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## Life force theory in George Bernard Shaw 's play Back To Methuselah

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### Abstract

Shaw's greatness does not lie in the fact alone that he is a genius of the stage. His greatness also depends on the fact that he has presented a social philosophy which is of much value and importance in our age, the age of conflict between war and peace, capitalism and socialism, conservatism and humanism. In order to convey the meaning of life-force theory to the society, Shaw has presented his characters in a very lively manner. In his play Back To Methuselah, he expounded the philosophy of the life-force and Superman. The play expresses the Shavian idea about creative evolution of the life force. Shaw believed in the life to come. According to his philosophy the Life-Force or Elan Vital is making experiments in order to create better forms of life. In other words it can be said that life is gradually evolving. But what will be the goal of this evolution, this has been answered by Shaw in various ways. In Man and Superman Shaw expresses his views vaguely the the purpose of creative evolution is to evolve super human beings. But this idea has been given a systematic philosophic form in Back To Methuselah. The present research article my aim is to highlight the LIFE-FORCE THEORY in GEORGE BERNARD SHAW'S play 'BACK TO METHUSELAH'.

**Keywords:** Elan Vital, Evolution, Humanism, Life-Force, Shavian Philosophy, Demolished.

### 1. Introduction

The first act of the play brings out the fact that Life Force discards old forms of matter in order to create new forms. What is death to other, to Shaw it is only a re-birth of a better form of life than the older form. Life is never demolished. It only changes its material existence. It discards one form and takes another form of matter. It is obvious that Shaw believes in the evolution of life. In the revolutionary process it uses matter. It cannot fulfill its instinctive purpose unless it enters into matter. In this process it changes the forms of matter and rejects decaying substance in order to evolve itself into a better form of matter. The Serpent in the first act, 'In The Beginning', teaches the first lesson of creative evolution of Eve. It tells her how it is born, reborn and born again. It only changes its skin and never dies. Death means only a change for it. Explaining this fact, Shaw speaks through the Serpent:

"The Serpent never dies. Some day you shall see me come out of this beautiful skin, a new snake with new and lovelier skin. That is birth."

The Serpent further educates Eve in the process of creative evolution:

"You see things; and you say why? But I dream things never were; and I say, 'why not?' I made the word dead to describe my old skin that I cast when I am renewed. I call that renewal being born."

When Eve learns at first about rebirth, she says "Born is a beautiful word", and at this the serpent suggests her the first lesson in the process of creative evolution:

Why not be born again and again as I am, new and beautiful every time.

It is clear that Shaw not only believes in rebirth but also believes that death is only change in the form of matter. Re-birth has been used deliberately. The same life which rejects the old form of matter –emerges again and again in the various forms of matter v; the new form of matter being better and beautiful than the old one. In this regard C.E.M. Joad has tried to bring out the Shavian concept of creative evolution in the following lines:

"Shaw postulate a universe containing two factors: Life and Matter, which he normally thinks of as being in opposition to each other. Life cannot fulfill itself, cannot further its own instinctive purpose,.....unless it enters into matter and uses its matter."

(b) Location of the Higher Education Institution

(c) Participating event.

Change is the law of life-this is the belief of Shaw. Life is not static. It is dynamic. It cannot dwell in a single state, place or thing.

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Evolution is in the nature of life. Adam has lived in eternity. But he is annoyed to live the same life, the eternal life in the Garden of Eden. When Eve tells him that they need not live forever as they may die, Adam exclaims with a great longing for change:

“If only there may be an end some day, and yet to end! If only I can be relieved of the horror of having to endure myself forever! If only the care of this terrible garden may pass on to some other gardener! If only the sentinel set by the voice can be relieved! if only the rest and sleep that enable me to bear day to day could grow after many days into an eternal rest, an eternal sleep then I could face my days, however long they may last. Only, there must be some end, some end: I am not strong enough to bear eternity.”

Shaw believes in two things: matter, which can decay gradually and fade away and life which never decays but emerges in it newer forms of matter. Life is an instinct, a will, an inspiration. Matter is nothing in comparison to life. Life enters into matter only because it wants to evolve itself. It is the decaying matter which wants death and likes eternal sleep. But life does not want an eternal sleep or rest; it is continually making experiments and evolving. This is why Joad thinks that matter and life are two opposite things. In This drama Adam represents matter and the Serpent represents life.

