deprived of his share of flesh. Catherine adds that if Major Petkoff comes to know about Bluntschli's stay in his daughter's bedroom, its consequences would be; most unfortunate: Catherine would never be forgiven nor would the life of Raina be safe.

In the above passage, the anxiety of a mother i.e. Catherine is amply reflected. Also the passage indicates how the return of Bluntschli has created a complication.



**Self Check Exercise 2**

Annotate the following with reference to the context:

- 1) Do you think I know no secrets? I know things about the mistress that she wouldn't have the master know for a thousand levas. I know things about him that she wouldn't let him hear the last of for six months if I blabbed them to her.
- 2) You could have annexed Serbia and made prince Alexander Emperor of the Balkans, that's what I would have done.
- 3) All this washing can't be good for the health: it's not natural. There was an Englishman at Philippopolis who used to wet himself all over with cold water every morning when he got up. Disgusting! It all comes from the English.
- 4) You are a barbarian at heart still, Paul. I hope you behaved yourself before all these Russian officers.
- 5) Madam: It was the cradle and the grave of my military reputation.
- 6) The glimpses I have had of the seamy-side of life during the last few months have made me cynical; but I should not have brought my cynicism here.
- 7) That's quite enough fuss about nothing; a soldier's daughter should be able to stand up without flinching to a little strong conversation.
- 8) Gentlefolk are all alike: you are making love to me behind Miss Raina's back, and she doing the same behind yours.
- 9) Which of the six is the real man? That's the question that torments me. One of them is a hero, another a buffoon, another a humbug another perhaps a bit of a blackguard.
- 10) Oh, if I had him here, I'd cram him with chocolate creams till he couldn't ever speak again?-
- 11) I made a beautiful ornament this morning for the ice pudding; and that stupid Nicola has just put down a pile of plates on it and spoiled it.

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### 18.3 SUMMING UP

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In Act II also, new characters are introduced: Sergius and Nicola who are apparently rivals for the love of Louka. Nicola reveals his worldly wisdom — though he appears to be having the soul of a servant. Louka is ambitious and aspires to marry a gentleman-like Sergius.

The plot also progresses further. Complications, will arise due to (a) Louka's knowledge of Miss Raina Petkoff's secret and (b) the arrival of Bluntschli to return Major Petkoff's coat.

Moreover, in this scene Shaw has satirised love by juxtaposing a scene of higher love between Sergius and Raina with another of flirtation between Sergius and Louka.

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### 18.4 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

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**Self Check Exercise 1**

Hint for 1 and 2: Read the text as well as Section 18.2 carefully and write the answer in your own words.

**Self Check Exercise 2**

Study 18.2.1 carefully wherein some of the important annotations are discussed. You will, then, get clues for answering the questions on annotations.