Character Analysis:

**Raina Petkoff:**

Raina is one of Shaw's most delightful heroines from his early plays. In the opening scenes of the play, she is presented as being a romantically idealistic person in love with the noble ideal of war and love; yet, she is also aware that she is playing a game, that she is a poseuse who enjoys making dramatic entrances (her mother is aware that Raina listens at doors in order to know when to make an effective entrance), and she is very quixotic in her views on love and war.

Whenever Raina strikes a pose, she is fully aware "of the fact that her own youth and beauty are part of it." When she accuses Bluntschli of being "incapable of gratitude" and "incapable of any noble sentiments," she is also amused, and she is later delighted that he sees through her "noble attitude" and her pretensions. In fact, her attraction for Bluntschli is partly due to the fact that she can step down off the pedestal which she must be upon, metaphorically, whenever she is in Sergius' presence. She shocks her mother when she says that she would like to shock Sergius' propriety since he is such a "stuffed shirt." Yet, at first, she is filled with undefined ideals. She admires Sergius' victories, but she is also genuinely troubled by the reports of the suffering and slaughter that accompany the war. She does respond immediately to the plight of the Serbian soldier (Captain Bluntschli), even though just a few moments earlier, she was delighting in Sergius' victory over the Serbs. And when there is the possibility of an actual slaughter taking place in her room (the Swiss soldier vowed to kill rather than be killed — even though we later discover that this was a bluff since he had no bullets), she impetuously decides to hide him and help him escape. When Bluntschli ridicules Sergius' quixotic cavalry charge, she pretends to be offended, but she is secretly glad that her intended is not "perfect."

Of Raina, Shaw wrote in an essay entitled "A Dramatic Realist to his Critics":

The heroine [Raina] has been classified by critics as a minx, a liar, and a poseuse; I have nothing to do with that: the only moral question for me is, does she do good or harm? If you admit that she does good, that she generously saves a man's life and wisely extricates herself from a false position with another man, then you may classify her as you please — brave, generous and affectionate; or artful, dangerous, faithless — it is all one to me. . . .”

Raina, then, is perhaps a combination of all the above qualities. She is romantic, for example, when she remembers an opera (Verdi's Ernani) in which a member of the aristocracy shelters an enemy; thus, she shelters Bluntschli, since it is "chivalrous" to protect him. She does possess exalted ideals, but she is also pleased to step down from her pedestal and enjoy life directly; finally, in spite of her aristocratic background, she marries a person with "the soul of a hotel keeper."

**Captain Bluntschli:**

Captain Bluntschli is a thirty-four-year-old realist who sees through the absurd romanticism of war. Furthermore, unlike the aristocratic volunteers who are untrained, amateurish idealists, Captain Bluntschli is a professional soldier, trained in waging a war in a highly efficient, businesslike manner. These methods allow Sergius to refer to his ability to wage a war as being low-class commercialism, devoid of any honor and nobility. Bluntschli would agree with this appraisal since he sees nothing romantic about the violent and senseless slaughter of human beings, even though it is his profession.

Being a professional soldier, he adopts a practical and wise view (his name is a combination of *Blunt,*plus the ending, which in Swiss means "sweet" or "endearing" or "lovable"). Given the choice of being killed or saving his life by climbing up a balcony and into a lady's bedroom, he chooses unheroically not to be killed. Practically, he knows that a dead professional soldier is of no value to anyone; thus, he saves his life by the most expedient method available — he hides in a lady's bedchamber. Likewise, given the choice of killing someone or of not going hungry, he chooses to eat rather than to kill; thus, he carries chocolates rather than cartridges, a highly unromantic but very practical thing to do.

When Bluntschli first hears of Sergius' cavalry charge and refuses to view Sergius' actions in any way except as a foolhardy display of false heroics, he reveals his complete practicality and subjects himself to Raina's charge that he is "incapable of appreciating honor and courage." Yet, his questioning of Sergius' actions causes Raina to question Sergius' qualities.

Bluntschli does possess some qualities which cause Raina to exchange the "noble and heroic" Sergius in favor of him. Raina's perfect honesty, in fact, allows her to relax and to come down from her pedestal. Bluntschli's fondness for chocolates in the midst of war is appealingly incongruous. His docility, combined with his efficiency, endears him to others, especially the entire Petkoff family, and, finally, he reveals to the established group that he is an incurable romantic. He explains that he could have sent the old coat back, but that he wanted to return it personally so that he could have one more glimpse of the entrancing Raina. Thus, he wins her for his "affianced wife."

**Sergius Saranoff:**

Sergius is the epitome of what every romantic hero should be: He is dashing, swashbuckling, devastatingly handsome, idealistic, wealthy, aristocratic, brave, and the acclaimed hero of a recent crushing victory in a recent cavalry raid which he led. He is possessed of only the loftiest and most noble ideals concerning war, romance, and chivalry, and he represents the quintessence of what a noble Bulgarian aristocrat should be. Yet Sergius is more than this. He is an aristocrat, but he is a Byronic type who has certain ideals, and he is likely to become thoroughly disillusioned when these ideals fail. For example, Sergius did go to war filled with high ideals, and he did lead a heroic and courageous cavalry attack; later, however, he discovered that wars are not conducted by bravery and courage; they are more often waged and won better by efficient and practical planning than they are won by glorious and chivalric deeds. For Sergius, then, war is only fit for sons of hotel keepers, who have something of the tradesman about them. For that reason, Sergius has resigned from the army in complete disillusionment.

After having become cynical about soldiering, Sergius becomes skeptical about his relationship with Raina. After all, as he tells Louka, it is rather tiresome having to live up to Raina's "ideal of the higher love." It was he, however, who placed Raina on a pedestal so high, in fact, that he was blinded to any possible fault she might have. When Louka reveals all of Raina's faults — Raina lies, she pretends, and she has entertained another man in her bedroom — Sergius then feels free to cast his affections where they normally lead him — into marriage with the attractive Louka.