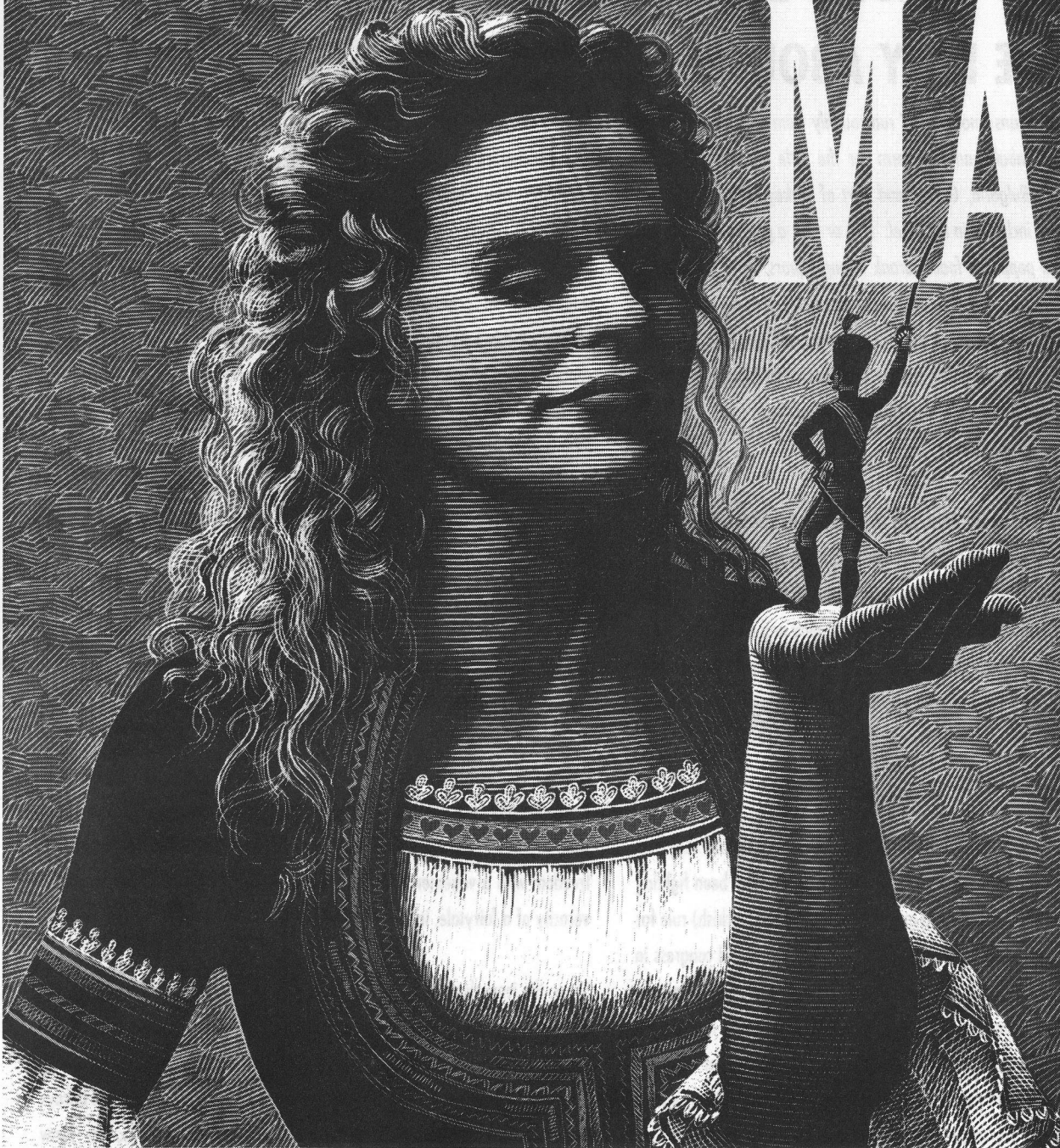


**ROUNABOUT THEATRE COMPANY**

# ARMS <sup>AND</sup> THE MAN



*Page To Stage Production Guide*



# ARMS AND THE MAN

by *George Bernard Shaw*  
directed by *Roger Rees*

## PRODUCTION GUIDE

### WHAT IS THE PLAY ABOUT?

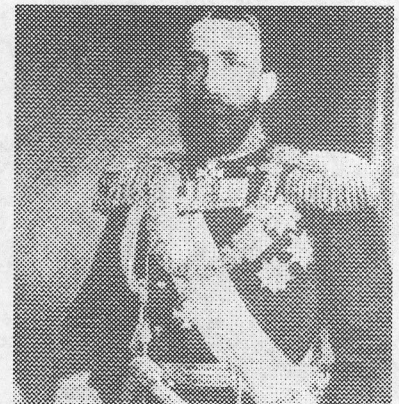
*The Balkans, which in Turkish means "mountains," run roughly from the Danube to the Dardanelles, from Istria to Istanbul, and is a term for the little lands of Hungary, Rumania, Yugoslavia, Albania, Bulgaria, Greece and part of Turkey, although neither Hungarian nor Greek welcomes inclusion in the label. It is, or was, a gay peninsula filled with sprightly people who ate peppered foods, drank strong liquors, wore flamboyant clothes, loved and murdered easily and had a splendid talent for starting wars. Less imaginative westerners looked down on them with secret envy, sniffing at their royalty, scoffing at their pretensions, and fearing their savage terrorists. Karl Marx called them "ethnic trash." I, as a footloose youngster in my twenties, adored them.*

--- C.L. Sulzberger, *A Long Row of Candles*

When the lights come up on the set of *Arms and the Man* at the Gramercy Theatre, audience members won't see the typical Shavian English drawing room. Theatregoers, especially those familiar with previous Roundabout productions of Shaw's plays, may be surprised to learn that for this comedy, the dramatist's fourth play and his first "pleasant play" (Shaw's own term for his writings with happier endings), Shaw chose the Balkans, specifically Bulgaria, as the locale. This setting, of course, was not chosen on a whim to present a more exotic background, but because he wanted to address issues of romantic ideals and heroic myths.

