

Don Juan in Hell in terms of Nietzsche's Superman in Shaw's Man and Superman

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Abstract

One of the most famous philosophers of the modern era is Nietzsche's whose works have been very influential in the political atmosphere of the 20th century. Nietzsche's introduction of Superman has affected Western world entirely. One of the followers of Nietzsche's idea of a superman who can bring happiness to humans is George Bernard Shaw. This article seeks to represent how Bernard Shaw reverberates Nietzsche's idea of Superman in his Man and Superman. He introduces a new term which can help humanity to nurture and bring about a new Superman who can redeem humanity. He relies on Darwin theory of natural selection to propose that in order to create a superman, social natural selection must be applied and this must be the only criteria for people to choose mate and partners.

Key words: Nietzsche, Superman, Shaw, Life Force, Man and Superman

Introduction:

George Bernard Shaw born in July 26th, 1826, in Dublin Ireland was a playwright, literary critic and Noble Prize winner for literature in 1925. He belonged to a protestant family and his father was a sinecure civil servant and then an unsuccessful grain merchant, all these led to a genteel poverty which he later remembered as a torture. Shaw was tutored by his clerical uncle, and he basically rejected the schools he then attended. Gareth Griffith in *Socialism and Superior Brains* The political thoughts of Bernard Shaw explains that Shaw's reputations rests on his scintillating work in music and drama criticism such as *Saint Joan* and *Major Barbara* (1993:1). Later he explains, what is overlooked is his role in Fabian society

...serving on its executive committee for more than twenty years. (p. 2). In this newly formed socialist club Shaw and his associates hoped to transform English society through culture. He also became a pacifist and an antiwar activist, attracting much criticism during World War I.

One of the most famous plays by Shaw is *Man and Superman* written in 1903. The play contains four acts. Theme of the play is based on Don Juan, an Italian fictional character who devoted his life to seducing women. The most famous part of the play is named *Don Juan in Hell*, this act is a nonrealistic dream episode. William Irvine in "*Man and Superman, A Step in Shavian Disillusionment*" claims that, socialism is the dominant subject in all the Shaw's plays,

and since it was a very detested subject, he left it as a definite theme after Mrs. Warren's Profession and did not return to it until *Man and Superman* (1947:206). So, *Man and Superman* is a "complex satire of socialism itself." (p. 206).

Fredrich Nietzsche was born on October 15, 1844. He was a German philosopher and cultural critic who published most of his works in 1870's and 1880's. As Anderson, R. Lanier describes in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2021 Edition), Nietzsche is famous for "uncompromising criticisms of traditional European morality and religion, as well as of conventional philosophical ideas and social and political pieties associated with modernity" (p. 1). Nietzsche's *On Genealogy of Morals* is one of the most influential works of modern philosophy in which he attacks the institution of Christianity and church. Moreover, he brings a new definition to the idea of history. "Nietzsche proposed a new outlook towards history which promotes the idea that history is always subjective and both history and the historian are under the influence of some particular ideologies" (Poorghorban, 2020, 42). One of the most famous concepts which he introduces is the concept of Superman. William M. Staller in an article named "Nietzsche's Superman" published in the *Journal of Philosophy Psychology and Scientific Methods* (1915), claims that, "this concept popularized by George Bernard Shaw in the play *Man and Superman*." (p. 421).

In "Shaw's Superman: A Re-Examination" (1970) Carl Henry Miles argues about two false impressions of the Superman, "one is based on deliberate misinterpretation of Nietzsche's phrase "big blond beast" and on Shaw's approval, with explicit reservation, of Mussolini, Hitler and Stalin" (p. 49). He continues and claims that the second false impression is based of romanticism in comic

books of Superman and TV shows these things show strength, military prowess and virtue. The author continues and believes that neither of these are like the Shaw's Superman because "one is deliberately distorted reality and the other is just and illusion". (p50). This article seeks to represent that although Shaw tried to distance himself from Nietzsche's ideas and have an Irish voice of his own, he fails to create a different paradigm and follows Nietzsche's idea of superman.

In "Social Criticism in Shaw and Nietzsche" (1967), Carl Levine points out the main difference between Nietzsche's Superman and Shaw's Superman, "Herein lies the difference between the Superman conceived by Nietzsche and that of Shaw. Nietzsche envisaged the gradual creation of a higher species of men, a new class which would exist in a stratified society consisting for the most part of the great mass of humanity, which would remain at the same low level as before and be ruled by the élite. Shaw, however, passionately believed it possible and desirable to raise the general level of all mankind" (p. 14). What Levine fails to understand is that the whole idea of a superman which can simultaneously serve and rule humans was first proposed by Nietzsche in his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

