

WILLING PROGRESS: THE LITERARY LAMARCKISM OF OLIVE SCHREINER,
GEORGE BERNARD SHAW, AND WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

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While the impact of Darwin's theory of evolution on Victorian and modernist literature has been well-documented, very little critical attention has been paid to the influence of Lamarckian evolutionary theory on literary portrayals of human progress during this same period. Lamarck's theory of inherited acquired characteristics provided an attractive alternative to the mechanism and materialism of Darwin's theory of natural selection for many writers in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, particularly those who refused to relinquish the role of the individual will in the evolutionary process. Lamarckian rhetoric permeated an ideologically diverse range of discourses related to progress, including reproduction, degeneration, race, class, eugenics, education, and even art. By analyzing the literary texts of Olive Schreiner, G.B. Shaw, and W.B. Yeats alongside their polemical writing, I demonstrate how Lamarckism inflected these writers' perceptions of the mechanism of human evolution and their ideas

about human progress, and I argue that their work helped to sustain Lamarck's cultural influence beyond his scientific relevance.

In the dissertation's introduction, I place the work of these three writers in the context of the Neo-Darwinian and Neo-Lamarckian evolutionary debates in order to establish the scientific credibility and cultural attractiveness of Lamarckism during this period. Chapter II argues that Schreiner creates her own evolutionary theory that rejects the cold, competitive materialism inherent in Darwinism and builds upon Lamarck's mechanism, modifying Lamarckism to include a uniquely feminist emphasis on the importance of community, motherhood, and self-sacrifice for the betterment of the human race. In Chapter III, I demonstrate that Shaw's "metabiological" religion of Creative Evolution, as portrayed in *Man and Superman* and *Back to Methuselah*, is not simply Bergsonian vitalism repackaged as a Neo-Lamarckian evolutionary theory but, rather, a uniquely Shavian theory of human progress that combines religious, philosophical, and political elements and is thoroughly steeped in contemporary evolutionary science. Finally, Chapter IV examines the interplay between Yeats's aesthetics and his anxieties about class in both his poetry and his 1939 essay collection *On the Boiler* to show how Lamarckian modes of thought inflected his understanding of degeneration and reproduction and eventually led him to embrace eugenics.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the last twenty-five years, there has been an explosion of interest in the intersections between Darwinism and literature, which can be attributed primarily to the flowering of interdisciplinary studies, the renewed debates about evolution in contemporary cultural discourse, and the 1983 publication of Gillian Beer's landmark book *Darwin's Plots*. This interest in Darwin among literary scholars has taken many forms, but most notably, three distinct modes of Darwinian literary criticism have emerged: that which traces the influence of Darwinian thought on literary texts and their production, that which analyzes Darwin's own writings as literary texts, and that which seeks to prove the validity of Darwinian evolution by applying theories from evolutionary psychology to literary texts.¹ What most of these accounts elide, however, is the fact that Jean-Baptiste Lamarck's theory of evolution as articulated in *Zoological Philosophy* (1809), which preceded Darwin's by fifty years, found renewed support in the wake of the Darwinian revolution. As Peter Bowler argues in *Evolution: The History of an Idea*, "Our vision of the whole Darwinian revolution has been skewed by the fact that the evolutionary movement became known as Darwinism even though the theory of natural

selection was not widely accepted” (275). Bowler recovers Lamarck from the considerable shadow of Darwin and demonstrates that in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, several competing theories of evolution were being championed by various factions within the sciences; the most prominent of these were Darwinism and Lamarckism, which quickly developed into neo-Darwinism and neo-Lamarckism, more extreme versions of their founders’ theories.² By focusing solely on Darwin’s legacy and failing to accurately historicize the evolutionary landscape of this period, literary critics have failed to account for the profound impact Lamarckism had on literary and cultural production. It is my contention that the tension between Darwinian and Lamarckian evolutionary theories during this period both reflected and shaped broader debates within and between nineteenth and twentieth-century ideologies of pessimism and optimism, secularism and religion, cultural despair and cultural progress, competition and community.

The most prominent feature of Lamarckian evolutionary theory is the claim that organisms evolve by inheriting acquired characteristics or habits; thus, any physiological changes that occur during an organism’s life can be transmitted to that organism’s offspring. Darwin’s theory of natural selection, on the other hand, explains the evolution of species as the result of a process whereby an organism that possesses a trait that allows it to more successfully interact with its environment will be more likely to survive, reproduce, and therefore pass that trait to its offspring. While Lamarck’s theory of the inheritance of acquired characters was in most ways antithetical to Darwin’s theory of natural selection, these two theories were not initially as exclusive of one another as their

later followers came to see them. The first edition of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* allowed a minor role for the inheritance of acquired characteristics in the evolutionary process, demonstrating that the two theories were not necessarily diametrically opposed (Bowler, *Eclipse* 28). However, in the 1880s, evolutionary biologist August Weismann transformed Darwinism into a much more conservative and rigid theory of natural selection that took as its premise "hard" heredity, "the complete inability of the body to influence the genetic information passed on to the next generation," thereby effectively excluding Lamarckism as even a minor factor in the evolutionary process (Bowler, *Eclipse* 41). This polarization of Darwinians under Weismann, known as neo-Darwinism, was occurring at the same time that Lamarck's theories were once again becoming popular with scientists who accepted evolution but rejected natural selection. This new movement was dubbed "neo-Lamarckism" by American scientist Alpheus Packard in 1885, and it emerged as an attractive alternative to Darwinism (Bowler, *Eclipse* 59). In his 1890 *Universal Review* essay "The Deadlock in Darwinism," Samuel Butler, who helped to popularize Lamarckism by bridging the gap between the scientific and literary communities, pointed out that, while "[t]en years ago Lamarck's name was mentioned only as a byword for extravagance," the Lamarckian revival had progressed to a point where "now, we cannot take up a number of *Nature* without seeing how hot the contention is between his followers and those of Weismann" (*Essays* 308). Butler's Lamarckism was largely a reaction against what he saw as the "baseless" and "repulsive" "nightmare of waste and death" that the "extreme Charles-Darwinians and Weismannists" promoted (308); however, despite this bias, his insistence here that

Lamarckism was gaining a significant foothold in evolutionary discourse is nonetheless an accurate representation.

Herbert Spencer also contributed to the early popularization of Lamarckian ideas. Spencer coined the term “survival of the fittest” and is credited with creating the theory of “Social Darwinism” (Bowler, *Evolution* 225). However, this latter term is a misnomer, as is the common conception of Spencer as a prominent Darwinian advocate, because his own social and political theories relied heavily on Lamarckian constructs. Although Spencer was sympathetic to some Darwinian ideas, he was strongly opposed to the extremism of neo-Darwinians in their insistence that natural selection was the sole evolutionary mechanism, and he strongly defended the theory of the inheritance of acquired characters (Bowler, *Evolution* 239). However, he claimed that “desire” had no role in this process and that any such suggestion only served to confuse our understanding of the mechanism of heredity (Spencer, Vol. I 494). And yet, like many writers who followed him, Spencer’s own rhetoric reflects the influence of intentionality, particularly when he moves his evolutionary arguments from the human body to the human mind. In “Human Population in the Future,” the final chapter of *The Principles of Biology*, Spencer asks us to “consider in what particular ways this further evolution, this higher life, this greater co-ordination of actions, may be expected to show itself,” demonstrating that he viewed evolution as a linear, goal-oriented movement toward a “higher life” (523). He goes on to consider the many human qualities that might be slated for future evolution. After rejecting “strength” and “swiftness or agility” as possibilities and explaining how humans will most likely evolve “mechanical skill” in a

limited way, he explains why both “intelligence” and “morality” will be the most likely sites for future human evolutionary progress (523-24). In his argument for moral or emotional evolution, Spencer employs a distinctly Lamarckian argument in order to make his case that morality will “perhaps most largely” be responsible for the direction taken by human evolution (525):

