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GEORGE BERNARD SHAW AND THE GRAND NARRATIVE OF MODERNISATION: *ARMS AND THE MAN AND AFTER*

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George Bernard Shaw's critique of received grand narratives, such as the nineteenth-century progress-centred "gospel" of liberalism, has been admiringly noted by the playwright's latter-day commentators (Gahan 194). Attention has also been drawn to his (largely unsuccessful) attempts to produce new grand narratives for his own time, such as a "religion of Creative Evolution" (Gahan 194). Shaw's grand narratives rank as failures because they lack "the unifying coherence that the form demands" (Gahan 194). However, even this can be construed as a positive feature, testifying to the playwright's awareness of the limitations of the construction of such narratives (Gahan 194) and, consequently, to his anticipation of our own time's sceptical attitude towards them. But was Shaw really so far removed from nineteenth-century ideas of progress as one might be led to believe by sceptical statements that he himself made, such as the frequently quoted commentary on the "growth" of civilisation in the 1898 "Notes to *Caesar and Cleopatra*" (*Three Plays*, locations 5048-5055), or by words that he put into the mouths of some of his characters, most notably, into that of Tom Broadbent, "the champion idiot of all the world" (*John Bull* 128)¹? This essay will attempt to provide an answer to the question by focusing on the playwright's treatment of the grand narrative of modernisation in his 1894 "Bulgarian" play *Arms and the Man* (henceforth referred to as *Arms*). A brief comparison between it and his later play about Ireland, *John Bull's Other Island* (henceforth referred to as *John Bull*), will be undertaken in the concluding part of the text. Significantly, both plays are concerned with societies that are in the process of undergoing significant changes in order to move up "the ladder of a unitary modernity" (Ferguson 167), and comparing some of their key structural and thematic aspects should shed light on Shaw's evolving view of modernisation.

A discussion of *Arms* will be incomplete without a glance at its reception insofar as previous readers' responses are not only essential to our own interactions with texts but also reflect important social and intellectual developments in the great world outside them. The late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century reception of Shaw's "Bulgarian" play was marked

by a polarisation of opinion: while a lot of “native” interpreters adopted a dismissive attitude to it, (mis)reading it, in the words of Shaw himself, as “comic opera or a burlesque” (*Collected* 312-3),² a number of foreign readers and viewers took issue with the play’s portrayal of Bulgaria and the Bulgarians. Samuel A. Weiss has presented a detailed picture of the political aspects of the play’s reception in Vienna, Prague and Berlin, between 1903 and the 1920s, and has particularly dwelled on Bulgarian responses to it in an atmosphere of rising tensions fuelled by pre-WWI troubles in South Eastern Europe, or the Balkans,³ and, later, by post-War resentment over the re-drawing of state borders in the region (27-33). He has also remarked on Shaw’s own reaction to such responses (27-29). Michael Holroyd has similarly commented on Bulgarian criticism of the play in the 1920s and Shaw’s response to it (locations 3496-3586).

More recently, the play has been subjected to a number of reinterpretations by scholars with East European antecedents. Their readings of the play have been part of a multifaceted reaction to the resurgence of nineteenth-century patterns of mental mapping and marginalising constructions of the Balkans in the West’s political-cultural imaginary in the aftermath of the collapse of communism and the excesses of violence accompanying the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia. Most scholars working within this context tend to make use of conceptual tools culled from the repertoire of postcolonial critique (Kostova, “Postcommunist” 74-86). By and large, Shaw’s *Arms* has been reinterpreted as an instance of Western denigration of Bulgaria and, generally speaking, the Balkan region to which the country belongs. Together with other texts that have similarly been construed as products of “the imperialism of the [Western] imagination,”⁴ the play has become part of what I have described elsewhere as a “Balkanist canon” (Kostova, “Postcommunist” 78).⁵ The play has been analysed from such a perspective by Maria Todorova and Vesna Goldsworthy, authors of the two seminal books on Western representations of the Balkans, *Imagining the Balkans* (1997) and *Inventing Ruritania. The Imperialism of the Imagination* (1998). Bulgarian-Canadian scholar Roumiana Deltcheva places *Arms* alongside Voltaire’s *Candide* and a skit on Jay Leno’s show in order to attest an enduring denigratory tendency in Western approaches to Bulgaria (5-9). Another Bulgarian-born scholar approaches the play in terms of the fin-de-siècle construction of Balkan identity as “the other within Europe” (Tchaprazov 72). Of all such critical evaluations Todorova’s, despite its relative brevity, seems the most meticulously contextualised one (111-15). With the others there is a tendency to abstract Shaw’s play from its historical, literary and theatrical contexts. Elsewhere I have argued that *Arms* may be read as a future-oriented “conjectural history” of Bulgaria whose telos is the overcoming of the country’s “Oriental” backwardness and its movement towards modern, Western-style capitalism (Kostova, *Tales* 175-84). In what follows I will reiterate and amplify some of my arguments.