He continues and asks how was this new race of men come to being? the answer is marriage something that both Nietzsche and Shaw attacked. In "Characters' Appraisalment in G. B. Shaw's *Man and Superman* in Terms of Van Leeuwen's Social Actor Representation" (2018) Ah Oda writes how Shaw introduced the idea of evolutionary development and uses the Nietzsche's concept of superman to create a superior race. He explains that "in *Man and Superman* Shaw asks how this higher type of humanity might be eugenically created" (p. 57). He continues and claims. "Shaw rejects the romantic love and argues that sex

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relates properly to the weal and woe of the species, not merely to the individual. So, he clearly demonstrates the tragicomic aspects of man–woman relationship” (p. 57). In fact, sexual intercourse must be solely allowed if it ends in procreation. Failure to follow this purpose can lead to chaos.

In “The Concept of insanity through Nietzsche's Superman theory in four different literary works and cultures; *Rope*, *Hamlet*, *Midnight's children* and *Man and Superman*” (2020) Barutlu claims that Shaw makes a different perspective about Nietzsche's theory of Superman, he believes: “The most interesting part is that Shaw puts Don Juan into Hell searching for the Superhuman while Nietzsche is a resident of Heaven and the Superhuman itself although Nietzsche has never seen himself as Superhuman”. (p. 64). People around Nietzsche thought he created this theory to explain his role in society, but in fact, he was just a role model for society. Barutlu believes the image Nietzsche created with his Superhuman theory is someone who has a capability to even rule people with their knowledge and intelligence. Finally, he believes that all people in society try to become more like this role model even though it's something impossible they never give up trying and eventually it leads to their madness. He continues that although there are plenty of understating and misunderstandings about superhuman theory,

“Shaw expresses that Jack Tanner, who has a resemblance with Don Juan (Juan Tenorio) in everything, is a man of honor who never fits into the society but enjoys manipulating them because he is more intelligent than most. Even though he never seeks power, his actions bring this ideology to him and make him a superhuman. His strong psychology lets him handle everything he desires, but again, the society does not let him play however he likes to” (p. 77).

In the article “Confluence of Minds: A Comparison of Nietzsche's and Shaw's; Vision of a Better Mankind” (2016) Aravind talks about the concept of superman according to Shaw: “Superman according to Shaw is the future of mankind. It is a being of far more superior intellect which is born to replace the feverish and selfish humankind of today”. (p. 25) Shaw claims that Man has been evolving in many other ways, for instance, his ability to alter agriculture, microscopic organisms and many material advancements; in short, his attempts at changing mother nature to his advantage. Aravind poses a question, why can't human use these abilities to improve mankind itself? He answers:

“Superman serves as an answer for this question and is a far more developed form of human being who has the virtues of a better intellect, cunningness and intuition, strength to defy the outdated moral code and dwells on self-defined values and assumptions. The world has produced some such men who, though not precisely reflecting the characteristics of a superman would come very near to what Shaw envisaged even though they don't satisfy exactly the same standards” (p. 26).

Later on, Aravind talks about the two characters similar to the concept of superman. The first character is Jack Tanner who is much ahead of his time and “believes in free love and disdains the institution of marriage” (p. 26). Aravind believes that this character is something that Shaw created to showcase the moral sense. The other character that resembles the superman concept is Don Juan, he strives for excellence and tries to bring something better into the world, according to Shaw, this is the most fundamental trait of superman. It must be noted that Nietzsche's conception of a superman is similar to Plato's idea of knowledgeable guardians who would and must rule the people. What

Shaw seeks to represent is the way to create a superman.

Nietzsche, Shaw, and the Superman

Before any attempt to link Nietzsche and Bernard Shaw in terms of similarities, I would like to explain some key terms shortly. Bernard Shaw, “one of the most significant playwrights of the nineteenth century” (Poorghorban, 2020, p. 214), who composed many dramatic works, was significantly influenced by many philosophers and artists. Shaw’s “socialist tendencies allow him to observe all social circumstances from a different view” (Poorghorban, 2021, p. 30). One of these philosophers, was Friedrich Nietzsche, whose ideas were not considerably appreciated by Shaw and he constantly tried to distance himself from Nietzsche specially after the play *Man and Superman*. By reading Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, it is feasible to link Nietzsche’s philosophical concepts to those of Bernard Shaw. Shaw has meticulously brought a philosophical debate in Act 3 of his play. The key concepts which will be illuminated with no further ado are as follows:

Übermensch: Nietzsche (1969) in his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* sheds light on the idea of Übermensch when he suggests: “Behold, I teach you the superman. The superman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the superman shall be the meaning of the earth! (p. 39). According to what Nietzsche proposes, God is dead, not in the literal sense but he means that the values he has created are meaningless. Therefore, a new set of values is needed and it is not feasible to achieve such values, but with assistance of the superman.