Shaw felt that due to their unique history, the Bulgarians possessed a romantic character ripe for criticism. In 1894, when Shaw wrote the play, the Bulgarians had been fighting for a national identity for several years. Having existed under Ottoman (Turkish) rule for over 500 years, Bulgaria was granted self-rule in 1878 by an international congress in Berlin. The Berlin decision was not wholly satisfactory to the Bulgarian people, however, since the borders of the country were significantly reduced and Bulgaria remained a principality of the Ottoman Empire. In 1885, when Prince Alexander of Bulgaria successfully mounted a *coup d'etat* to regain some of the lost Bulgarian territory, known as Eastern Rumelia, the country was thrown into turmoil again. The Russians withdrew their military support, and the Bulgarian army was left with no officers above the rank of captain. Soon afterward, Serbia mounted its own military offensive against Bulgaria's

western border. The Bulgarian army confronted the Serbs in the town of Slivnitsa, soundly defeating the Serbian Army. This victory led by an army under the command of native officers quickly became a symbol of nationalistic pride for the Bulgarians.



Alexander Battenberg, Prince of Bulgaria, 1879-1886

As historian R.J. Crampton noted, "more than any other event, the battle of Slivnitsa welded the Bulgarians north and south of the Balkan Mountains into one nation." It is this legendary battle that audiences encounter (in the form of off-stage gunshots) during Act One of *Arms and the Man*.

Shaw incorporated the battle of Slivnitsa and the Bulgarian people in order to critique the romantic view of war and national struggles. Shaw saw the Bulgarian people as a naïve nation, having only recently acquired some sense of independence. "They were a nation of plucky beginners in every department," he wrote. To Shaw, the Bulgarians spoke and believed in ideals of heroic warfare, exemplified in romantic poetry like Tennyson's "Charge of the Light Brigade." The Bulgarians were a people who fought for their newfound freedom with a vehemence and an ignorance similar to a child defending the veracity of a fairytale, in Shaw's view.