Right conduct is usually come short of more from defect of will than defect of knowledge. For the right co-ordination of those complex actions which constitute human life in its civilized form, there goes not only the pre-requisite—recognition of the proper course; but the further pre-requisite—a due impulse to pursue that course. On calling to mind our daily failures to fulfil often-repeated resolutions, we shall perceive that lack of the needful desire, rather than lack of the needful insight, is the chief cause of faulty action. A further endowment of those feelings which civilization is developing in us—sentiments responding to the requirements of the social state—emotive faculties that find their gratifications in the duties devolving on us—must be acquired before the crimes, excesses, diseases, improvidences, dishonesties, and cruelties, that now so greatly diminish the duration of life, can cease. (Vol. II 524-25)

Spencer’s identification of “defect of will” and “lack of needful desire” as the most important factors in the failure of people to act morally demonstrates a pseudo-Lamarckian understanding of individual agency in the evolutionary process. Lamarck did not directly attribute use-inheritance to the actions of a conscious will, particularly in

non-human species; instead, he claimed that the will “can only be present in those which possess a special organ for intelligence; and that even in these, which include man himself, it is not always the motive of the actions performed” (Lamarck 355). However, many neo-Lamarckians inflected Lamarck’s theory of use-inheritance with individual agency, believing that humans could consciously acquire inheritable habits and characteristics. This is one way in which, just as neo-Darwinism was a more narrow and disciplined theory than its founder had intended, neo-Lamarckism did not always accurately represent Lamarck’s ideas.

Spencer’s discussion of the “feelings which civilization is developing in us” draws more faithfully from Lamarck in its suggestion that humankind is developing “sentiments responding to the requirements of the social state,” an idea very close to Lamarck’s theory that animals develop “habits” and “characters” in response to their physical environments. At the end of this passage, Spencer adds a sense of urgency to the Lamarckian mechanism he is employing: instead of using Lamarck’s theory in an explanatory way, to describe how humans evolve, Spencer uses language to suggest a proactive evolutionary agenda in which “emotive faculties [. . .] must be acquired” in order to protect ourselves from the internal and external agents of death and degeneration. Spencer’s use of the word “acquired” further cements the Lamarckism inherent in this passage because it suggests Lamarck’s “inherited acquired characters,” thus linking Lamarck’s theory to his own progressivist agenda. Through the work of non-scientists like Spencer who appropriated and promoted Lamarckism for their own purposes and scientists who heavily revised Lamarck’s theories in order to more viably compete with

Weismann's neo-Darwinism, Lamarckism became increasingly infused in the public discourse and began to profoundly influence the evolutionary imagination.

Although Lamarck was careful to deemphasize the role of the will in the mechanism of evolution, those who championed his theory only needed to take a few short steps in logic to create a modified Lamarckism that allowed for personal control in the evolutionary process. Lamarck's most famous example of use-inheritance in *Zoological Philosophy*, which served as the most convincing evidence for those who wanted to emphasize the role of the will in Lamarckism, is his story of how the giraffe got its long neck:

It is interesting to observe the result of habit in the peculiar shape and size of the giraffe (*Camelo-pardalis*): this animal, the largest of the mammals, is known to live in the interior of Africa in places where the soil is nearly always arid and barren, so that it is obliged to browse on the leaves of trees and to make constant efforts to reach them. From this habit long maintained in all its race, it has resulted that the animal's fore-legs have become longer than its hind legs, and that its neck is lengthened to such a degree that the giraffe, without standing up on its hind legs, attains a height of six metres (nearly 20 feet). (122)

The "constant efforts" that the giraffes must exert to reach the leaves, which result in a "habit" that is passed down biologically from generation to generation until long front legs and a long neck are eventually achieved, leave the impression that the giraffe has achieved this rare body type through the biological manifestation of a desire to reach the

best food.³ On the strength of this example, and use-inheritance in general, many adherents to Lamarck's theory claimed that "Lamarckism is a more purposeful mechanism than selection, since the desires of the animal indirectly control its own evolution" (Bowler, *Eclipse* 62). However, conceiving of evolution as a will-driven process was only possible when talking about animals, and so the other primary aspect of Lamarckism, which was sometimes called environmentalism and sometimes "physiogenesis" by neo-Lamarckians, was needed to explain how both plants and animals evolved unconsciously in response to their environments.

Lamarck explains the phenomenon by which organisms evolve in response to environmental stimuli by using the example of *Ranunculus aquatilis*, a white flower that grows in freshwater bodies:

So long as *Ranunculus aquatilis* is submerged in the water, all its leaves are finely divided into minute segments; but when the stem of this plant reaches the surface of the water, the leaves which develop in the air are large, round and simply lobed. If several feet of the same plant succeed in growing in a soil that is merely damp without any immersion, their stems are then short, and none of their leaves are broken up into minute divisions, so that we get *Ranunculus hederaceus*, which botanists regard as a separate species. (111)

Here we see a plant evolving based on changes in its environment rather than by consciously using its body in a way that will make it more successful in that environment. The plant acquires inheritable habits, but through an unconscious response to direct

stimuli. While this aspect of Lamarckian evolution was not immediately attributable to the agency of the individual, the idea that one's environment could cause inheritable changes in the body led some to believe that animals, particularly humans, would be able to take some responsibility for their own evolutionary development by leaving or altering their environments (Bowler, *Eclipse* 63).

Peter Bowler provides an important corrective to the “nonsense” that he claims has been written about Lamarckism by those who oversimplify Lamarckism as a purely optimistic, progress-oriented theory of evolution. As he demonstrates, Lamarckian scientists fell into roughly two camps: those who had an ideological interest in using Lamarck's theory to demonstrate that evolution progressed along a linear path (orthogenesis) and “those for whom the inheritance of acquired characters was purely a mechanism of adaptation, more purposeful than Darwinism but no more likely to generate regular patterns of evolution” (*Eclipse* 58). This is an important distinction, and certainly true within the scientific community. However, within popular, non-scientific intellectual culture, this distinction became blurred, and the promise of progress offered by Lamarckism, particularly when human agency could affect that progress, was the aspect of the theory that had the most clear and accessible social applications. Because the writers I consider here were not scientists, this project focuses primarily on these broader applications of Lamarckism rather on the inheritance of acquired characters as an adaptive mechanism with no cultural value attached.

Although the most common way that Lamarckism was transmitted into popular discourse was through the optimistic notion of evolutionary progress and the promise for “life itself to be seen as purposeful and creative” (Bowler, *Evolution* 244), it could also be used to support theories of racial degeneration. Some Lamarckians, particularly those who leaned toward an orthogenetic view of evolution, thought that acquired habits or characteristics might eventually cease to be useful to an organism, at which point they would become nonadaptive and may cause the organism’s evolution to slow, stagnate, or reverse (Bowler, *Eclipse* 63). This idea contributed to what Bowler calls “the darker side of Lamarckism’s implications” (*Eclipse* 66). As I demonstrate in the following chapters, Lamarckian rhetoric could be employed in support of both positive and negative eugenics, both of which were reactions to cultural anxieties about degeneration, reproduction, race, and class.

