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## **The Craft of GB Shaw in Representing Hypocrisy in**

### **Arms and the Man**

George Bernard Shaw's play "Arms and the Man" is a sharp critique of war and the romanticized notions surrounding it, delivered with his signature wit and clever dialogue. One of the play's central themes is the hypocrisy surrounding social and national ideals, particularly those related to heroism, warfare, and masculinity. Shaw's craft in representing this hypocrisy is multifaceted, relying on character development, dramatic irony, and satirical dialogue to challenge the audience's perceptions of war and its glorification.

Shaw's characterization is crucial to his exploration of hypocrisy. The character of Captain Bluntschli, a Swiss mercenary who embodies pragmatic realism, serves as a foil to the romanticized ideals of war upheld by others in the play, notably Sergius Saranoff. Bluntschli's candid demeanor and practical approach to combat starkly contrast with the traditional heroic archetype. He carries a revolver filled with chocolate rather than bullets, symbolizing his rejection of the glorification of violence. This character choice exposes the absurdity of romantic notions of warfare and underscores the hypocrisy of those who idolize soldiering without understanding its brutal realities.

In stark contrast, Sergius initially embodies the romantic hero, boasting of his valiant deeds in battle. However, as the play progresses, it becomes evident that his portrayal of heroism is largely a facade. His initial bravado gives way to revealing moments of cowardice and self-interest, highlighting the dissonance between his public persona and private reality. This duality exemplifies Shaw's critique of the performative nature of masculinity and the societal expectations placed upon men to conform to heroic ideals, thus revealing the hypocrisy in the glorification of war figures.

Shaw's use of dramatic irony further amplifies the hypocritical themes in "Arms and the Man." The audience knows that the realities of war are far removed from the ideals portrayed by characters like Raina Petkoff, who is initially enamored

with the romantic notion of the soldier and idealizes Sergius's supposed heroism. As the play unfolds, Raina's perceptions are challenged, particularly through her interactions with Bluntschli, who candidly shares the uncomfortable truths of warfare. This irony not only emphasizes the disparity between perception and reality but also positions the audience to question societal norms that romanticize war and valorize those who engage in it.

Moreover, Shaw's satirical dialogue serves as an incisive tool to expose hypocrisy. The play is replete with witty exchanges that strip away the romantic veneer associated with war and force characters—and the audience—to confront the absurdities inherent in such ideologies. For example, Raina's initial admiration for the idea of a dashing soldier is met with Bluntschli's practical perspective, resulting in comedic yet poignant moments that unearth the underlying ridiculousness of her naïveté. Through humor, Shaw undermines traditional beliefs about heroism and valor, allowing the audience to reflect critically upon the absurdities of war.

Shaw also critiques the entrenched social norms that perpetuate hypocrisy in relationships. The interactions between Raina and her parents, particularly her mother, serve as a microcosm of societal expectations. Mrs. Petkoff's insistence on maintaining appearances and adhering to social conventions highlights the tensions between individual desires and societal pressures. Raina's eventual

transformation, as she learns to embrace a more authentic understanding of both love and war through her interactions with the more pragmatic Bluntschli, signifies a rejection of the hypocrisy she has internalized.

Additionally, the play captures the hypocrisy of nationalistic fervor through the juxtaposition of Raina and Bluntschli's contrasting viewpoints on duty and honor. Raina, enveloped in the romanticism of nationalism, initially perceives conflict as noble and virtuous. In contrast, Bluntschli's experiences as a soldier reveal the senselessness of war, evidenced by his disdain for ideals that glorify national conflict. This clash between their beliefs serves to illustrate the artificial nature of patriotism when juxtaposed against the genuine human cost of warfare.

In conclusion, Shaw's craft in "Arms and the Man" effectively highlights the hypocrisy surrounding war and the ideals of heroism, employing rich characterization, dramatic irony, and sharp satire. Through the characters of Bluntschli and Sergius, Shaw reveals the dissonance between societal expectations and the realities of human nature, challenging audiences to reconsider their perceptions of war as noble and glorified. Ultimately, the play serves as a powerful indictment of the romanticized notions of warfare and the hypocrisy embedded in social and national ideals, reaffirming Shaw's position as a critical voice in modern drama. His ability to blend humor with incisive

social critique not only entertains but provokes thoughtful reflection on the complexities of human behavior and the moral implications of conflict.