Creative Evolution does not mean that the eternal life should only change forms. It means that life emerges itself in better forms because it has a purpose, and that purpose is nothing else, but to create a superman, a race superior to the present one having greater power and knowledge. The present race is only a means to achieve that purpose and, hence, every endeavour must be motivated by this aim of creation of super mankind. Franklyn, the expounder of Shavian concept of creative evolution, dwells on this idea. When Conrad tells that the “Eternal Life” emerges in the young ones, Franklyn tells:

Yes, bodies and minds ever better and better fitted to carry out its eternal pursuit.....The pursuit of omnipotence and omniscience. Greater power and greater knowledge: these are what we all are pursuing even at the risk of our lives and sacrifice of our pleasure. Evolution is that pursuit and nothing else. It is the part of godhead.”

Shaw believes in a concept of creative evolution according to which life is striving hard to reach its destination, to godhead, to spiritual height. It is trying to free itself from matter in order to become omnipotent and omniscient like God. But it cannot achieve this end till it evolves fully. Matter is only a means to the end, to the path of godhead. Life has manifested itself into various forms of matter which life has enslaved in order to achieve its eternal pursuit. The life force may discard the present man in order to achieve its eternal pursuit of infinite power, and infinite knowledge, in order to reach to the height of perfection. The future mankind, which life will enslave, will be certainly a superman. So Shaw thinks that if we want to co-operate with life in its pursuit, our first and foremost task should be to create a congenial atmosphere for the creation of superman. Hence, the necessity of a system of perfect breeding which Shaw has tried to present in the third act of this drama.

Franklyn stresses on the need for emergence of superman in his speech:

The force behind evolution, call it what you like, is determined to solve the problem of civilization; and if it cannot do it through us, it will produce more capable agents.

You and I are not God’s last word; God can still create. If you cannot do his work, he will produce some being who can.

The Life –Force proceeds by the method of Trial and Error and so it may discard man if he proves to be useless in the evolution of life. Conrad says:

“The power my brother calls God proceeds by the method of trial and error; and if we turn out to be one of the errors, we shall go the way of the mastodon and the megatherium and all the other scrapped experiments.”

As life becomes limited and restricted in its material form so it tries to become free from matter. Commenting on the concept of Shavian Creative Evolution, C. E. M. Joad has observed:

But life has expressed in Matter is limited and restricted by the material form in which it is expressed....having emancipated itself from matter, Life which began as pure force ends up as pure thought, and that presumably, so far as Shaw thought takes us, is the ultimate purpose of the whole development of life.”

Joad’s statement is justified by the following lines told by She-Ancient:

“The body was the slave of of the vortex; but the slave has become the master; and we must free ourselves from the tyranny. It is this stuff (indicating her body), this flesh and blood and bone and all the rest of it, that is intolerable. Even pre-historic man dreamt of what he called an astral body, and asked who would deliver him from the body of this death.”

Joad’s expression that life ends in pure thought is justified by Martellus who says:

This body always ends by being a bore. Nothing remains beautiful and interesting except thought because thought is life.

Life does not destroy itself, even if matter ends. Life is eternal and will evolve higher and higher, this is that Shaw dwells on in Back to Methuselah. This is perhaps, the best drama of Shaw which discusses the concept of creative evolution in full detail. Revealing about the eternity of life Lilith says after Adam and Eve disappear as pure thought:

They have accepted the burden of eternal life. They have taken the agony from birth; and their life does not fail them even in the hour of their destruction.

This pure thought evolves into pure intelligence to which Lilith refers:

Best of all, they are still not satisfied, the impulse I gave them in that day when I surrendered myself in twain and launched Man and Woman on the earth still urges them: after passing a million goals they press on to the goal of redemption from the flesh, to the vortex freed from the matter, to the whirlpool in pure intelligence that, when the world began, was a whirl pool in pure force. And in the end it says:

“I am Lilith; I brought life into the whirlpool of force, and compelled my enemy, Matter to obey a living soul. But in enslaving life’s enemy I made him life’s master; for that is the end of all slavery; and now I shall see the slave set free and the enemy reconciled, the whirlpool become all life and no matter.”

And Shaw ends this play with a proclamation by Lilith:

“Of life only is there no end; and though of its million starry mansions, many are empty and many still unbuilt, and though its vast domain is as yet unbearably desert, my seed shall one day fill it and master its to its utter most confines.”

Thus Shaw seems to believe that life never ceases its revolutionary process and is ever striving hard to manifest itself in the superior forms.

## **2. Conclusion**

There is no end to the conflict that has been depicted here .It is a continuous struggle between the life force and the spirit of protest and as the march of creative evolution is incessant, this struggle will pass from one generation to another through its different phases. G. B. Shaw was the distinguished dramatist of England, who propounded the theory and concept of life force. He considers that the wills of females are more determined than male. This is the reason that almost in all his plays women were influenced and commanded by life force. So it is noticed that the concept of life force is very relevant in the plays of GB Shaw.

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