To Nietzsche, Christianity is the worst of all enemies for humanity since it obliges humans to be inert in the world and blindly follow the old laws which suggest that man is sinful and he should consistently repent to

be able to go to heaven. “My Ego taught me a new pride, I teach it to men: No longer to bury the head in the sand of heavenly things, but to carry it freely, an earthly head which creates meaning for earth” (Nietzsche, 1969, p. 57). Suggesting a creator of values, it should be considered that this new creator must be highly effectual.

Nietzsche’s Übermensch is a person who can overcome himself, he does not blindly follow the conventions, he is the creator of new values and attempts to lead men to higher intellectual state for man is free when he is knowledgeable. He uses “discourses to produce meanings” (Poorghorban, 2021, p. 249). He despises the blind followers and he is only created, according to Nietzsche, when men and women of higher intellect and higher health provide the proper atmosphere for him to be. He has the will to power and attempts to rise this in all humans.

Life Force: Shaw in *Man and Superman* introduces a term by Don Juan entitled the Life Force. When the idea of natural selection was introduced by Darwin, there came to existence a lot of controversial ideas. Natural selection suggests that evolution happens not through a thoughtful force but through chance. “Shaw rejects this notion of a mindless universe and says that there is an impersonal creative will at force that directs all living things towards its evolution” (Aravind, 2016, p. 26). Shaw in the play disputes that marriage is a means to evolve mankind, he proposes people marry for wrong reasons since the supreme reason in his view is merely procreations of intellects that leads to evolution and lastly to the creation of a creator, the superman.

In Act 3 of the play known as *Don Juan in Hell*, there occurs a debate between, Don Juan, The Devil, Ana, and her father in a shape of a statue. Don Juan who represents Tanner himself disputes that he considers

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heaven a better place than hell. The sketch of Hell and Heaven which Shaw gives the reader varies significantly from that of Milton or Dante. In Shaw's hell, people are doomed to enjoy beauty and pleasure, it is the boredom that irritates, but Statue, who was formerly in heaven considers heaven the most boring place of all since there is no word of beauty nor the laziness of human being thus, he does not enjoy it.

Don Juan: Senor Commander: I do not blame your disgust: a picture gallery is a dull place for a blind man. But even as you enjoy the contemplation of such romantic mirages as beauty and pleasure; so, would I enjoy the contemplation of that which interests me above all things namely, Life: the force that ever strives to attain greater power of contemplating itself. What made this brain of mine, do you think? Not the need to move my limbs; for a rat with half my brain moves as well as I. not merely the need to do, lest in my blind efforts to live I should be slaying myself. (p. 130)

In the instance above, Juan claims the same set of belief as Nietzsche did in Thus Spoke Zarathustra for man to cry for more. More power, more knowledge, more intellects and more of whatever makes man a greater being fully flourished. Juan later expands his philosophy in the same act:

Don Juan: In the heaven I seek, no other joy. But there is the work of helping life in its struggle upward. Think of how it wastes and scatters itself, how it raises up obstacles to itself and destroys itself in its ignorance and blindness. It needs a brain, this irresistible force, lest it its ignorance it should resist itself. (p. 130)

He proposes that man needs to overcome himself and by doing so through his intellect he must attempt to bring about better form of life, a kind of life to its fullest but not to the fullest of pleasure, to the fullest of human capacity. In another instance Juan

explains how it is possible for men to be triggered into bringing Life into its best state when he says:

That is perhaps why the battles are so useless. But men really never overcome fear until they imagine they are fighting to further a universal purpose fighting for an idea, as they call it. Why was the Crusader braver than the Pirate? Because he fought not for himself, but for the cross, what force was it that met him with Valor as reckless as his own? (p. 135)

He proposes in order to trigger mankind into such a great deed, man needs to be aware of the scope and the significance of such a deed which eventually leads to creating a superman that comes and creates new values and perfect us. On the other hand, Tanner, in spite of his ignorance to Anna, accepts to marry her. The reason can be suggested due to Tanner's understanding of the purpose of life and marriage; hence he denounces his selfishness and accepts to marry her for the greater good. It must be mentioned that the idea of a greater good cannot only be found in Nietzsche's ideology; however, Shaw's socialist view affected how he thinks of humans as collective beings who are in need of one another in order to thrive and become better creatures.

Conclusion

Shaw's *Man and Superman* is an example of a strong belief in Nietzsche's idea and conception of the Superman. Nietzsche's superman is someone who can bring bliss and happiness to all human beings by introducing new sets of values which can embellish the old ones or entirely eradicate them. Shaw's *Man and Superman* must be considered as a way to create and produce superman. In this sense, it is a didactic play which suggests the readers to marry, not for pleasure, not for love, but only to create a superman which can redeem man and his existence on the face of the planet.

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