Shaw, the iconoclast, couldn't let a romantic ideal stand, and utilized a variety of comic techniques to expose the naivete of the characters' ideals. Though the woman of the house, Catharine Petkoff, displays the Bulgarian dislike for things Serbian, she also looks to the West for her cultural signifiers. That she is always seen in a Viennese party dress is a clue of the extent of her patriotism. Shaw further undercuts the Petkoffs' assertion of nationalism by presenting them as pretentious nouveau riche, proudly describing a shelf of paperback novels as a library.

# CAST OF CHARACTERS

**Raina Petkoff** (played by Katie Finneran), pronounced Rah-ee-na, is a young lady, intensely conscious of the ideals of romantic beauty and dreams of heroism. She strikes a regal pose now and then, but isn't above adopting a petulant disposition when things don't go her way. She's engaged to Sergius.

**Major Sergius Saranoff** (played by Paul Michael Valley) is an officer in the Bulgarian army. He has the physical hardihood, the high spirit, and the susceptible imagination of an untamed mountaineer chieftain. He is jealously observant and assertive. A clever, imaginative barbarian with an acute critical faculty, he possesses a disposition that could be called Byronic.

**Catherine Petkoff** (played by Sandra Shipley) is Raina's mother and the mistress of the house, imperiously energetic with highly attuned housekeeping instincts. To some, she might resemble a farmer's wife, but she is determined to be a Viennese lady and wears a fashionable tea gown on all occasions. She appears astonishingly handsome and stately under some of the most demanding conditions.

**Major Paul Petkoff** (played by Tom Bloom) is a cheerful, excitable, insignificant, unpolished man, naturally unambitious except to his income and his importance in local society. He is greatly pleased with the military rank which the war has thrust upon him as a man of consequence in his town. The fever of plucky patriotism has pulled him through the war, but he is glad to return home.

**Louka** (played by Robin Weigert) is the Petkoff's maid, so proud and defiant in her servility as to be insolent at times.

**Nicola** (played by Michael Potts) is the Petkoff's man servant who dreams of running his own business. He is a man of cool temperament but clear and keen intelligence, with the complacency of the servant who values himself on his rank in servitude, and the imperturbability of the accurate calculator who has no illusions.

**Bluntschli** (played by Henry Czerny) is a Swiss mercenary soldier capable of keeping his wits even in the most trying times. He claims to keep chocolates in his cartridge case as a practical matter, but he hides a romantic side.

**Russian Officer** (played by Mark Deklin) possesses a soft feline politeness despite a stiff military carriage.



Montenegrin highlanders in traditional dress, with richly embroidered vests.

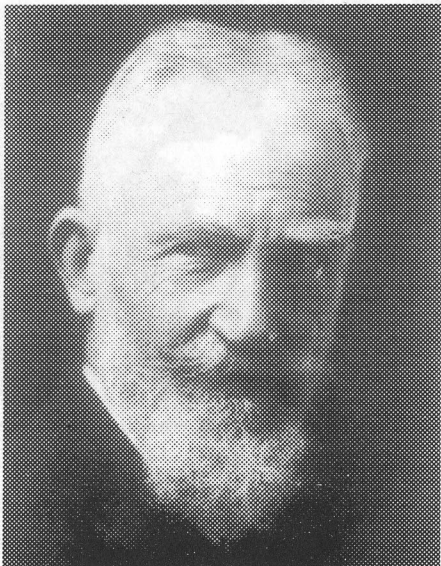
## PRINCIPAL WORKS OF GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

- 1892 - *Widower's Houses*
- 1893 - *The Philanderer*
- 1894 - *Mrs. Warren's Profession*
- 1894 - *Candida*
- 1894 - *Arms and the Man*
- 1894 - *You Never Can Tell*
- 1897 - *The Devil's Disciples*
- 1898 - *Caesar and Cleopatra*
- 1899 - *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*
- 1903 - *Man and Superman*
- 1904 - *John Bull's Other Island*
- 1905 - *Major Barbara*
- 1906 - *The Doctor's Dilemma*
- 1907 - *The Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet*
- 1908 - *Getting Married*
- 1908 - *Man of Destiny*
- 1909 - *Misalliance*
- 1910 - *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*
- 1911 - *Fanny's First Play*
- 1913 - *Androcles and the Lion*
- 1914 - *Pygmalion*
- 1919 - *Heartbreak House*
- 1920 - *Back to Methuselah*
- 1923 - *Saint Joan*
- 1929 - *The Apple Cart*
- 1930 - *Too True to be Good*
- 1933 - *On the Rocks*
- 1939 - *In Good King Charles' Golden Days*
- 1935 - *The Millionairess*
- 1946 - *Buoyant Billions*



# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

## GEORGE BERNARD SHAW



*"I am an Irishman (like Goldsmith and Sheridan), born in Dublin on the 26th July, 1856. I came to London in 1876. I wrote five novels, but nobody would publish them. I was equally unsuccessful in my attempts to work as a journalist; no editor would touch my articles. ... For twelve years I was very active as a public speaker and agitator, delivering addresses from all sorts of platforms,*

*sometimes to the British Association, sometimes to the passersby in the streets. ... Meanwhile I had at least (from 1885 onward) obtained work as a critic, first of literature, then of music. My mother had been a distinguished amateur of music in Dublin and I acquired a good deal of knowledge of music in this way in my boyhood. I used my musical feuilletons as vehicles for politic and social satire and soon began to be known by my signature, GBS."*

*--George Bernard Shaw*

George Bernard Shaw's contribution to the establishment of modern English drama is well known, as is the fact that, as John Gassner and Bernard Dukore put it, his is "the most significant collection of modern dramatic literature by a single playwright." When you add to this his writings as an art, music and theatre critic, novelist, and orator for the Fabian cause, the full picture of his influence on twentieth century society begins to emerge. In his analysis of Shaw, Charles Osborn notes, "One of the most endearing (to some) and exasperating (to others) aspects of Shaw is his inability to limit himself to the task in hand. The playwright embraces philosophy, the political orator expounds aesthetics, the drama critic discusses economics and sociology, while the music critic reaches out to embrace the whole of human life, and always in the least prosy, most musical prose, and with a life-enhancing wit and gaiety that at times bubble over into downright clowning." Eric Bentley adds to this assessment by remarking, "In the first half of the twentieth century, I should be tempted to say, no event was complete until it has been commented on by Bernard Shaw. His creative work spilled over into letters to the paper, interviews, and postcards. He missed nothing."

Shaw's propensity to miss nothing seems to have been brought on by an uncompromising integrity to tell things as he saw them. "It is an instinct with me

personally," Shaw explained, "to attack every idea ... especially if it claims to be the foundation of all human society. I am prepared to back human society against any idea, positive or negative, that can be brought into field against it." However, if social commentary were the full extent of his impact, Shaw would surely not have acquired the enduring reputation he now enjoys. If not for his particular ironic view of life, he might have been more easily dismissed. For this we owe a debt of gratitude to Shaw's father who, by setting himself up as a model for how not to behave, helped shape a unique perspective of the world in his son's eyes. As Shaw himself wrote:

*A boy who has seen 'the governor'[Shaw's father] with an imperfectly wrapped-up goose under one arm and a ham in the same condition in the other (both purchased under heaven knows what delusion of festivity), butting at the garden wall in the belief that he was pushing open the gate, and transforming his tall hat to a concertina in the process, and who, instead of being overwhelmed with shame and anxiety at the spectacle, has been so disabled by merriment (uproariously shared by the maternal uncle) that he has hardly been able to rush to the rescue of the hat and pilot its wearer to safety, is clearly not a boy who will make tragedies out of trifles instead of making trifles out of tragedies. If you cannot get rid of the family skeleton, you may as well make it dance.*

It is this ironic view of life that helped Shaw to create the multifaceted personality of GBS and left his readers to wonder if he was serious in his often biting opinions or only creating an elaborate joke. To this notion he replied, "My way of joking is to tell the truth. It is the funniest joke in the world." And tell the truth he did, on all sorts of subjects with a distinct prose that produced an effect of determined clarity.

*The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man.*

*A life making mistakes is not only more honourable but more useful than a life spent doing nothing.*

*Life does not cease to be funny when people die any more than it ceases to be serious when people laugh.*

*Do not waste your time on social questions. What is the matter with the poor is Poverty; what is the matter with the rich is Uselessness.*

*Continued on page 5*



# A CONVERSATION WITH DIRECTOR ROGER REES

This past December, Margaret Salvante, Roundabout's Education Director, spoke with Roger Rees, who directed this production of *Arms and the Man*.