Although Lamarckism’s popularity among scientists began its slow decline around 1900 with the discovery of Mendel’s work on genetics, it still maintained strong advocates in the sciences well into the 1920s. It is also clear from the non-scientific writing of the time that Lamarckian ideas had become firmly rooted in the public imagination, so that even when scientists began to eschew Lamarck in favor of other theories of evolution, Lamarckian tropes still operated within the public discourse. Paul Kammerer, a German experimental biologist, made important contributions to this continuation of Lamarck’s popularity. Kammerer conducted experiments on toads, salamanders, and newts that he claimed proved the viability of the inheritance of acquired characters. Although Kammerer committed suicide in 1926 after he was accused of

faking his experiments, his popularity before he was publicly discredited gave Lamarckism a temporary boost in scientific credibility and also helped to keep visions of evolutionary progress alive in the public imagination (Koestler 13). In his 1912 article “Adaptation and Inheritance in the Light of Modern Experimental Investigation,” published in the *Smithsonian Institution Annual Report*, Kammerer reports the results of his own experiments that seem to prove the viability of the Lamarckian theory, and he then discusses the recent discovery of “the inheritable transmission of protection against bacterial or other toxins” (439). He announces that “[t]his wonderful new result, together with all those previously attained, opens an entirely new path for the improvement of our race, the purifying and strengthening of all humanity” (439). The immediate link Kammerer makes between the inheritance of an acquired immunity and “improvement of our race” demonstrates why Lamarckism was so attractive to both scientists and laymen: the idea that it is possible for humans to strive toward a more promising biological future, toward becoming more fit for life on earth and in society, is an attractive one. Kammerer goes on to disparage Darwin’s theory of natural selection without actually calling it by name, claiming that this “new path for the improvement of our race” is “a more beautiful and worthy method than that advanced by fanatic race enthusiasts, which is based upon the relentless struggle for existence, through race hatred and selection of races, which doubtless are thoroughly distasteful to many” (439). The fact that Kammerer equates the Darwinian “relentless struggle for existence” with “race hatred and selection of races” indicates that by 1912, Darwin’s theory had been taken up by many scientists and social theorists who used natural selection as justification for scientific racism. Kammerer’s

rhetoric in this passage deftly demonizes Darwinists as “distasteful” while simultaneously painting Lamarckism as a “beautiful and worthy” alternative. As I will demonstrate later in this dissertation, however, Lamarckism was no more immune to use for racist, classist, and eugenic ends than Darwinism. Kammerer’s optimism about the far-reaching effects of experiments in Lamarckian evolutionary theory intensifies as he endows human accomplishments with evolutionary potential: “If acquired characters, impressions of the individual life, can, as a general thing, be inherited, the works and words of men undoubtedly belong to them. Thus viewed, each act, even each word, has an evolutionary bearing” (439). Here, Kammerer pushes beyond the boundaries of science in order to imply that every action, every decision, “even each word” uttered by a human has the potential to alter the course of human evolution. By singling out the “word” as an evolutionary act, Kammerer includes both speech and writing in the evolutionary schema, thus suggesting that literature has the potential to change the course of human evolution. The writers in this study certainly believed that their words had “evolutionary bearing,” particularly those who were the most overt in their Lamarckism. Thus, it is possible to see a reciprocal relationship between literature and Lamarckism, one in which the tenets of Lamarckism inspire literary texts and the authors of those texts view themselves as contributing to the evolutionary process through a Lamarckian mechanism.

By the 1920s, most experimental biologists had given up trying to prove that acquired characteristics were inherited, but Lamarckism experienced a resurgence in interest in 1923 when Kammerer visited England to give a highly-publicized speech to the Cambridge University Natural History Society. The front-page banner of the *London*

Daily Express for May 1, 1923 read, “Wonderful Scientific Discovery,” and the lead article on that page was a report on Kammerer’s lecture entitled “Eyes Grown in Sightless Animals” (“Eyes Grown”). The large-font subtitles read, “Scientist Claims to Have Found How to Transmit Good Qualities,” “Hereditary Genius,” and “Transformation of the Human Race,” indicating that Kammerer’s discovery held exciting promise for human evolution. In the article, the author leads by reporting that Kammerer had made a “startling claim” in his lecture the previous night:

It is that experiments which he has made open up a new future for mankind. His object has been the improvement of humanity by enabling the good qualities which a man cultivates in his lifetime to be handed down to his children as part of their nature—in other words, to speed up evolution and even to make genius hereditary. Results which he has achieved suggest the entire readjustment of the theory of heredity. (“Eyes Grown,” emphasis in original)

Although sensationalist in its rhetoric, the press coverage of Kammerer’s claims to have finally proven Lamarck’s theory of inherited acquired characteristics demonstrates that there was still an eager audience for Lamarckian evolutionary ideas and that the public mood in England was sympathetic toward a version of evolution that gave humans agency in their own evolutionary development.

Of particular interest in this article is the author’s emphasis on the “improvement of humanity” through the transmission of “good qualities” that are acquired, presumably, through education and refinement. One of the subheadings for the article is “Eugenics

Superseded,” which suggests, along with this excitement about the inheritance of positive traits, a link between Lamarckism and eugenics, in this case positive eugenics. However, even though Kammerer’s experiments were clearly Lamarckian, and when he is quoted in the article he is careful to say that when he refers to the transmission of traits, he does “not mean those with which [a person] is born,” the article ends with a quotation from a “prominent biologist” who identifies Kammerer’s work as Darwinian: “It is a striking development of the work of Darwin on evolution and of Mendel on heredity” (qtd. in “Eyes Grown”). When the *New York Times* reported this same story a month later, they also linked Kammerer to both Darwin and Mendel and failed to make any mention of Lamarck (“Scientist Tells”). Thus, even while Kammerer was promoting the most fundamental tenet of Lamarckian evolutionary theory and being hailed as having “made perhaps the greatest biological discovery of the century,” he was being misidentified as a Darwinist (qtd. in “Scientist Tells”). This demonstrates that, among non-scientists and even some scientists, the differences between Lamarckism and Darwinism were not well understood. Therefore, even when the majority of the Lamarckian players in the evolutionary debates had given up on the inheritance of acquired characters, the nonscientific public, those outside of these debates, were eager to embrace this version of evolution.

Most work on evolution and literature has focused on the naturalist and realist texts of the Victorian period because modernist critics tend to emphasize the formal and ideological break from Victorian positivism and the resulting emphasis on fragmentation.

While this is certainly one important way to view the differences between these two literary movements, it also establishes an artificial division between them that fails to take into account the continuities within the broader culture that help to contextualize the literature. It also fails to acknowledge the fundamental similarities between these two modes of thought, for, while modernists found themselves confronted by a fragmented world, they, too, sought to bring order to that world. In “The Mind of Modernism,” James McFarlane identifies three stages in the transition from Victorian to modernist thought:

Initially, the emphasis is on fragmentation, on the breaking up and the progressive disintegration of those meticulously constructed ‘systems’ and ‘types’ and ‘absolutes’ that lived on from the earlier years of the century, on the destruction of the belief in large general laws to which all life and conduct could be claimed to be subject. As a second stage [. . .] there came a re-structuring of these parts, a re-relating of the fragmented concepts, a re-ordering of linguistic entities to match what was felt to be the new order of reality. [. . .] Finally, in its ultimate stages, thought seemed to undergo something analogous to a change of state: a dissolving, a blending, a merging of things previously held to be forever mutually exclusive. A sense of flux, the notion of continuum, the running together of things in ways often contrary to the dictates of simple common sense (though familiar enough in dream) alone seemed to help in the

understanding of certain bewildering and otherwise inexplicable phenomena of contemporary life. (80-81)

Lamarckism was particularly well-suited to fill the needs that arose in the second stage in this process. If one aspect of the “new order of reality” was the value placed on the individual and, with the modernist turn toward both psychology and mysticism, the individual mind and spirit, then the claims many Lamarckians made about the power of the individual to forge his or her own evolutionary path would have provided a rubric under which to reorganize the fragments. The “sense of flux” and “notion of continuum” that McFarlane identifies as the final manifestation of modernist thought seems antithetical to a theory of evolution that, in most applications, privileged progress. However, as McFarlane points out, many modernists embraced myth as a “highly effective device for imposing order of a symbolic, even poetic, kind on the chaos of quotidian event” and a means of responding to “this situation of growing fluidity” (82). I see a corollary between certain interpretations and applications of Lamarckism and this modernist impulse toward recovering ancient myths and revising them to help reorder the chaos of modern life. George Stocking identifies a tendency among Lamarckian social scientists to apply the doctrine of inherited acquired characters to broader claims about cultural or “race” memory. For instance, he describes the views of the influential American psychologist Granville Stanley Hall (1844-1924), who applied the neo-Lamarckian idea of recapitulation to the development of the human mind: “Hall’s recapitulationism assumed that, just as the development of the human embryo recapitulated the physical evolutionary history of its phylogenetic ancestors, so did the

developing individual human mind retrace in its major outlines the mental history of the race” (243-44). This conviction that humans maintained a racial memory, which consisted of an accumulation of inherited acquired mental habits, meant that humans could preserve a connection to the past while simultaneously creating new mental habits that would revise and supplant the old ones. Modernist myth-making operated under a similar logic, especially for those writers, often influenced by Nietzsche, who sought some kind of cultural cohesiveness.