Yet another area of the play’s critical exploration may be described, somewhat simplistically, as “Anglo-Irish.” Scholars working within this trend favour what may be termed a *displacement paradigm*, that is, they view Shaw’s Bulgaria as a more or less distorted image of Ireland or even England. As early as 1991 Declan Kiberd stated, in the second volume of the authoritative *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, that “in a play like *Arms and the Man* (1894), the word ‘Bulgaria’ might be replaced, without undue strain, by the word ‘Ireland’” (“The London Exiles” 421). The displacement of Anglo-Irish Protestant anxieties onto Bulgaria is likewise central to Michael McAteer’s 2010 reading of *Arms* (210-17). In 2000 Kiberd published another interpretation of the play in which he analysed “the mapping of *England onto Bulgaria* [my emphasis]” (*Irish Classics* 341). For the critic this mapping is an authorial strategy aimed at “trick[ing] [English] audiences into laughing at a slightly skewed version of their own society” and thus stimulating self-analysis amongst them (341). Katharyn Stober follows the same trend in an article focusing on Raina Petkoff as a “xenophilous” “pre-New Woman” subverting conservative Victorian moral values (89-101).

While “Anglo-Irish” readings have yielded valuable insights, they have also led to the relative obscuring of the representation of Bulgaria in the play. It seems to me that *Arms* is most fruitfully approached through a perspective that takes into account the play’s “native” historical, literary and theatrical contexts but is also alert to Bulgaria’s portrayal in it, or does not “strip the play of its geography” (Tchaprazov 71).

***Arms* as a “Conjectural History” of a “Hopeful and Gallant Little State”⁶**

The term “conjectural history” was coined by Scottish philosopher Dugald Stewart (1753-1828) and was closely linked to the Scottish Enlightenment’s model of stadial development (Garrett 82). A conjectural (or theoretical) history was usually a narrative striving to explain a movement from one stage of societal development to another. If there was no evidence for a particular historical change in a certain society, then that change could be “conjectured” through the examination of another social context in which evidence could be found (Pittock 263). Scottish conjectural historical narratives were oriented towards the past or, at any rate, they aimed at explaining aspects of the present through speculation about a putative past. Shaw’s *Arms*, in my view, makes *conjectures* about Bulgaria’s future by using as a point of departure a *hypothetical* construction of the country’s present.

Are we justified in describing Shaw’s construction of late nineteenth-century Bulgaria as *hypothetical*? The playwright himself stressed his play’s “political actuality and ethnographical verisimilitude” (*Collected* 312-3). However, a number of Shavian commentators have pointed out that the dramatist knew little about Bulgaria at the time of the writing of the play and the acquisition of solid knowledge about the country and its inhabitants was not among his priorities. Thus, Holroyd explains that the first version of the play was entitled *Alps and Balkans*, and, significantly, did not contain any specific geographical references: “the names of the places [were] left blank” (location 3533). The characters were simply called “the Father,” “the Daughter,” “the Heroic Lover,” “the Stranger,” and so on (locations 3531-4). It was Sidney Webb who gave Shaw the idea of using the Serbo-Bulgarian war of 1885 as a time setting, whereas a Russian émigré, who had commanded a flotilla on the Danube, supplied “a good deal of historical and social information” about the country (locations 3531-4). The outcome of Shaw’s combined use of second-hand information from a non-native informer, newspaper reports about the Serbo-Bulgarian war and selective reading of travel books in the British Museum is a portrayal of Bulgaria that a number of Bulgarian readers and spectators subsequently found *inauthentic*. On the other hand, some specialised Western readers have complimented Shaw on his representation of Bulgaria. For instance, Weiss, who acknowledges the playwright’s insufficient familiarity with his chosen setting, nevertheless praises him for having grasped the “greater” socio-historical picture and having revealed “the *essential* social changes that followed the liberation of a *backward country*, such as Bulgaria, in 1878, from centuries of feudal Turkish rule [my emphasis]” (37). McAteer goes even further: he accepts Shaw’s historically erroneous assertion that the Bulgarian army was commanded by Russian officers in the war with Serbia⁷ and praises the playwright for his insightful portrayal of “the rift between the Austro-Slavic and the Russophile wing within Pan-Slavism” (213). The Serbo-Bulgarian war did show up the artificiality of the Pan-Slavic project, which was based on a non-conflictual idea of European “Slavdom,” but was hardly a reflection of the “rift” between the movement’s two wings. To avoid both resentment and praise founded on overgeneralisation, I will attempt to contextualise Shaw’s representation of Bulgaria and the Bulgarians by drawing on nineteenth-century perceptions of historical development. This should also shed light on Shaw’s complicity with liberal ideas of progress.

