



THE COMIC DENIAL AND CRITIQUE OF ROMANTIC IDEALS IN GEORGE BERNARD SHAW'S DRAMA "ARMS AND THE MAN"

Absamadov Bahodir Urozovich
Lecturer at Turon University, Uzbekistan

ABSTRACT

This article explores the comic rejection and critical deconstruction of romantic ideals in George Bernard Shaw's play *Arms and the Man*. By analyzing the characters, dialogue, and plot structure, the study demonstrates how Shaw employs irony and satire to challenge the glorification of war, heroism, and romantic love typical of 19th-century literature. The article highlights Shaw's rationalist approach, where realistic and pragmatic values are elevated over sentimental idealism. Special attention is given to the contrast between illusion and reality, as well as the transformation of characters such as Raina and Bluntschli, who embody the transition from romantic delusion to practical understanding. The paper concludes that *Arms and the Man* serves not only as a comedy but also as a platform for Shaw's social commentary on the absurdity of idealized values.

KEYWORDS: George Bernard Shaw, *Arms and the Man*, romantic ideals, comic critique, satire, irony, realism, anti-romanticism, character analysis, war and love.

INTRODUCTION

In literature, romantic ideals—such as the glorification of war through notions of honor and heroism, and the depiction of love as an idealized, deeply emotional feeling—have served as the thematic foundation of literary works for centuries. However, at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, these values were critically re-evaluated through realism, satire, and comic subversion. This very approach found a vivid expression in the works of the English playwright George Bernard Shaw.

Shaw aimed to expose the prevailing social stereotypes and artificial ideals of his time. He viewed comedy not merely as a source of entertainment but as a powerful tool for social change. As literary scholar Eric Bentley emphasizes, Shaw's comedic approach serves to reveal social truth through the opposition between realism and romantic imagery. Bentley writes: "Just as Ibsen's realistic tragedy is romantic, so is Shaw's realistic comedy. In both dramatists, a desire to analyze modern life blends with romantic vision and inspiration." [1, p. 124].

This perspective is especially evident in "*Arms and the Man*," where romantic ideas about war and heroism are criticized through irony and satire. Through the characters' behavior, the tension between reality and idealized views is revealed. Shaw uses comedy as a means of combating social misconceptions and mental illusions. The relevance of this study lies precisely in revealing Shaw's critical and comedic treatment of these romantic perceptions.

MAIN PART

The essence of romantic ideals in dramatic expression typically revolves around elevated notions of heroism, love, and war. In such depictions, heroes are often brave, selfless, and invincible. Love is portrayed as lofty, ideal, and at times even sacred. The romantic view of war, meanwhile, elevates the battlefield as a site of glory and valor [2, p. 178].

In "Arms and the Man," Shaw creates satirical-comedic situations to critique and reject such romantic ideas. The protagonists Sergius and Raina embody these romantic ideals. Sergius is portrayed as an ideal warrior; however, the play reveals that his battlefield "heroics" are more coincidental and irrational than truly courageous. Raina, meanwhile, romanticizes love, but over time her feelings evolve to become more pragmatic and realistic. In contrast, the character of Captain Bluntschli is the antithesis of romanticism: he is pragmatic, intelligent, and grounded in reality. Through these characters and their interactions, Shaw openly and critically dismantles romantic ideals using comedic tools [3].

Shaw's dramaturgy is enriched with elements of satire and irony, which serve to humorously critique certain ideals and beliefs. His satire is aimed at exposing the false values, illusions, and dogmas of society, conveying deep social meaning through irony. In "Arms and the Man," satire and irony are the primary tools for critiquing romantic notions. Shaw skillfully constructs his characters' actions and dialogues to transform romantic ideals into vivid objects of ridicule [4, p. 67]. Through this, Shaw conveys the artificial and unrealistic nature of such ideals, exposing societal stereotypes via satire.

In this drama, Shaw debunks romantic stereotypes through humorous and absurd situations. For example, Sergius's acts of "heroism" on the battlefield are shown to result from random errors and foolishness, which ultimately undermines the romantic image of bravery. Another comic situation emerges when Raina's idealized view of love is confronted by the realistic and practical Bluntschli. These moments allow Shaw to highlight the artificiality and absurdity of romantic stereotypes in a clear and dramatized manner [5, p. 102].