In their essay “The Name and Nature of Modernism,” McFarlane and Malcolm Bradbury claim that one major feature of modernism was a tendency to “suppress certain features of modern sensibility—some of its optimism in history, science, evolution and progressive reason” (49). This definition of modernism, as a movement that rejected nineteenth-century values and modes of thought such as teleology, progress, race-improvement, and didacticism, is, while accurate when describing some practitioners of modernism, ultimately limited by the narrow parameters of modernism upon which it relies. The high modernist, avant-garde definition of modernism includes writers such as Eliot, Joyce, Pound, and Woolf who distanced themselves from their Victorian predecessors through formal innovations in their writing and who in many ways rejected the rhetoric of progress that many Victorian writers emphasized. However, many other early-twentieth-century writers who are now considered modernists under the more loosely defined term “modernisms” maintained some nineteenth-century values while still experimenting with new formal techniques in their writing. It is my contention that even those writers considered “high modernists” did not break as easily with these values

as they led us to believe. In his essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” for instance, T.S. Eliot claims that “if the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, ‘tradition’ should be positively be discouraged” (2396). He also negates any Lamarckian reading of his text by arguing that tradition “cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour” (2396). However, Eliot also emphasizes the importance of the “progress of an artist” (2398) and of “develop[ing] or procur[ing] a consciousness of the past” (2398), a “historical sense” (2396) that will inform one’s poetry. While I am not claiming that Eliot subscribes to a Victorian ideology of progress, he does advocate for a poetic education that will inform and improve contemporary poetry. Other writers, particularly Pound and Joyce, emphasized the need for a new myth for society and sought this myth in the ancient, rather than recent, past. While their historical model was not exactly teleological, it did emphasize a connection, rather than a break, with history, demonstrating a belief in the importance of education and historical understanding for the improvement of the arts and of humankind in general. This emphasis on both education and a “historical sense” is even more pronounced in writers for whom a clean break with the nineteenth century was less imperative. The authors I examine in this dissertation—Olive Schreiner, G.B. Shaw, and W.B. Yeats—are representative of the many writers of this period whose work demonstrates a Lamarckian sensibility, which lent scientific support to their understanding of human progress and to their advocacy for the improvement of the human race through evolutionary, educational, aesthetic, and eugenic approaches.

In Chapter II, “Cooperative Lamarckism in Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm* and *From Man to Man*,” I argue that Schreiner forwards her own theory of evolution in her two major novels and her non-fiction text *Woman and Labour*. She rejects the violence and competition of Darwinism and embraces many tenets of Lamarckism, particularly the inheritance of acquired characteristics and the emphasis on human progress, but her fiction reveals that she is dissatisfied with the way Lamarckism privileges the individual will. Instead, she forwards a uniquely feminist version of evolution that emphasizes the role of cooperation and community, and, in particular, the importance of motherhood and gender equality, in human progress. Schreiner’s theory is not merely an explanation for the mechanism of human evolution; rather, her novels demonstrate that she views the competing evolutionary models, including her own, as options that we can choose, and therefore we are empowered to change our own evolutionary mechanism.

In Chapter III, “Evolutionary Proselytizing: Science and Salvation in Shaw’s Religion of Creative Evolution,” I closely examine Shaw’s theory of Creative Evolution as expressed in *Man and Superman* and *Back to Methuselah* in order to demonstrate that it was thoroughly steeped in the evolutionary science of the period instead of, as many critics have argued, merely evidence of Shaw’s anachronism. Shaw’s theory is often dismissed as simple vitalism, but, as I reveal in this chapter, it actually represents a complex interplay of religion, contemporary science, socialism, eugenics, and aesthetics. As his theory develops and increases in complexity in the twenty years between these two plays, it becomes simultaneously more scientific and more implausible. Whereas *Man*

and Superman takes human reproduction as its primary evolutionary medium, *Back to Methuselah* posits longevity as the evolutionary salvation of the human race and, by the end of the play cycle, imagines a world of pure mind where humans have evolved out of their bodies completely. Finally, I argue that Shaw's status as a visible and vocal literary and cultural icon, particularly during the first decades of the twentieth century, meant that his tireless advocacy of Lamarckism over Darwinism helped to keep Lamarckian rhetoric current in popular and intellectual culture long after most scientists had abandoned their support for Lamarckism.

In my final chapter, "Eugenic Poetics: Degeneration, Aesthetic Education, and Lamarckian Evolution in the Poetry and Prose of W.B. Yeats," I read poems from both early and late in Yeats's career, especially the "Crazy Jane" poems, in the context of *On the Boiler*, his 1939 collection of essays in which he lays out his theory of degeneration and proposes eugenics as the best solution. While Yeats had not yet discovered eugenics when he wrote his early poems, they are often closely tied to his ideas about class, and it is impossible to fully understand Yeats's class philosophy without understanding the origins and development of his interest in eugenics. I propose that this understanding can best be reached through the lens of Lamarckian evolutionary theory, which bridges the gap between the recurring tropes of degeneration and reproduction in his early poetry and the more blatant eugenic rhetoric of his late poems. Yeats's poems and prose reveal a Lamarckian belief in the importance of aesthetic education for those with eugenic potential as a means of improving the race, as well as a desire to employ artificial breeding to weed out undesirable traits. Finally, I argue in this chapter that Yeats's

attractions to myth, occultism, and Ireland's Celtic past all work synergistically with Lamarckian thought and give Yeats a rich well of interrelated concepts upon which to draw when he later becomes concerned with degeneration and progress.

The three authors I discuss in this dissertation by no means represent a complete survey of the writers in this period who drew on a Lamarckian or quasi-Lamarckian understanding of evolution to promote their respective ideologies in literature and non-fiction. However, their work spans the decades during which Lamarckism was the most influential on both scientific thought and public discourse, and they each interacted with evolutionary theory in ways that reflected their unique social and political perspectives. Also, each of these three writers had different levels of familiarity with the scientific underpinnings of Lamarckism, so, while Shaw explicitly proclaimed himself a Lamarckian, both Schreiner and Yeats adapted their Lamarckian rhetoric from broader cultural conversations about evolution and human progress. Thus, by recognizing the influence of Lamarckism on the development of literary modernism, we can begin to understand the didactic and teleological impulses demonstrated by some modernists within a movement that often questioned these tendencies.

Notes

¹ See, respectively, George Levine's *Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction* (1988), Gillian Beer's *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (1983), and Joseph Carroll's *Evolution and Literary Theory* (1995).

² Because this project deals primarily with Lamarckism and Darwinism in the forms they took in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, in subsequent chapters, when I use the terms “Lamarckism” and “Darwinism,” I am referring to the neo-Lamarckian and neo-Darwinian movements of this period. Also, the neo-Lamarckism I primarily address in this project is European Lamarckism, not American neo-Lamarckism, which was slightly different in character. However, this becomes a bit more complicated when I write about Yeats, whose cultural understanding of evolution would have come from the European school but who also drew on American psychologists for support for his eugenic claims.

³ Although this is a translation of Lamarck’s original French text, *Philosophie Zoologique*, and therefore it is difficult to analyze this language too closely, this story is so ubiquitous among those who wrote about Lamarck during the period with which this dissertation is concerned that it is relatively safe to assume that either the translation is fairly accurate or most people in England and America who read Lamarck did so in translation.