Despite the playwright's jibes at liberalism,⁸ his view of the Bulgarians as a "young" nation "emerging from slavery" that must needs "ap[e] western civilisation" (*Plays Pleasant* 15)⁹ easily falls within the context of nineteenth-century Western European liberal historiography. As Monika Baár has demonstrated, that historiography followed Enlightenment savants in viewing Eastern Europe "not as the antipode of civilisation" but as an intermediate cultural-geographical area located "somewhere along a developmental scale that stretched from civilisation at one end to barbarism at the other" (62). Moreover, it "envisaged the progress of civilisation as the imitation of ... vanguard nation[s]" by emergent ones (63). Emphasis was thus laid on the civilisational superiority of "'established' nations" in Europe's Western half, such as Britain and France, which "were confident of their leadership in Europe and beyond" (62). According to this progress-oriented schema, Eastern European modernisation was a form of (self-)Occidentalisation.

Needless to say, Shaw never uses the term "modernisation" either in *Arms* or in his comments on it. In fact, the concept had not been theorised fully by 1893 when he started working on his text. However, the play's plot is shaped by the dominant idea of the transformation of Bulgarian society "from rural and agrarian conditions to urban ... modes of living" (McGrath and Martin 6). Moreover, in the context of the play, the Swiss professional soldier Bluntschli, who is not keen on fighting and risking his life but possesses first-rate bureaucratic skills, is assigned the role of the *moderniser* of a nation in transition, thus bearing out Shaw's conviction that progress "travels" from West to East. Bluntschli's approaching cross-cultural marriage to the Bulgarian Raina Petkoff, which is announced in the concluding part of the play and seems to link it, however tangentially, to Irish national tales, such as Sydney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806) and Bram Stoker's much more recent and highly melodramatic *The Snake's Pass* (1890), clearly implies that the Balkan "periphery" is bound to overcome its backwardness in due course and is to share at least some of the economic, political and cultural advantages of the "developed" world.

Added to Shaw's affirmation of Western superiority is his adherence to "a binary typology of advanced and backward (or subject) races, cultures, and societies" (Said 206). Despite his rejection of the excessive reliance on "race"¹⁰ for the explanation of cultural traits in *John Bull* (123), the playwright did share a concern with "racial" survival and extinction, and "weaker" and "stronger" races with a lot of late Victorian thinkers and writers.¹¹ In the Preface to *Plays Pleasant*, the Bulgarians are described as a "*spirited* race [my emphasis]" that has long been under "the despotism of the Turk" (15). In *Arms* itself, "the spirited race" is trying to assert its "Europeanness" through inept imitation of Western ways. Bulgarians are thus portrayed as *changing*, and this distinguishes them from the "races" making up the Orient "proper" which were stereotypically represented, in the nineteenth century, as passive and static.

Despite the dynamism of the newly emancipated Bulgarian nation, the legacy of "the Turk" is still an essential part of its present. Shaw represents Bulgaria as demi-Oriental. Its culture is characterised by a high degree of semiotic instability which manifests itself in the uneasy coexistence of two sets of features. One set comprises traits that Shaw's Western European contemporaries tended to interpret as "Oriental": poor personal hygiene and habitual cigarette-smoking for women.¹² The features belonging to the other set are best described as quasi-Western insofar as they are the outcome of the play's Bulgarian characters' faulty interpretation of Western culture. Whereas the "Oriental" characteristics have presumably been produced by Bulgaria's long-term Oriental-Muslim domination, and are practically indigenous to the country, the quasi-Western ones have been imported only recently.