Through the characters of Sergius, Raina, and Bluntschli, Shaw masterfully deconstructs romantic ideas comedically. Sergius initially appears as a courageous hero, but his insincerity and arrogance are exposed through comic situations. Raina gradually realizes, through her conversations with Bluntschli, that her view of love is naïve and overly idealized. Bluntschli, with his pragmatic outlook, exposes the absurdity of romantic ideals. The interactions and dialogues among these characters become a powerful dramatic tool through which Shaw critiques romanticism in a humorous way.

The romantic view of war is thoroughly criticized in "Arms and the Man." Shaw presents war not as an arena of glory but as a moral and human crisis. Sergius's "heroic maneuvers" are not results of military skill but of chance and ineptitude. This illustrates how the idealization of war is a harmful illusion deeply rooted in the public consciousness. For Shaw, romantic perceptions of war deceive society and lead people to follow false notions of heroism [1, p. 138].

Through Bluntschli's character, Shaw portrays the harsh and bitter reality of war. Bluntschli, having experienced battle firsthand, is depicted as a grounded and disillusioned figure. His rational and alert stance exposes war as chaos, fear, exhaustion, and death. Through this realism, Shaw unveils the false stereotypes surrounding war and urges the audience to confront the truth.

Romantic illusions, by creating idealized images in the public mind, divert attention from real societal problems. In "Arms and the Man," this is demonstrated through glorified views of war

and heroism. Shaw critiques these illusions to show how they distort social consciousness. For instance, Sergius's depiction as an ideal hero reflects the dominance of false values in society, which can mislead the younger generation into making poor life choices based on unrealistic perceptions.

Similarly, through Raina, Shaw illustrates how romantic illusions about love can impact social relations and lead to the loss of sincerity in personal life. He emphasizes that these views are problematic not only on an individual level but also on a societal scale. Such illusions push real needs—like justice, peace, and pragmatism—to the background and promote false ideals. Shaw's comedic critique focuses on exposing these harmful consequences through laughter.

The themes Shaw explores in "Arms and the Man" remain relevant today. In modern society, romantic ideals about heroism, war, and love continue to be promoted through mass media, cinema, and political discourse. These ideals are often far removed from reality and can mislead the younger generation when making real-life decisions. Shaw's play, however, reveals the destructive consequences of such illusions and encourages the reader to think critically.

Issues raised in the play—false heroism, the painful truths of war, the value of sincerity, and the primacy of realism—remain significant in today's global sociopolitical context. Particularly, themes like the sanctity of human life, pragmatic living, and resistance to social stereotypes are of great importance. Shaw's critical-comedic approach serves as an effective tool for conveying these urgent issues to a broad audience.

CONCLUSION

In George Bernard Shaw's dramaturgy, the comic rejection of romantic ideals is central to his artistic and critical methodology. In his plays, especially "Arms and the Man," he employs comedy as a means of re-evaluating societal values. Shaw sees comedy not just as a means of entertainment but as a tool for self-reflection and internal transformation [6, p. xv].

Through satire, irony, and social parody, Shaw critiques romantic stereotypes. He argues that such stereotypes distance people from reality and corrupt public consciousness. For instance, the character of Sergius in "Arms and the Man" is a caricature of romantic heroism, revealing its artificiality and ridiculousness. Shaw targets the stereotypes surrounding heroism, love, and war through humor, inviting the audience to think critically [4, p. 226].

Thus, Shaw's comedic approach is not merely an artistic form, but an ethical and social stance. Through it, the playwright exposes existing illusions in society and strives to reveal the truth.

The play remains relevant today as a powerful artistic tool for uncovering the false ideals, stereotypes, and romantic illusions still present in modern society. Shaw's realism-based comedic style urges the reader to think critically, recognize truth, and re-examine societal values. "Arms and the Man" provides not only social and artistic insights relevant to its own time, but also to contemporary audiences, fully showcasing the moral and aesthetic potential of dramaturgy.

REFERENCES

1. Bentley, E. The Playwright as Thinker. – New York: Harcourt Brace, 1946. – 362 b.
2. Abrams, M.H., Harpham G.G. A Glossary of Literary Terms, Tenth edition. – Boston: Wadsworth, Cengage learning, 2012. – 443 b.
3. Shaw, G.B. Arms and the Man. – Edinburgh: FB &c Ltd, 2016. – 86 b.

4. Holroyd, M. Bernard Shaw: The One-Volume Definitive Edition. – New York: Random House, 1997. – 826 b.
5. Innes, C. Modern British Drama: The Twentieth Century. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. – 424 b.
6. Shaw, G.B. Plays Pleasant and unpleasant. – London: Constable and Company Ltd, 1911. – 332 b.