CHAPTER II

COOPERATIVE LAMARCKISM IN OLIVE SCHREINER'S *THE STORY OF AN
AFRICAN FARM AND FROM MAN TO MAN*

Olive Schreiner ends the introduction to her 1911 feminist polemic *Woman and Labour*¹ with a proclamation to “the men and women of the generations which will come after us,” those who will benefit from the biological and social evolutionary work, especially the improvement of the position of women, that she and her generation has accomplished:

You will look back at us with astonishment! You will wonder at passionate struggles that accomplished so little; at the, to you, obvious paths to attain our ends which we did not take; at the intolerable evils before which it will seem to you we sat down passive; at the great truths staring us in the face, which we failed to see; at the truths we grasped at, but could never get our fingers quite round. You will marvel at the labor that ended in so little;—but, what you will never know is how it was thinking of you and for you, that we struggled as we did and accomplished the little which we have done; that it was in the thought of your larger

realization and fuller life that we found consolation for the futilities of our own. (23)

Here, Schreiner uses evolutionary rhetoric to tell future generations what they have inherited from their forebears and to remind them to appreciate and, she implies, to continue her generation's "passionate struggles" to improve the human condition. Although the word "struggle" is usually associated with Darwinian evolutionary theory, Schreiner employs the term here in the service of a Lamarckian worldview in which men and women struggle, or strive, to improve their bodies, minds, and social systems in order to pass these accomplishments to their offspring with the hope that each new generation will build upon the successes of the previous generation. In addition to providing insight into Schreiner's position within the evolutionary debate, this quote can also be read as Schreiner's defense of her own project to improve the human condition through her fiction and her polemics. If future generations find her work lacking, they must understand that she did the best she could given the evolutionary position from which she began. Thus, this passage aptly reflects Schreiner's life-long struggle to find an alternative to Darwinism that was less ruthless and less competitive, as well as her desire to make a personal contribution to the evolutionary process. Her writing is frequently didactic, seeking not only to reflect and elucidate human nature, but to improve it. This didacticism, which I will highlight in my analysis of the novels, is both evidence of and symptomatic of her Lamarckian views.

Schreiner found in Jean-Baptiste Lamarck's theory of inherited acquired characteristics a much more palatable evolutionary mechanism, and Lamarckian rhetoric

permeates her fiction, especially her two major novels *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) and *From Man to Man* (1926). Darwin's theory of natural selection, presented in *On the Origin of Species* (1859), quickly transformed in both popular and scientific discourse into the idea of "Social Darwinism," a concept that took many forms but originated with Spencer's theory of human social progress. Spencer's *First Principles* (1862) was a formative text for Schreiner (First and Scott 58-60), but, as I discuss in Chapter I, his "Social Darwinism" was actually much more Lamarckian than Darwinian (Bowler 301). Whereas Darwinism relied on the tenet that humans were in a constant state of struggle, competing with one another for survival, Lamarck, whose theory of evolution predated Darwin's but was equally influential during the period in which Schreiner was writing, advocated the "inheritance of acquired characters," the theory that species pass on to the next generation the knowledge, skills, and physical adaptations they have acquired during the course of one generation. Through such transmission, progress occurs, each generation building on the acquisitions of the previous generation. Thus, when Schreiner claims that she and her peers "struggled as we did and accomplished the little which we have done" for the benefit of future generations' "larger realization and fuller life," she is applying Lamarckian evolution to the idea of human progress in order to provide scientific and evolutionary support for the feminist argument she forwards in *Woman and Labour*.

Schreiner's two major novels have been primarily read by critics in terms of feminism and, more recently, post-colonialism, and these elements of Schreiner's work are certainly important.² However, I argue that it is impossible to separate Schreiner's

literary contribution to these two fields from her evolutionary theory, which underpins her writing on gender, race, and imperialism. Schreiner's relationship to evolutionary theory is complex, as evidenced by the wide-ranging interpretations of her evolutionary rhetoric by critics. She applies different evolutionary mechanisms to the human and non-human worlds, and she does not draw clear lines between the evolution of humans as a biological species and the socio-evolution of human societies. As I will demonstrate below, Schreiner also refuses to fully endorse one existing evolutionary theory, and instead struggles to create her own model of human evolution. In Joyce Avrech Berkman's 1989 study of Schreiner's contributions to Victorian scientific, sociological, and philosophical thought, *The Healing Imagination of Olive Schreiner*, she insists that Schreiner rejected Social Darwinism in part because it "served to rationalize Britain's imperial aggrandizement and militarism, its racism, its socioeconomic class stratification, and its patriarchal patterns" (Berkman 74). Although many of her feminist contemporaries "were able to resist or discount the misogyny of Darwinism," Schreiner could not reconcile the social form of Darwinian thought with her own views on human progress (Lovell-Smith 309). Thus, a model of human progress based on the power of the individual will, rather than one that necessitated violent competition between classes, races, cultures, or individual people, was attractive to Schreiner. However, as several critics have noted, Schreiner never fully subscribed to one socio-evolutionary theory, instead seeking throughout her career to find a new way of envisioning human progress.³

Schreiner scholarship, when it does engage Schreiner's evolutionary views, fails to account for the complex relationship between Darwinism and Lamarckism during the

time period in which she was writing. For instance, Rose Lovell-Smith identifies Schreiner's engagement with evolutionary theory as Darwinian. She accurately points out that Rebekah, one of the two main characters in *From Man to Man*, launches a thorough and reasoned critique of Darwin's theory, but she calls Rebekah's ultimate conclusions about evolution "Schreiner's new *Origins*," suggesting that Schreiner was rewriting Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (319). Although this is an understandable reading of the text, especially in light of widespread misunderstanding about Darwin's supremacy as the only important figure in nineteenth-century evolutionary science, Lovell-Smith makes the common critical mistake of assuming that any discussion of evolution in the late nineteenth century must be responding to Darwin. Berkman's understanding of Schreiner's evolutionary influences is more sophisticated, and she identifies Schreiner as a "Lamarckian who believed in the transmission not of genetic but of acquired traits," claiming that "Schreiner allowed for biological and cultural progress and regression within one generation" (83). Berkman does admit the influence of Darwin on Schreiner, as do I, and by placing Schreiner within the context of Victorian debates about evolution, she recognizes that Schreiner's engagement with evolutionary science was much more complex than a simple reaction to Darwin. For instance, she claims, "For all her quarrels with Darwin, Schreiner had enormous respect for him," and argues that "[h]is Social Darwinist popularizers were the ones she abhorred" (261 n.4). Berkman identifies "human progress" as Schreiner's primary influence, and recognizes that her claims about gender, race, and class were all rooted in both egalitarian aims and a progressive understanding of the development of the human species and of human

societies (73). However, Berkman sees Schreiner's evolutionary ideas primarily as a means of understanding her egalitarianism, and blames Schreiner's supposed "failure" to thoroughly develop a cohesive evolutionary theory as the cause of "occasional moments of murky thinking in her egalitarianism" (77). Although egalitarianism is an essential aspect of Schreiner's worldview, it is my contention that Schreiner *did* forward a fully developed (though still clearly a layperson's) theory of human evolution, and that her egalitarian ideas contribute to, rather than stem from, her evolutionary theory.