The play's Bulgarian characters emblematised the country's dynamic present. They are all represented as *changing*. The upper-class characters, Sergius Saranoff and the Petkoffs, are

involved in a series of Occidentalising exercises: they study and, to the best of their ability, imitate the manners and the mores of the West with the intention of passing for “genuine” Europeans. Within this context, Major Petkoff emerges as the character that is most impervious to change and most attached to the “old way” of life. While they do not share their masters' obsession with “Europe,” the servants Nicola and Louka are also going through a process of Westernisation. Significantly, neither masters nor servants acquire Western culture directly from one of the “established nations” of Western Europe. In Act I, Raina Petkoff reveals that she and her parents go to Bucharest, the capital of the neighbouring “young” state of Romania, “every year for the opera season” (35). She adds that she has spent “one month in Vienna” (35), a metropolis traditionally portrayed in British travelogues as replete with Oriental types and therefore not “properly Western” (Kostova, “A Gateway” 97). Nicola borrows his models of hygiene and dainty femininity from Russian culture (71), itself the product of (self-)Occidentalisation, as Shaw was to demonstrate in his 1913 one-act play *Great Catherine (Whom Glory Still Adores)* (22-23). Despite the Bulgarian characters’ “relay translation” of Western culture, they are bound to move forward. Resorting to the rhetorical synonymy of woman and nation, Shaw presents Bulgaria's passing from one stage to the other through the fates of the play's female characters: the servant Louka, her mistress Catherine Petkoff and Catherine's daughter Raina.

In accordance with a nineteenth-century idea of the *Volk* as deeply rooted in the land, the peasant Louka is the least Westernised of the three. This is signalled by her appearance: she wears a “peasant's dress with double apron” (22). In addition, Louka lacks the servility traditionally expected from a servant in the West, but is said to be “proud” and “defiant” (22). Last but not least, she cultivates the stereotypically Oriental habit of cigarette smoking. At the same time, Louka is different from other Bulgarian women in her position because of the cultural instruction that has been imparted to her by her fiancé Nicola. Nicola reminds her of her debt to him in an impassioned speech:

NICOLA: [scrambling up and going to her] Yes, me. Who was it made you give up wearing a couple of pounds of false black hair on your head and reddening your lips and cheeks like any other Bulgarian girl! I did. Who taught you to trim your nails, and keep your hands clean, and be dainty about yourself, like a fine Russian lady ? Me: do you hear that ? Me! (71)

Albeit indirectly, Louka has been (partially) Westernised.

Catherine Petkoff's Occidentalisation is likewise skin deep. She is intent on disguising her “Balkanness” by presenting a “civilised” facade, or, as we are told in a stage direction, she “might be a very splendid specimen of the wife of a mountain farmer, but is determined to be a Viennese lady, and to that end wears a fashionable tea gown on all occasions” (20). Catherine incessantly cultivates the external signs of “civilised” behaviour. For instance, she has taken to washing her neck every day. Her husband Major Petkoff finds this excessive and “unnatural” (43). As a newly introduced element of personal hygiene, regular bathing (“wet[ting] oneself all over with cold water,” as an anonymous Englishman stationed in Philippopolis is said to have done [43]) contrasts with the life style of the previous generation: the Major's own father “never had a bath in his life,” but nevertheless “lived to be ninety-eight” and was “the healthiest man in Bulgaria”(43).

Late nineteenth-century British spectators of the play must have been aware of the fact that Old Petkoff's life style was no different from that of slum dwellers in London and other industrial cities (cf. Eliza Doolittle's life style before her “metamorphosis”). By conflating underdeveloped but changing Bulgaria and the slums of a “civilised” Western metropolis such

as London on the basis of the hygienic habits of their inhabitants Shaw demonstrates the relativity of such concepts as “civilisation” and “barbarity.” This conflation also shows that the signs of “civilisation” that Catherine and the other upper-class Bulgarian characters are at such pains to cultivate are, in fact, part of a fantasy of the West that they themselves have produced. In the “real” West of the nineteenth century, a relatively small number of people were scrupulously clean. On the other hand, “real” society women in the same privileged entity were supposed to wear their tea gowns only at home when they entertained family members and friends informally.