**SALVANTE:** *What is Shaw after with Arms and the Man? Is it just an anti-war play, or is he saying something more specific than that?*

**REES:** Oh, several things. It's about man defining himself. It's about the nature of heroism and the nature of baseness. It's: "Oh, I see! That's the guy who's the real hero of this play!" He does this continually, Shaw. He does it in *Major Barbara* where Augustus Cousins, who works in the Salvation Army, takes over the armaments business from Andrew Undershaft. The best example is a play that was very successful for Roundabout, *Candida*, where you have the exciting youthful poet, juxtaposed with Morell, the rather drab husband, the cleric.

And in the end you discover that Morell is really the center of the play. *Candida* chooses Morell in the end.

**SALVANTE:** *The young people we bring to the theatre often ask me why Shaw's characters talk so much. What would your response to them be?*

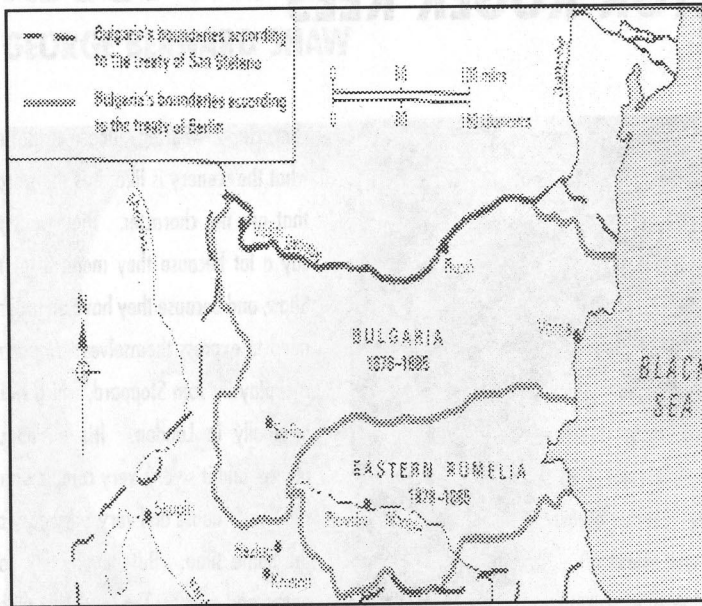
**REES:** Yes, it's true of Shakespeare, too. They talk because they are the language, the language is them. Nothing happens in the wings in a Shaw play; it doesn't happen in the wings of a Shakespeare play, either. The words, the language, the way people speak, is the character. It doesn't matter what the



character's wearing, doesn't matter what the scenery is like, it is the words that are the character. They want to say a lot because they mean a lot to Shaw, and because they have an urgent need to express themselves. *Hapgood* is a play by Tom Stoppard, which I did originally in London. It's all about physics and it's very, very complex and fabulously dense and very, very easy at the same time. But people talk for pages and pages. The very first night we did it at Wimbledon Theatre—it was pretty hard to rehearse and we thought we'd got a handle on it. I invited a friend of mine, an old vaudevillian, a kind of comic. He came around to my dressing room afterward and I said to him, "What do you think?" and he said, "A bit wordy." (laughs) It is funny. You can always be cynical about it. We're so isolated nowadays. Technology has dictated that we don't need to speak, we just need to click our mouse. And we must prevent that. That's why these plays need to be done.

**SALVANTE:** *Why are you drawn to these plays?*

**REES:** Because of Shakespeare, and I had a pretty good experience with Dickens. Have you ever seen a manuscript of a Shaw play or a Dickens book? Shakespeare wrote *Taming of the Shrew* and he wrote *Hamlet*. And he wrote 35 other plays as well. How could he write such different plays? It's extraordinary, extraordinary. These guys really applied themselves. Nowadays, we're lucky if you can get out of bed to get a bagel, and that's what you did that day? Or maybe you pick up your dry cleaning? It's horrible, isn't it? It's an effort to get to the library! What these plays say to young people is "Hey, you can do great things. You too can be Leonardo da Vinci." Ultimately, that is what these plays have to say.