Although Schreiner rejected Social Darwinism, she was heavily influenced by Spencer, whose theories had been appropriated by Social Darwinists seeking justification for racism, sexism, classism, and imperialism. One of the foundational experiences of Schreiner's life, which she relates to Havelock Ellis in an 1884 letter, occurred when, as a fifteen-year-old girl living in South Africa, she read Spencer's *First Principles*, an event shrouded in the mystery and excitement of any youthful transformative experience:

When I was up in Basuto Land with an old Aunt & cousin, one stormy, rainy night, there was a knock at the door; they were afraid to go & open it so I went. There was a stranger there like Waldos [sic] Stranger exactly. There was no house within fifty miles so he slept there: the next morning he talked with me for a little whilie [sic] & after that I saw him twice for half an hour: & then I never saw him again. He lent me Spencer's "First Principles." I always think that when Christianity burst on the dark Roman world it was what that book was to me. I was in such complete, blank atheism. I did not even believe in my own nature, in any right or

wrong, or certainty. I can still feel myself lying before the fire to read it. I had only three days. (*“My Other Self”* 39)

Schreiner was introduced to Spencer on what was literally a dark and stormy night, and her letter reads like a gothic novel—a mysterious stranger appears at the door of an isolated house during a storm; the knock at the door arouses fear and suspicion; Schreiner, a young girl, alone has the bravery to answer the door; she sees the “stranger” only briefly; the stranger disappears forever. However, despite the dramatic rhetoric Schreiner employs here, this passage can more appropriately be read as the crucial scene in a bildungsroman. Schreiner had renounced Christianity as a young girl (despite and perhaps because of her devout missionary parents⁴), only to find herself in “complete, blank atheism,” struggling to find something to believe in. Over the course of three days, she dove into Spencer’s *First Principles* and emerged a changed person, one who had found a replacement for the ordered universe provided by Christianity.

Although Schreiner recognized Spencer’s profound influence on the construction of her thoughts about evolution, human progress, and social structures, she did not remain tightly bound to his ideas. In another letter to Ellis, Schreiner wrote that she no longer read Spencer, even though she appreciated his role in her intellectual formation:

You ask me whether Spencer is to me what he was. If one has a broken leg & a doctor sets it; when once it is set one may be said to have no more need of the doctor, never the-less one always walks on his leg. I think that is how it is with regard to myself & Herbert Spencer. I have read all his works once, some three & four times, now I read him no more. He helped

me to believe in a unity underlying all nature; that was a great thing, but he has nothing else to give me now. (*“My Other Self”* 43)

Schreiner’s language here is both scientific and mystical. Her metaphor of the doctor fixing the broken leg suggests that Spencer healed Schreiner’s atheism and broken spirit by giving her science. However, Spencer also communicated the mystical “unity underlying all nature” to Schreiner, which was the most important lesson she learned from him. By recognizing that “he has nothing else to give me now,” Schreiner acknowledges that she has moved beyond Spencer’s understanding of the world—his ideas may form the foundation of her own, but she built upon those ideas, incorporated them, changed them, and moved beyond them toward her own theory of human progress.

Schreiner continued to read widely as a teenager, focusing her attention particularly on scientific and social theorists, including J.S. Mill, Carl Vogt’s *Lectures on Man*, Darwin’s *Variation of Plants and Animals*, David Page’s *The Past and Present Life of the Globe*, and Robert Chambers’ *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (First and Scott 60; *Olive Schreiner Letters* n.215). All of these texts contributed to the early formation of a unique scientific and evolutionary worldview that underpinned most of her writing. As she told Ellis in an 1884 letter, “You don’t know what a gap would be left in my life if all the good I have had from scientific books were taken out of it (making the word scientific cover everything from Darwin & Carl Vogt, to little primers on Heat & Light)” (*“My Other Self”* 47). Her desire to stretch the definition of “scientific” to encompass any analysis of human behavior, social systems, and progress indicates that she thought of herself primarily as a scientific thinker: these are the subjects with which

her fiction is primarily concerned, and she wanted to believe that her contribution to the collective body of human knowledge was as important as the contributions of modern scientists. In the same letter, Schreiner declares, “I think that even the mere reading [of science, as opposed to the practice of science] helps one to the feeling that truth is before all things, & to have a kind of love for things in their naked simplicity; I think that the tendency of science is always to awaken these two feelings; don’t you?” (47) These “two feelings” of scientific “truth” and “love for things” seem incompatible, especially from a scientific point of view, but for Schreiner they were inseparable. It is no surprise, then, that the evolutionary theory she grapples with and espouses in her fiction relies equally on both of these principles.

Though there is no direct evidence that Schreiner read Lamarck, it would have been difficult for her to avoid the contemporary debates between neo-Lamarckians and neo-Darwinians, and she read several texts whose authors were either heavily influenced by, were directly responding to, or explicitly discussed Lamarck. These writers helped shape Schreiner’s progressivist ideas about human evolution. Spencer is popularly known as the father of Social Darwinism, but his philosophy can be more appropriately termed “Social Lamarckism,” as I have demonstrated in the dissertation’s introduction. Thus, Schreiner most likely gleaned many of her Lamarckian ideas from Spencer. However, she also read Robert Chambers’ book *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844) in 1871 or 1872 (*Olive Schreiner Letters* 215), which popularized evolutionary theory before Darwin. Lamarck was largely ridiculed by scientists when Chambers wrote *Vestiges*, so he understandably made every effort to distance himself

from Lamarck's theory. However, despite this attempt to stake out new evolutionary territory, Chambers' text is in many ways still very Lamarckian. Chambers' one mention of Lamarck simultaneously dismisses and engages the evolutionary theorist:

Early in this century, M. Lamarck, a naturalist of the highest character, suggested an hypothesis of organic progress which deservedly incurred much ridicule, although it contained a glimmer of the truth. He surmised, and endeavoured, with a great deal of ingenuity, to prove, that one being advanced in the course of generations to another, in consequence merely of its experience of wants calling for the exercise of its faculties in a particular direction, by which exercise new developments of organs took place, ending in variations sufficient to constitute a new species. (230)

Even though Chambers claims that Lamarck "deserved" the "ridicule" he received for his theory, the "glimmer of truth" that he admits actually consists of the central argument in Lamarck's evolutionary schema. In fact, Chambers admits that "it is possible that wants and the exercise of faculties have entered in some manner into the production of the phenomenon which we have been considering," but he qualifies this admission by claiming that it "certainly" did not happen "in the way suggested by Lamarck, whose whole notion is obviously so inadequate to account for the rise of the organic kingdoms, that we only can place it with pity among the follies of the wise" (Chambers 230-231). Thus, like many evolutionary thinkers in the mid-nineteenth century (decades after Lamarck published *Philosophie Zoologique* in 1809 and before Darwin published *On the Origin of Species*), Chambers tried to build his own reputation as an evolutionary theorist

by distancing himself from the most popular theorist to precede him. However, as Milton Millhauser points out in *Just Before Darwin: Robert Chambers and Vestiges*, “Chambers followed Buffon and the Lamarckians more than he anticipated Darwin” and the critics of *Vestiges* disparaged his text as “Lamarck and water” (86). Thus, even if Schreiner did not read Lamarck’s own theory and never explicitly called her evolutionary ideas “Lamarckian,” she would have known of Lamarckian evolution through her reading of Chambers, Spencer, and other popular nineteenth-century evolutionary writers.

This engagement with Lamarck is, I will demonstrate, quite evident in her first novel *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) and her unfinished, posthumously published novel *From Man to Man* (1926). Though many aspects of Schreiner’s evolutionary theory are decidedly Lamarckian, the theories of human evolution she proposes in *African Farm* and *From Man to Man* not only reject the cold, competitive materialism of Darwin’s theory, but also reject the focus on the individual will found in Lamarck and Spencer. Thus, I argue in this chapter that Schreiner proposes a new evolutionary theory, built upon Lamarck’s mechanism but modified to include a uniquely feminist emphasis on the importance of community, motherhood, and self-sacrifice for the betterment of the human race.

However, despite her divergence from and revision of Lamarck, Schreiner has clearly sided with the Lamarckians in the evolutionary debates of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In fact, any time she discusses human progress, even in her letters, her language is filled with references to the “will” and to “striving,” indicating that she firmly believed in the power of humankind to shape its own evolutionary destiny.