The Petkoffs' daughter Raina exemplifies Bulgaria's semiotic instability at its most problematic. She insists on seeing herself and her family as thoroughly “European”; hence her naïve bragging to Bluntschli in Act I:

RAINA: Do you know what a library is ?

THE MAN: A library ? A roomful of books ?

RAINA: Yes. We have one, the only one in Bulgaria.

THE MAN: Actually a real library! I should like to see that.

RAINA: [affectedly] I tell you these things to shew you that you are not in the house of ignorant country folk who would kill you the moment they saw your Serbian uniform, but among civilised people. (35)

Being a dreamer, a reader of romantic fiction and poetry, and an admirer of nineteenth-century opera, Raina imposes on reality patterns derived from these spheres. For instance, she shelters Bluntschli in her bedroom in imitation of the magnanimous act of the old Castilian noble Silva in Giuseppe Verdi's opera *Ernani*, itself based on Victor Hugo's drama *Hernani* (*Plays Pleasant* 35). One may, indeed, see her as a Balkan Madame Bovary. However, unlike Flaubert's heroine, she is aware of the artificiality of art-derived patterns and of the fantasy quality of the signs of “civilisation” that she is consuming and (re)producing in her daily life. As a result, Raina leads a double life, involving affected posing, on the one hand, and clear-headed calculation, on the other. The following episode provides good illustration of both:

SERGIUS: [with fire] ... But enough of myself and my affairs. How is Raina; and where is Raina?

RAINA: [suddenly coming round the corner of the house and standing at the top of the steps...] Raina is here.

She makes a charming picture as they turn to look at her. ... Sergius goes impulsively to meet her. Posing regally, she presents her hand; he drops chivalrously on one knee and kisses it.

PETKOFF: [aside to Catherine, beaming with paternal pride] Pretty, isn't it?

She always appears at the right moment.

CATHERINE: [impatiently] Yes: she listens for it. It is an abominable habit. (46)

Raina is an early embodiment of the Shavian “Life Force,” and as such she is intent on making what would later on become known as a *good eugenic marriage*. The ideal of etherialised, “pure” womanhood to which she aspires in her relationship with Sergius is a fake. It only masks her true essence which is that of an inexorable man-hunter and manipulator (cf. Ann Whitefield in *Man and Superman*).

Sergius Saranoff's Balkan-grown Byronism is the masculine counterpart of Raina's Bovaryism. It is said to be the outcome of the “intense activity” into which the “[naturally] acute critical faculty” of this “clever imaginative barbarian” has been thrown by “the arrival

of Western civilisation in the Balkans”(44). By Western standards, his Byronic pose is irredeemably old-fashioned: the Bulgarian's “half tragic, half ironic air” would have fascinated “the grandmothers of his English contemporaries” (45). Significantly, even in the Balkan context, Sergius's Byronism appeals more to Catherine Petkoff than to her daughter. Raina distrusts his romantic posing largely because she recognises her own penchant for play-acting in it.

The servant Louka easily sees through the upper-class characters' fake romanticism. In fact, she predicts that Raina will gladly leave Sergius for Bluntschli, thus revealing herself as her mistress's all-knowing double and as a home-grown *realist*. For Shaw, *realists* are the ones who are bold enough “to lay[] hold of ... mask[s] that we have not dared to discard and reveal[] the disagreeable truth” underneath (Holroyd, locations 2413-14). Louka and Raina could be read as a composite figure standing for the emergent Bulgarian nation. Between them, they typify what, in conformity with a biological model of socio-historical development, are taken to be the “young” country's essential features: “barbaric” health, vitality, energy, shrewdness, and courage, but also imitation of old-fashioned foreign models, affectation, and counterfeit refinement. Given Shaw's contempt for *idealism*, perceived as “life by the rule of precedent” and as a predilection for “beautiful masks which the idealist puts for us on the unbearable faces of truth” (Holroyd, locations 2407-8), some of those are to be discarded as so much useless ballast as the Balkan country outgrows its present stage of (under)development.

