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## **Creative Evolution in Shaw's *Man and Superman***

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### **ABSTRACT:**

*George Bernard Shaw, the greatest English dramatist of the modern age is a philosopher. Through his dramas he aims not merely to entertain the readers, but also to tell them something profound about life. He presents a coherent and comprehensive view of human nature and of human life. He is thus a Creative Evolutionist. 'Man and Superman' is regarded as one of the best plays of Shaw. Here Shaw puts his philosophy of Creative Evolution in a dramatic form. He was right in calling Man and Superman 'Comedy' and a 'Philosophy', for the play is a rich storehouse of Shavian thought, but this serious thought – content is treated in the most light- hearted comedy. This paper while focusing on Shaw's theory of Life Force and Creative Evolution, discusses how it is incorporated in the theme of the famous drama 'Man and Superman'. The paper also reflects how man and woman becoming slaves of instincts, work together for Creative Evolution.*

**KEY WORDS:** Life Force, Creative Evolution, Instincts, new species, higher intelligence.

Shaw is regarded as the greatest English dramatist of the modern age, and his contribution to British theater is considered second only to that of William Shakespeare. Rejecting the outmoded theatrical conventions, Shaw succeeded in revolutionizing British drama. He has been credited with creating the “theater of ideas,” in which plays explore issues of sexism, sexual equality, socioeconomic divisions, the effects of poverty, and philosophical and religious theories. He is also credited with creating the serious farce, a dramatic genre that inverts melodramatic conventions and utilizes comedy to promote serious views on public policy, social institutions, and morality. Shaw is a creative evolutionist. He is a philosopher in the sense that he has tried to present a coherent and comprehensive view of human nature and of human life. He also shows the way in which human life should best be lived.

Shaw believes that there is a mysterious power which controls nature and works for the betterment of life in all stages. He calls this power the Life Force. Throughout the ages it has been making experiments in evolving better and better forms of life. When life progresses towards a new form, the Life Force considers whether it is perfect. If it finds the form imperfect it creates in those creatures the instincts to improve. Those who ignore this instinct and care only for pleasure are left where they are. Those who heed the mysterious call of the Life Force for betterment move forward. He has come to the conclusion that the Life Force is the essence, the ultimate reality behind the world of the senses. S.C Sengupta rightly remarks, “He has found that the other things might be Fictitious: but there can be no skepticism about life (the Life Force) which does exist and cannot be dismissed as a Maya”. This theory makes its appearance from time to time in his various plays. It is this theory of Life Force that mocks at all accepted ideals and makes Shaw a “Creative Evolutionist”.

*Man and Superman* is regarded as one of the best plays of G.B.Shaw. Here Shaw put his philosophy of Creative Evolution in a dramatic form. It made Shaw the leader of the new drama of ideas. Presenting a biological theory in a dramatic form was no easy matter. But because of Shaw's comic genius a most entertaining play was produced on a most serious theme. For thousands of years the poets and dramatists of the world have been weaving a veil of romance and mystery over the relations between men and women. Shaw tore veil at one stroke by showing that in affairs of the heart the woman is the hunter and man her prey. The play is concerned with the love-chase of the man by the woman. Shaw's idea is that the Evolutionary Will or the Life Force has been working for millions of years for the evolution of life into higher and higher forms.

### **THEORY OF LIFE FORCE: IT'S AIM**

Shaw believed that even in the very beginning universe contained both Life and Matter. Life always seeks to dominate and subdue matter. It is for this reason that Life enters into matter and animates it. The result is a living organism: it is life expressed in matter. Shaw suggests that Life uses matter as an instrument because Life cannot evolve or develop unless it enters into matter and creates living organisms. Life has two purposes: (1) the immediate purpose of life is to acquire new faculties and higher intelligence. This is done by creating living organisms. Matter, though Life's enemy is also, "the whetstone upon which life sharpens itself in order that it may advance further". Matter limits the operation of the Life force, thus forcing it to make efforts to overcome these limitations and thus acquire new powers and new faculties. (2) The ultimate object of the Life Force is to pass beyond matter, i.e. the necessity of incarnating itself in matter, of depending upon matter for its evolution. When this is achieved, Life's individualized expressions will become permanently individualized, i.e. immortal.

### **THE WAY IN WHICH LIFE FORCE OPERATES:**

Shaw defines Life Force as, Vitality with a direction, expressing itself in the will to create matter or to mould matter which it finds, but which it has not created. Will to do anything, can do that thing, and the will to create, if sufficiently intense, can create. By intense willing evolution takes place, new organs are developed in the existing species and ultimately there is the development of new species. Thus by the intense willing of the vital Life Force new and higher forms of life are evolved. First, there is desire, then imagination, then will, and then creation. "You imagine what you desire; and at last you create what you will." This evolution is not towards forms of greater beauty or physical strength but towards higher and higher forms of intelligence. New powers of mind, powers of insight, vision and intelligence are gradually developed because Life Force wills them, so that it may evolve more effectively towards higher forms of life. Evolution takes place not continuously or faultlessly, but through a constant process of trial and error. Life enters matter so that it may be transcended: it is a ladder which must be scaled in order that, having arrived at the top, life may pass on to something higher.

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### **MAN, AN INSTRUMENT OF THE LIFE FORCE:**

Since man is the instrument of the Life Force for the evolution of higher forms, he must act in a way which is likely to further the evolutionary process. It is by the maximum expenditure of effort and energy in working and thinking that a man will develop his existing faculties and thus contribute his might to the process of evolution. His increased intelligence and faculties will become a part of the common heritage, and so in the next generation life will express itself at a slightly higher level, and the process will continue from generation to generation. Such effort will result in happiness, for it is the furtherance of the purpose for which we were created.