Ellis even noted Schreiner's excessive use of these words, though he saw it as an idiosyncrasy in her language and does not attribute it to the perhaps unconscious expression of her Lamarckian sensibilities: "You have a way, both in your book & in writing & talking of saying 'will' & 'would' when you ought to say 'shall' & 'should'. That has got to be beautiful to me as a characteristic of you, & I have several times finding myself, when writing to you—& when *thinking* to you—doing or feeling inclined to do just the same thing" ("*My Other Self*" 90). Whereas for Ellis, who at this point was romantically involved with Schreiner, her use of these words was an adorable eccentricity, closer examination of her letters and her fiction reveals that her choice of these words is a natural extension of her theories about human evolution and human progress.

The socio-evolutionary model that Schreiner forwards in *The Story of an African Farm* feels in many ways incomplete because it is not a neatly worked-out theory. Berkman argues that, throughout her life, Schreiner attempted to find an "alternative scientific interpretation of evolutionary dynamics," but, even though "she had glimmers of what would constitute that alternative [. . .] she never worked it out" (77). This argument is especially applicable to *The Story of an African Farm*, where it is difficult to find one fully developed and narratively successful method for improving the human race. However, as I will argue here, Schreiner actually does fully develop a model of socio-evolution, even though her characters are ultimately not successful examples of this theory at work. Although *African Farm* does not explicitly formulate a theory of

Lamarckian human progress, it employs the language of Lamarckian evolution in order to propose this philosophy as a possible model for human intellectual development and human social progress. However, through the deaths of the main characters Waldo and Lyndall and, more importantly, their lack of progeny, the novel demonstrates that the individual will alone is not enough to sustain forward progress in the evolution of human society, but must instead be revised to allow for the importance of community in the course of human progress.

The Story of an African Farm follows Lyndall and Waldo, its two protagonists, from their troubled childhoods on a Boer-owned South African farm, to their young adulthoods traveling separately through Africa, to their early deaths. Both characters are concerned in different ways with improving the human condition; Lyndall is a feminist from a young age who refuses to conform to nineteenth-century expectations of women, while Waldo is a frustrated artist who, as a child, transforms from a devout Christian into a freethinker who seeks “truth.” Both are terrorized by Tant’ Sannie, the Boer woman who owns the farm, and Bonaparte Blenkins, the hired tutor and overseer, and both seek to escape their restrictive circumstances. Em, Lyndall’s cousin, is a foil for Lyndall and Waldo in the book because, while she is good-hearted and reliable, she demonstrates no will, no desire to change her circumstances and, thus, no desire to evolve and contribute to human progress. Thus, Em remains on the farm and remains alive at the end of the novel, while Lyndall dies after giving birth to a child who dies shortly after birth, and Waldo dies after returning to the farm following a failed attempt to make his way in the world. The struggles and, I argue, the untimely deaths of Lyndall and Waldo,

demonstrate that Schreiner is positing a theory of evolution that she recognizes cannot yet be fully realized.

In *The Story of an African Farm*, Lyndall and Waldo each demonstrate a different version and a different kind of failure of Lamarckian progress. While Waldo must first go through various stages of Christian thought before he can begin to realize the power of his own will, Lyndall is seemingly born a “vital genius”⁵ who is driven by her will from an early age. In the novel’s first chapter, when Lyndall is a small child, her cousin Em asks her, “[H]ow is it your beads never fall off your needle?” ‘I try,’ said the little one gravely, moistening her tiny finger. ‘That is why’” (4).⁶ For Lyndall, even a task as small as stringing beads can be perfected through a Lamarckian notion of “trying,” which is the only way, in her young mind, that anything will be achieved. Once this pattern of trying is established early in the novel, it becomes possible to read Lyndall’s pronouncements about what she will do in the future as evidence that she believes that the power of her will, through trying hard enough, will allow her to achieve whatever she sets her mind to. Thus, when Lyndall is an older child and says, “‘When I [. . .] am grown up, I shall wear real diamonds, exactly like these, in my hair,’” we can infer that she will accomplish this, not because she is genetically or otherwise predisposed to succeed, but because she will try hard enough (10).

More important than Lyndall’s desire to wear diamonds, however, is her desire to become educated, a feat much more difficult for a Victorian woman, especially in South Africa, to achieve. Lyndall tells Em that Tant’ Sannie “‘is a miserable old woman, [. . .] but I intend to go to school’”:

‘And if she won’t let you?’

‘I shall make her.’

‘How?’

The child took not the slightest notice of the last question, and folded her small arms across her knees.

‘But why do you want to go, Lyndall?’

‘There is nothing helps in this world,’ said the child slowly, ‘but to be very wise, and to know everything—to be clever.’ (10)

Here, Lyndall not only demonstrates the power of her will—which is so strong that when Em asks her “How?” she doesn’t need to respond—but she also espouses the importance for humans to “be very wise, and to know everything.” At this stage in the novel, it seems clear that Lyndall’s combination of extraordinary will and appropriate goals will make her a perfect socio-Lamarckian specimen: she has aimed her will toward the socially responsible task of increasing her intellect, which will, in the Lamarckian model, cause her to produce intelligent children, thus furthering the intellectual capabilities of the human race.

In comparison, Em exclaims that she “should not like to go to school,” and, when Lyndall goes on to detail all of the intellectual and material luxuries she will have when she is older, Em thinks it is “a dream of quite too transcendent glory ever to be realized” (10-11). Em does not possess Lyndall’s will, nor does she believe in the power of the will the way Lyndall does. Instead, she is used, in this matter, as a foil for Lyndall, using the same language of trying and wanting in order to forward a theory of religious

determinism that stands in relief against Lyndall's belief in her own power. When Waldo is trying to figure out how the kopje (a small hillock) came into existence, Em interjects:

'Oh, Waldo, God put the little kopje here,' said Em, with solemnity.

'But how did He put it here?'

'By wanting.'

'But how did the wanting bring it here?'

'Because it did.'

The last words were uttered with the air of one who produces a clinching argument. (14)

Em understands the power of "wanting," but sees it only in the divine. It is unlikely that Lyndall will achieve her goals through wanting, but God certainly can. Here, Em is delivering an argument that Lyndall would agree with were it applied to humans, but the religious context makes Em's argument unconvincing precisely because it presupposes that God, not man, controls the fate of the world.

Though much of Waldo's youth is spent agonizing over his relationship with God, he eventually reaches a point in his development when he, too, can see the power of his own will, the first achievement of which is a prototype of a sheep-shearing machine he invents and secretly works for months to build. When he confesses his secret of the machine to Em, he tells her, "'There is only one thing that is not right yet; but it will be soon. When you think, and think, and think, all night and all day, it comes at last'" (38). Here, Waldo is describing a process very similar to the "wanting" that Em attributes to God, but his philosophy is much closer to Lyndall's than to Em's. Just as Lyndall can

string beads perfectly by “trying,” so Waldo can will himself to produce a solution to his machine’s problem through “thinking.”

The first evidence in the novel of the potential fallibility of Lamarckism comes when Lyndall is trying to escape from her room to see Otto, Waldo’s father, before he is banished from the farm. She breaks her bedroom window and, once she discovers that the shutter has been bolted down, proceeds to “peck at the hard wood of the shutter” with a penknife (50):

‘What are you doing now?’ asked Em, who had ceased crying in her wonder, and had drawn near.

‘Trying to make a hole,’ was the short reply.

‘Do you think you will be able to?’

‘No; but I am trying.’ (51)

This scene begins the novel’s tentative and conflicted relationship with Lamarckian ideas. If Lyndall knows that she will not succeed, why does she continue to try? One answer may be that the terrible betrayal of Otto by Tant’ Sannie and Bonaparte Blenkins, resulting in Otto’s death, is a traumatic enough event to shatter Lyndall’s Lamarckian idealism, making her face the cold reality that she will not get everything she wants through will alone.