Louka and Raina are the emblems of the change that is to shape their country's history. Quite significantly, they are responsible for the final reshuffling of marriage partners in a way that should point to the Balkan Ruritania's future development. Raina is matched with the Swiss Bluntschli, who stands for Western capitalism. Louka gets Sergius Saranoff, who badly needs her ministrations as an unmasker of spurious Western attitudes.

As the representative of the Western “centre,” Bluntschli is the character who is to sow the seeds of capitalism in the “gallant little state.” Significantly, the Bulgarians cannot look up to the Russians, who, as already remarked, were mistakenly assumed by Shaw to have had full command of their army in the war with the Serbs, to help them progress to capitalism. In his plays *Great Catherine* and *Annajanska, the Bolshevik Empress* (1918), Shaw portrays Tsarist Russia as a land of a backward despotism. His attitude to it strongly contrasts with his much later celebration of the Soviet Union as “the only country ... where you can get real freedom” and of Stalin as “the greatest man alive” and “a good Fabian,” to boot (Weintraub).

It has been said that in *John Bull* Shaw created “the stage Englishman” (Holroyd, location 2892). Bluntschli may be seen as “the stage Swiss.” He possesses a number of stereotypically “Swiss” qualities such as efficiency, down-to-earth practicality and ruthless punctuality (cf. the stereotype of the Swiss as a nation of watch-makers). However, national stereotyping is not the only key to Bluntschli's character. In the play's ideological mosaic, this particular product of Shaw's cultural-political imagination embodies the most typical traits of the capitalist middle class. The fact that he is a professional soldier rather than a merchant or an industrialist does not invalidate this assertion. As already hinted, Bluntschli's conception of war is thoroughly bourgeois: being a soldier is a trade like any other. Love of glory and heroism are not part of it. He tells Raina that he joined the Serbs “because they came first on the road from Switzerland” (28). In battle his most important consideration is physical survival: this is why he prefers to carry chocolate rather than cartridges.

According to Bluntschli, a romantic display of personal courage is thoroughly unprofessional. The outcome of a battle should be decided by the competence of the warring sides in making proper strategic decisions and by their use of advanced military weapons. Bluntschli himself is in the artillery and is spared the necessity of killing enemy soldiers in a hand-to-hand combat. He is convinced that the modern battlefield is no place for misplaced

idealism or cheap theatricals. This is why the sight of Sergius Saranoff at the head of the cavalry charge that leads to the final victory of the Bulgarian army only provokes an ironic reaction from him. The Bulgarian officer, he avers, is an inveterate *idealist* (in the Shavian sense of the word!), a Don Quixote who properly belongs on the operatic stage rather than in the modern world (31-32). Sergius' cavalry attack would have turned into a suicide mission, if the Serb artillery had been sent the right kind of ammunition. For the prosaic Bluntschli the course of history is "always already" determined by unromantic mistakes such as misplaced ammunition rather than by acts of grand heroism.

Bluntschli's choice of occupation should also highlight a contradiction which for Shaw was undoubtedly central to the middle-class mentality. Despite his sober practicality in professional matters, the Swiss regards himself as a romantic. Like the archetypal *homo economicus* Robinson Crusoe, who views his "wandering Inclination" (Defoe 5) as a source of endless trouble, Bluntschli claims that he "spoiled all [his] chances in life through an incurably romantic disposition" (85). In the founding fiction of European capitalism, Robinson's mobility emerges as the chief means whereby he achieves economic success. Because of his "romantic disposition" Bluntschli finds himself in a backward Balkan country which he sets out to "civilise" by teaching the locals the value of efficiency. As Majors Petkoff and Saranoff are not good at administrative work, he steps in and writes all orders that are needed for the disbanding of the army now that the war is over (30). There is no apparent reason why Bluntschli should burden himself with this activity. He belongs to the enemy army and the two Bulgarians are not his commanding officers. One possible explanation is that he cannot resist *work* – especially when he is confronted with the bumbling attempts of the two Bulgarian officers to solve the problems in hand. For Bluntschli, as for Robinson before him, work is the "principle of the legitimation of social power" (Moretti 30). The writing of orders and despatches does not bring any money but through it the Swiss establishes his superiority in civil matters over the two Bulgarians and gains prestige. This is also a good way of reminding us that he is the play's agent of modernisation: as some of the authorities on the subject have shown, modernisation is accompanied by "increasing dependency on bureaucracies" (McGrath and Martin 6).