### **THE FEMALE PRINCIPLE:**

According to Shaw's conception, the initial form of life was female. No man was with her. She created man by "sundering herself in twain". Shaw conceives the Life force as working through woman to create man, who is designed to carry life to higher levels. The Hell Scene in *Man and Superman* tells that, "Sexually woman is Nature's contrivance for perpetuating its highest achievement. Sexually Man is woman's contrivance for fulfilling Nature's behest in the most economical way". Thus the romantic notion of love which glorifies womanhood is mocked at by Shaw's philosophy.

### **THE SEXUAL BAIT:**

The Life Force has created the impulse of sex for the betterment of Race because when there is a union of two creatures both inspired by a strong will to improve, a better offspring is likely to be produced. Far back in the evolutionary process, woman invented man for her own impregnation, because in this way, "something better than the single-sexed process can produce. But as man is assigned so small a part in the process of reproduction-he has not to undergo the exhausting labour of child birth-he has at his disposal a store of surplus energy which he has used to invent, "dreams, follies, ideals, heroism". "He has become too strong to be controlled by her bodily needs, and too imaginative and mentally vigorous to be content with mere self-reproduction." Art and literature and such other higher activities divert his attention from the purely biological purpose for which woman created him. But as woman is biologically primary and man biologically secondary woman is able to subdue him in most cases by first turning him into an adorer of herself-hence the romance of love and marriage-and when he has been ensnared by the bait of sexual attraction, by turning him into a bread-winner for herself and her children. Hence it is that Shaw considers marriage a heavy chain. In order to wean man away from his "artistic or idealistic activities", she shares man's interests and ideals. But this is only a bait to convert man into a suitable bread-winner-an ideal father and husband.

### **THE LIFE FORCE IN MAN AND SUPERMAN:**

In *Man and Superman*, we see the Life Force in action. In this play, Octavius is in love with Ann. He has a poetic temperament. He knows all the defects of Ann but he is madly in love with her. She encourages him and calls him "Ricky-Ticky-Tavy" but does not love him. He is

a broken man at the end of the play. Ann does not have a romantic attachment with John Tanner. He loves her in a vague manner but he has no idea that she is determined to marry him. He thinks that she is in love with Octavius. When Straker tells him that Ann's intention seems to be to marry him, he runs away. He wants to preserve his freedom. He knows that marriage will be a hindrance to his revolutionary work. Ann pursues him across the continent though she was not having any emotions for him. Shaw believes that it is by the power of Life Force Ann acts as its agent. She feels instinctively that Tanner would be the best father for the Superman. She refuses to be a poet's dream. She rejects happiness as unimportant. She does not care for the world's opinion. She does not bother if the world laughs at her, calls her shameless. She does not pause to think. Driven by her instincts she pursues Tanner across the European continent, catches him in Spain and tries all her wiles to persuade him to marry her. At the crucial moment the Life Force "enchants" Tanner. He fights for his freedom upto the last moment. But instinct finally triumphs and she is victorious. Ultimately he succumbs to her, saying, "The Life Force enchants me. I have the whole world in my arms, when I clasp you". He renounces the happiness, freedom and tranquility and takes up the cares of family. Here we realize that Ann and Tanner are being used by an irresistible force as instruments for a purpose greater than themselves. Ann and Tanner have a good personality and a highly developed intellect, and they have come together on the basis of their instincts and so we expect that their offspring will be a superman.

The conclusion of the play is a gloomy one for Shaw. By marrying Ann, Tanner admits that woman bolstered by the "Life Force" is bound triumph that man even the superman is bound to abandon the pursuit of his own goal to serve woman in goal of perpetuating the race.

The interaction between Don Juan and the Devil is just as important as that of Ann and Jack Tanner. Due to the fact that Tanner dreams up this sequence and is said to be Don Juan in his dream we can now parallel the two characters. After juxtaposing Don Juan and Tanner it becomes apparent that Shaw is using Don Juan as a vessel for his revolutionary ideas. He becomes a rebel against God and is transformed into a saint and thus an idealist, it is he who becomes and predicts a superman who is God defying. Just like Tanner, he is not bound by earthly obligations; in fact Shaw intentionally makes Don Juan opposite from his normal stereotype as a womanizer and even mocks those in hell who do look for sexual satisfaction. Don Juan embodies everything Shaw feels his superman is to be. He holds the ideals of libertine such as Tanner but owes nothing to the life force that would ground him to earth. However, it is this life force that stops a great man like Tanner, that ultimately chooses who will become a superman. Don Juan states that evolution strives to make god-like men, but only those men seen fit by the life force, which Shaw considers himself as a chosen one.

Hopefully the drama *Man and Superman* successfully achieves its aim of sending a message about Creative Evolution. Coupled with the fact that Shaw brought the ideas of many ideological thinkers into this work there becomes an overwhelming feeling that this is more than a dry love story. The third act holds the "Don Juan in hell" scene that many refer to as a play in itself. This "play" holds more of the political commentary than found throughout the real play. It is here that Shaw writes how democracy will fail and that there needs to be a strong few to pick the country up after its demise. The institution of marriage that Shaw continually attacks in *Man and Superman* is in fact more than just an attack on that

institution. It is an attack on what the government has created through that institution. Marriage has become something forced upon the two due to a life force. Some critics feel this life force is a biological thinking, however, others feel the life force is a term used for the state. There are so many more benefits that await a couple who marry that it seems that the government is endorsing marriage and condemning bachelorhood. In *Man and Superman*, Shaw used character interactions to voice his thoughts and opinions.

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