

# **THE CONCEPT OF THE SUPERMAN IN SELECTED PLAYS BY GEORGE BERNARD SHAW**

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## ABSTRACT

Modern society and its deplorable and deteriorating conditions stimulated many creative writers to look for something better. They began to suggest alternatives that, they hoped, might replace the suffocating ones that built the modern society. Among those writers is George Bernard Shaw, who combines his creative thinking with his zeal to better the nature of human beings. His intolerance with politics, his hatred for random drifting, and his passion for social order put him out of patience with the painfully lethargic movement of a free society.

Consequently, his extensive readings and his wide experience gave him the conviction that unless there is a change there will be more calamities, and unless there is a Superhuman being to lead society, it will still linger in the fens of its degeneration. This Superman is motivated by the Shavian Life Force, which chooses the betterment of society as its sole purpose. He is also endowed with political, religious, economic as well as social expertise to improve and lead his society. He, in fact, casts off any personal aim or interest that may hinder him from achieving universal goals.

Shaw, in fact, is interested in those who wrote about the theories of evolution and the human will. He believes that the Superman is an evolved creature, whose will is his guide to reach his aims. Therefore, Shaw read the theories of Jean-

Baptist Lamarck, Charles Darwin and Samuel Butler who wrote about evolution. Also he read Arthur Schopenhauer's theory of will, along with Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy of the "Overman".

The present study aims at showing the differences between Shaw's theory of evolution and the Superman, and the theory of Lamarck, Darwin, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Butler, whose ideas, the critics believe, have influenced Shaw. It also aims at pursuing his concept of the Superman in five of his plays. The study is divided into three Chapters and a Conclusion followed by a Bibliography.

The First Chapter is an Introduction. It is divided into two Sections. Section One is devoted to surveying the opinions of those philosophers and scientists who wrote about will, evolution and the Superman, stressing the points of departure between them and Bernard Shaw. The Second Section casts light on Shaw's philosophy of the Superman and his theory of the Life Force. It first shows the difference between him and the preceding philosophers and scientists, highlighting the impact of Butler on Shaw's creative philosophy. It also defines Shaw's Superman, manifesting his characteristics and explaining how Shaw was influenced by Julius Caesar and Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) in illustrating these characteristics.

The Second Chapter includes three Sections tackling three of Shaw's plays. The first Section studies *Candida*, stressing

how Candida's firmness and personality help the poet, Marchbanks, to realize his potential. It also shows how Candida's and Marchbank's influence make Candida's husband, Morell, see his illusions and abandon them. The second Section analyses *The Devil's Disciple*, illustrating the impact of Dick Dudgeon's sacrificial act on the Puritan society. The third Section handles *Man and Superman*, displaying the Shavian philosophy of Life Force and the Superman through the philosophic speech of John Tanner and Don Juan in the play. It shows how man is entangled by the toils of woman, who is, in the Shavian philosophy, the agent of the Life Force.

The third Chapter consists of two Sections, also discussing two of Shaw's plays. The first Section tackles *Back to Methuselah*, in which Shaw displays the cycle of the human evolution from the beginning up to the farthest point Shaw's mind can reach, showing in the five-part-play how man's malignant thinking destroys humanity and causes human beings to suffer. The second Section discusses *Saint Joan*, which represents the apogee of Shaw's philosophy of the Superman. Through the character of Saint Joan, Shaw impersonates the highest qualities that a human being ever had. Her unbreakable belief and her resolute soul command her to defy even death to assert the word of truth.

The thesis ends with a Conclusion, which sums up the findings of the study. This is followed by a Bibliography.