Marriage to Raina should help Bluntschli fulfil his function as a historical agent and from this perspective the match of the "xenophilous" Bulgarian woman and the Swiss is highly desirable. Raina accepts his marriage proposal. However, the play does not end with wedding bells but with Bluntschli's solemn promise that he will be back to claim his bride and, presumably, to resume his function as the human instrument of modernisation "punctually at five in the evening on Tuesday fortnight" (89).

The two couples' marriages should lead to the establishment of "healthy" families constituting the "natural" units of the "young" nation's society. In addition, the approaching union of Raina and Bluntschli is an emblem of the integration of the Balkan "periphery" with the European "centre." The Sergius/Louka relationship, however, is more closely linked to the "periphery's" mixed culture and therefore represents the perpetuation of some of its semiotic instability, despite Louka's status as one of the play's realists. One feels that the marriage to Nicola, which she rejected, might have been more appropriate in terms of the plot's ideological organisation. Nicola, recognised by Bluntschli as "the ablest man" in Bulgaria (84), is the play's home-grown capitalist whose dream is to "set up a shop" in Sofia (83). The Swiss is so impressed with Nicola's abilities that he is prepared to "make him manager of a hotel if he can speak French and German" (84). However, the Nicola/Louka relationship must have been sacrificed by Shaw because it could not be fitted into the format of the "well-made play" of which *Arms* is an example, despite its iconoclastic content.¹³ As the play's sexually aggressive soubrette Louka *had* to become her mistress's rival and *had* to seduce Sergius.

Shaw's ability to make use of "conventional vehicles" (Wearing xx) for the expression of his advanced ideas is, to my mind, one of the intriguing aspects of the play.

Conclusion

Arms may be described as a serious *drame à thèse* which is concerned, on the one hand, with the debunking of idealism, in the Shavian sense of the word, and with Bulgaria's road towards modernisation, on the other. The play foregrounds the inevitability and desirability of modern change. Interestingly, its agent of modernisation Bluntschli emerges as a largely disinterested capitalist. He helps the Bulgarian officers with their administrative tasks, thus demonstrating the value of efficiency. His marriage proposal to Raina reveals, by his own admission, his "incurably romantic disposition" (85). Bluntschli's promise to return to Bulgaria does encourage speculation about his future plans and activities. For instance, one wonders if he might embark upon business ventures that would bring him substantial profits but could also result in the exploitation of the Bulgarians. But insofar as there are no indications in the play of such a scheme ever becoming reality, we cannot move beyond speculation. By and large, *Arms* presents us with a positive picture of modernisation: the natives do not resist it and it is likely to help them overcome the legacy of recent foreign domination and join Europe. Despite Bulgarian criticism of the play, it ends with anticipations of positive change for the Bulgarians.

Written ten years later, *John Bull* represents modernisation from a very different perspective. For one thing, the "Irish" play's chief agent of modernisation, the Englishman Broadbent, has very clear plans about the rural community of Rosscullen, which still retains vestiges of traditional Irish life:

BROADBENT: We'll take Ireland in hand, and by straightforward business habits teach it efficiency and self-help on sound Liberal principles. ... I shall bring money here: I shall raise wages: I shall found public institutions, a library, a Polytechnic [undenominational, of course], a gymnasium, a cricket club, perhaps an art school. I shall make a Garden city of Rosscullen: the round tower shall be thoroughly repaired and restored. (191)

Broadbent is helped in his business ventures by Larry Doyle, a practical and ruthless Irishman, who shares the Englishman's belief in efficiency. Doyle has the additional advantage of understanding the "native" mentality and seeing through the "masks" that some of the Irish characters put on when associating with Broadbent. The "Anglicised" Irishman's own behaviour has been approached in terms of Fanon's analysis of racism and colonial behaviour in *Black Skin, White Masks*: he deplores poverty and oppression in Ireland but clearly identifies with Broadbent's policy of drastic change and profit making (Ochshorn 184).