As a foil to the Bulgarian's romantic idealism, Shaw crafted a character from another country known for its democratic commercialism: Switzerland. The Swiss in *Arms and the Man* is a mercenary in the Serbian army, fighting for monetary reward, not to defend his ideals or his country's push for independence. The Swiss soldier's pragmatism is such that he doesn't use his cartridge case to carry ammunition, but chocolates (a confection the Swiss have long been famous for). Shaw uses this Swiss soldier, Bluntschli, to dispel the image of the heroic cavalryman charging the enemy full gusto. Bluntschli bluntly tells the other characters that the only reason a cavalier would be at the front of a battle charge is because he's lost control of his horse. Bluntschli also asserts that the battle of Slivnitsa was won not because of the righteousness of the cause or the bravery of the Bulgarians, but rather because of the miscalculations by the enemy.

Shaw's play offended some of its initial critics. Reviewers found Shaw's arguments to be farcical, and called Bluntschli "a coward." The playwright responded to his detractors in an essay entitled *A Dramatic Realist to His Critics*. After lambasting the critics for having no connection with the real world and possessing the same naïve views as the Bulgarians, Shaw defended his view of war as realistic. He wrote, "There is no burlesque: I have stuck to the routine of war, as described by real warriors." As Shaw had never served any military duty, he provided several first-person accounts from English and American military officers describing the foolhardiness of new recruits, horses startled in combat and the lack of proper sustenance for soldiers. Shaw also mentions a man who survived on chocolate when stranded in the mountains and officers who chose not to carry a pistol as proof that his character of Bluntschli was not merely a concoction created from thin air, but a character based on real people.

Though the image of the war hero on his trusty steed has fallen from vogue, Shaw's message of looking at the realities of armed combat still carry much weight. Of course, Shaw could never have guessed that the struggles of the Balkan peoples would continue through to the new millennium.

The list of Shavian witticisms that have ingrained themselves into the fabric of our society seems endless. And in spite of the surprisingly widespread hostility GBS inspired, through this alter ego Shaw managed to strike an indelible mark on the history of social thought. Even so, it is as Bernard Shaw, the playwright, that he hoped to make his strongest stand. "All my happenings have taken the form of books and plays," he wrote. "Read them, or speculate them; and you have my whole story." With his collection of fifty-two plays, Shaw provides us with a comprehensive view of his philosophy, and does so with an entertaining flair, ironic wit and masterful use of the anti-climax.

*I am not an ordinary playwright in general practice. I am a specialist in immoral and heretical plays. My reputation has been gained by my persistent struggle to force the public to consider its morals. In particular, I regard much current morality as to economic and sexual relations as disastrously wrong; and I regard certain doctrines of the Christian religion as understood in England today with abhorrence. I write plays with the deliberate object of converting the nation to my opinions in these matters.*

When Shaw came on the literary scene, in the early 1880's, he entered a field that was mired in pessimism, shocked and insulted by the revelations of Darwin and Freud, and coming to believe that as Sartre later surmised, "man is a useless passion." Although he was denounced by his contemporaries for failing to recognize the seriousness of the situation, Shaw remained unwavering in his belief that man had the power to shape his own future. By the time of his death in 1950, Shaw had achieved a celebrity status rarely achieved by a living playwright, surpassing even that of the great religious and political leaders of his day. It was a reputation that he carefully cultivated, knowing full well the necessity of celebrity to legitimize his views.

*I have been dinning into the public head that I am an extraordinarily witty, brilliant, and clever man. That is now part of the public opinion of England; and no power in heaven or on earth will ever change it. I may dodder and dote; I may potboil and platitudinize; I may become the butt and chopping-block of all the bright, original spirits of the rising generation; but my reputation shall not suffer: it is built up fast and solid, like Shakespeare's, on an impregnable basis of dogmatic reiteration.*

As we leave one century of confusion and anxiety to enter another, Shaw's views seem more relevant for us than ever. If Shaw's premise that progress depends on the unreasonable man is true, perhaps we all need to be a little less reasonable in our acceptance of the status quo and, as Colin Wilson so aptly advises in his reflections on Shaw, "start believing in the future, and in man's power to transform it."