John Bull's plot also includes a cross-cultural marriage which could be linked much more easily to the earlier tradition of the Irish national tale insofar as it follows the "classical" formula of an Englishman marrying an Irishwoman. The Irishwoman in question is Nora Reilly, who enjoys prestige in Rosscullen on account of her modest fortune of forty pounds a year. As she has had to wait for Doyle for eighteen years, she accepts Broadbent's marriage proposal mostly to spite her Irish lover. Broadbent, however, wishes to marry her not because he has been swept off his feet by the charms of the "native" colleen but in order to facilitate his political and economic schemes. He immediately involves her in his canvassing campaign and she is mortified because she has to associate with people whom she has always regarded as her social inferiors (188-9). According to Kathleen Ochshorn, Nora "functions in the play

as a kind of symbol of the neglected, slightly weather-beaten charm of Rosscullen itself, and ... is essentially colonised by the broad-chested Broadbent” (188). She definitely lacks Raina’s youth, vitality and will power. In addition, her approaching marriage to Broadbent seems the diametrical opposite of the “healing” cross-cultural unions in Irish national tales, such as *The Wild Irish Girl*. It has been said about Owenson’s Glorvina that she “links her nation’s past and future, both embodying and healing its troubled history” (Ferris 242). It is impossible for Nora to accomplish such a task in the context of a play which presents modernisation as part of a long history of colonisation and loss.

Another significant difference between Shaw’s “Bulgarian” and his “Irish” play is that the potentially negative consequences of modernisation are envisaged in the latter. The eventual failure of Broadbent’s Syndicate is foretold by Peter Keegan, a defrocked Catholic priest whose identification with animals and insects recalls St. Francis of Assisi while his celebration of the divine and/in the human is reminiscent of William Blake. Keegan paints a grim picture of the commercialisation of Rosscullen, complete with “little children carrying the golf clubs of ... tourists” (189) and goes on to predict the liquidation of the Syndicate and the ruin of its investors and the people of Rosscullen (192).

According to Robert Meisel, *John Bull* is “the first Shaw play to project a sour future, a future we can recognise, whose colonialism and whose utopia may be found in holiday resorts and real-estate development” (131). It is also a play in which received ideas of progress and modernisation are thoroughly deconstructed. Shaw was able to discern and point out the dangers inherent in modernisation when writing about the land of his birth with which he identified closely. His “conjectural history” of modernisation in Bulgaria, a country he knew very little and decidedly did not identify with, could only convey some of the truth.

Notes:

¹ All subsequent references are to *John Bull’s Other Island* (2009) and will be given parenthetically in the text.

² There were exceptions. Thus, William Archer praised Shaw for having “set himself to knock the stuffing ... out of war” (22).

³ For a lucid commentary on the controversy over the use of the terms “South Eastern Europe” and “Balkans,” see Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, especially pp. 38-61. In the present essay, the two political-geographical terms will be used interchangeably.

⁴ My reference is to the title of Vesna Goldsworthy’s seminal book *Inventing Ruritania. The Imperialism of the Imagination* (1998).

⁵ From Maria Todorova’s term “Balkanism” which designates the complex patterns of South Eastern Europe’s “othering” by the West. See her *Imagining the Balkans*, especially pp. 5-20.

⁶ My reference is to Shaw’s 1898 Preface to *Plays Pleasant*: “the political and religious idealism which had inspired Gladstone to call for the rescue of these Balkan principalities from the despotism of the Turk, and converted miserably enslaved provinces into *hopeful and gallant little States* [my emphasis]” (15).

⁷ On the withdrawal of all Russian officers from the Bulgarian army in 1885, see Crampton 123.

⁸ Derogatory references to the British Liberal leader Gladstone abound in *John Bull*. Liberalism is also mocked in Shaw’s 1913 one-act play *Great Catherine (Whom Glory Still Adores)* in which the eponymous heroine poses as a champion of Voltairean principles and prides herself on being a “Liberal Empress” (22).

⁹ Unless otherwise indicated, all subsequent references are to *Plays Pleasant* (1946) and will be given parenthetically in the text.

¹⁰ On “race” as a classificatory category in accounts of human diversity and on the word’s uses in nineteenth-century contexts, see Kostova, “Countering” 349-351.

¹¹ On Shaw’s later fascination with eugenics, see Laura Doyle, p. 12.

¹² On the link between poor personal hygiene and Oriental life, see, Boner 42. On habitual smoking as part of the stereotype of the Oriental woman, see Malek Alloula, pp. 67-83.

¹³ For a reading of *Arms* as a well-made play, see J. P. Wearing’s Introduction to the 2008 Methuen Drama edition of the play.

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