## ACTIVITIES:

### **Before the Play:**

On separate sheets of paper, write the words "soldier," "commander," "manservant," "housemaid," "wealthy woman," and "teenage girl." For each of these character types, draw a picture or write a description of what a typical person who fits in that category would look and act like. Then draw another picture or write another description for each character from a completely different point of view, giving each character a unique and unexpected set of traits.

- Which set of characters do you find more interesting?
- Which set is funnier?
- Which group of characters would provide a playwright with complex personalities and humorous situations?

### **During the Play:**

Characters in Shaw plays tend to talk a lot, but that doesn't mean their actions aren't important. As you watch *Arms and the Man*, you'll need to listen to what the characters say, but you'll also need to watch carefully what they do. Compare each character's actions with their words.

- Does the characters actions match what he or she says?
- Does the character contradict what other characters say about him/her?
- Why does Shaw present characters that say one thing and do another?
- Is he trying to make the audience laugh, or think, or both? And what should we be laughing at or thinking about?

### **After the Play:**

Write a play or short story about characters who are not what they claim to be. Perhaps you could be like George Bernard Shaw and write about a family who believes in one set of ideals, but actually lives by other ideals. For example, perhaps your characters could say that giving to charity is important, but their actions would indicate they are actually quite selfish. As Shaw chose the topics of his plays carefully, so you should also be sure to write about ideas that you think are important.

When you're finished, mail your play or story to Roundabout, and we'll share it with the people who worked on *Arms and the Man*! (We may even post it on our website!) Send it to the attention of:

**Margaret Salvante**, Education Director, Roundabout Theatre Company  
231 West 39th Street, Suite 1200, New York, NY 10018  
or send an E-MAIL to: [Margies@roundabouttheatre.org](mailto:Margies@roundabouttheatre.org)

## SOURCES:

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Michael Holroyd, ed. *The Genius of Shaw*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979.  
Robert D. Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.  
Dragos D. Kostich. *The Land and the People of the Balkans*. New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1962.  
Sherman D. Spector and Rene Ristelhueber. *A History of the Balkan Peoples*. New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc. 1971.

### **Check out these websites!**

<http://site.netscape.net/bernardshawinfo/> - The Official George Bernard Shaw Information Service. This site has several pages devoted to Shaw, including listings of his plays, achievements, description of his political life, and some of his more famous quotes.

[www.bulgaria.com](http://www.bulgaria.com) - This site contains several areas on Bulgaria, including pages related to the country's art, government, history, and news.

[www.balcanica.org](http://www.balcanica.org) - Organized by the International Center for Balkan Studies, this site has a series of maps that depict the changes in political geography of the turbulent region over several centuries.

[www.roundabouttheatre.org](http://www.roundabouttheatre.org)

# WHEN YOU GET TO THE THEATRE

## What To Look For

**T**he lower lobby of the Gramercy Theatre has a number of resources for your convenience. There is a refreshment counter where you can buy soda or a snack, but please remember that you will not be permitted to take these items into the theatre with you. The lobby is also an art gallery, so you might want to have a look at the paintings we have on display.

## Ticket Policy

**A**s a student participant in *Page To Stage* or *Theatre Access*, you will receive a discounted ticket to the show from your teacher on the day of the performance. You will notice that the ticket indicates the section, row and number of your assigned seat. When you show your ticket to the usher inside the theatre, he or she will show you where your seat is located. These tickets are not transferable and you must sit in the seat assigned to you.

## Audience Etiquette

**A**s you watch the show please remember that the biggest difference between live theatre and a film is that the actors can see you and hear you and your behavior can affect their performance. They appreciate your applause and laughter, but can be easily distracted by people talking or getting up in the middle of the show. So please save your comments or need to use the rest room for intermission. Also, there is no food permitted in the theatre, no picture taking or recording of any kind, and if you have a beeper, alarm watch or anything else that might make noise, please turn it off before the show begins.

*Thank You For Your Cooperation*  
*Enjoy The Show!*

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