This reading is supported by a later scene where Doss, Waldo’s dog, kills a beetle: “The beetle was hard at work trying to roll home a great ball of dung it had been collecting all the morning; but Doss broke the ball, and ate the beetle’s hind legs, and then bit off its head. And it was all play, and no one could tell what it had lived and

worked for. A striving, and a striving, and an ending in nothing” (65). This image seems to support a Darwinian, mechanistic model of the interaction between and among species that rejects the ability of “striving” to accomplish anything. However, according to Berkman, Schreiner did not necessarily believe that “the laws governing nonhuman evolution were automatically applicable to human evolution,” but “[i]nstead, she posited a selective, critical stance toward nature, namely, viewing the diverse repertoire of nonhuman forms and behavior as composed of both models and antimodels for human society” (78). Thus, as Doss and the beetle are animals, and, as the novel is interested in human progress rather than in the evolution of the animal world, this scene serves instead to demonstrate the unique power of the will that humans possess; for a dung beetle, striving can accomplish nothing, but for Lyndall, progress is achieved even when the goal is not.

Lyndall’s dedication to the doctrine of trying, even in the face of assured failure, suggests that there may be some merit in trying for the sake of trying. Even if trying does not result in the accomplishment of the task at hand, it strengthens the will for future tasks that will demand practiced determination. Thus, this scene does represent a turning point in the novel’s ideology of progress, but it is a turn away from youthful idealism and toward the reality that determination, though not always successful, can only make us stronger. Under this new paradigm, when Lyndall gives up trying and says to herself, employing anti-Darwinian rhetoric, ““When that day comes, and I am strong, I will hate everything that has power, and help everything that is weak,”” we can question her ability

to truly help the weak, but we know that she will try and, by doing so, will create a foundation upon which the next generation will begin its trying (51).

The chapter entitled “Waldo’s Stranger” further expands this theory of the potentiality of the will, demonstrating through Waldo’s eyes the human merits of “[a] striving, and a striving, and an ending in nothing.” As Waldo lies outside carving images onto a wooden headstone for Otto, a stranger approaches on horseback, stops to rest, and proceeds to tell Waldo a story based on the pictures Waldo has carved into the wood. The stranger’s interpretation of Waldo’s carving is, on one level, an allegory of the will, in which a hunter gives up all relationships and all possessions in order to climb a treacherous mountain in search of the rare bird “truth.” But the hunter never reaches the top of the mountain, where truth lives, and, thus, his efforts seem in vain. However, as he is dying, he realizes that his efforts have made a difference for future generations:

Where I lie down worn out other men will stand, young and fresh. By the steps that I have cut they will climb; by the stairs that I have built they will mount. They will never know the name of the man who made them. At the clumsy work they will laugh; when the stones roll they will curse me. But they will mount, and on *my* work; they will climb, and by *my* stair! They will find her, and through me! And no man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. (116)

This realization that his life spent in pursuit of a single goal, of truth, will allow “other men” to eventually achieve that goal reinforces a Lamarckian view of human progress: the acquisitions of one generation will be passed on to the next so that they may be built

upon. However, the final line of the quote also points toward a seemingly contradictory philosophy of community: the human will alone is not enough; one must have the support of a society in order for true progress to be realized.

In an 1886 letter to statistician, eugenicist, and “Woman Question” theorist Karl Pearson, Schreiner states this theory of human social progress, especially her ideas about the progress of intellectual work, in similar terms:

Such a great peace comes to one when one fixes oneself on one large object so. ‘And if one dies?’—Yes, then others will take up our work, where the pen drops from our fingers another man will be found to pick it up and finish the line, and the book; the gold we have seen, another man who comes after will see too, and he will pick it up and give it to the world, if we have not time. Truth is not a dream, not a chimera, she is always there, those who come upon the same road will find her where we have found her. We are not alone as we sometimes feel in our agony, we are all working into each other’s hands, and the steps are thick behind us on the road on which we wander wondering if we have lost our way. (98)

The “one large object” to which Schreiner refers here is Pearson’s work on the “Woman Question,”⁷ but she is also clearly referencing her own life-long work on *From Man to Man*. She saw both projects as important contributions to the progress of human ideas, and hoped that “another man will be found to pick it up” if she or Pearson were to die with their work uncompleted.⁸ Thus, for Schreiner, human progress never occurs over the course of one generation. According to Schreiner, we must do our work secure in the

knowledge that someone will come along and build upon what we have done.

Schreiner's emphasis on the search for truth here, and her insistence that "we are all working into each other's hands" is a radical revisioning of the concept of genius. In this construction, there is no such thing as unique, original, individual genius—just as Waldo needs his stranger to help him make sense of his own sculpture, and just as the character in the stranger's story discovers, there will always come one who can finish the work we started. In this sense, genius is collective, and is part of her theory of communal human progress.

This idea of community is Schreiner's contribution to the Victorian discourse of biological and social evolution; if Social Darwinism is too mechanistic and breeds race, class, and gender discrimination, then Social Lamarckism is too focused on the power of the individual, making no allowances for the importance of human interaction and the meaning that community brings to the individual life. This philosophy becomes apparent in *African Farm* when, as an adult, Lyndall returns from boarding school a changed young woman. Although she still believes in the power of the will, she has also begun to recognize the importance of community. However, Lyndall sees community both in the love and cooperative effort between humans and in the socialization that oppresses women. She says to Waldo, in their first conversation after her return, "I like these birds [. . .]; they share each other's work, and are companions. Do you take an interest in the position of women, Waldo?" (134). Lyndall admires the birds for their cooperative behavior, but immediately equates this image with the "position of women," demonstrating that, for Lyndall, the two ideas cannot be separated; if individuals were

truly left to pursue their own goals, there would be no community, but there would be no oppression, either. Schreiner returns to this same image of cooperative birds in *Woman and Labour*, in which she recalls seeing “cock-o-veets” as a child in Africa. She admires their “inter-knit love-songs” and the fact that they are “building their nests together, and caring for and watching over, not only their young, but each other,” and she claims that this image “has powerfully influenced all I have thought and felt on sex matters since” (4-5). She goes on to assert that “along the line of bird life and among certain of its species sex has attained its highest and esthetic, and one might almost say intellectual, development on earth: a point of development to which no human race as a whole has yet reached, and which represents the realization of the highest sexual ideal which haunts humanity” (5). Thus, for both Lyndall and Schreiner, birds provide an example of cooperation between the sexes for the good of the community because, by treating the females of their species equally, they improve the condition of the entire species. Further, Schreiner’s claim that humans have not yet reached the same level of development in “sex matters” as birds challenges the Social Darwinist belief that humans, especially white, male, European humans, are the most evolved creatures on earth.

Lyndall’s insistence that the human species has not yet achieved the qualities she admires in the birds becomes apparent when she goes on to tell Waldo about the ways in which women are oppressed in modern human societies:

We all enter the world little plastic beings, with so much natural force, perhaps, but for the rest—blank; and the world tells us what we are to be, and shapes us by the ends it sets before us. To you it says—*Work*; and to

us it says—*Seem!* To you it says—As you approximate to man’s highest ideal of God, as your arm is strong and your knowledge great, and the power to labor is with you, so you shall gain all that human heart desires. To us it says—Strength shall not help you, nor knowledge, nor labor. You shall gain what men gain, but by other means. And so the world makes men and women. (135)

Lyndall’s understanding of the difference between men and women is steeped in a Lamarckian sensibility, but one that has been modified by experience: Lyndall believes that, for men, the socio-Lamarckian insistence on the power of the will and of striving is still applicable because “the world” allows men the freedom to pursue “all that human heart desires.” Women, however, are the ones who are truly “little plastic beings” who are acted upon by “the world” and told to suppress the desires of their wills. The difference between “*Work*” and “*Seem!*” is important here: for Lyndall, work is equated with power and opportunity, while “seeming” is what she excels at, as a beautiful woman whose outward charms bring her into men’s favors so that she may “gain what men gain, but by other means,” means that most likely involve judicious marriages.

For Lyndall, the plight of women takes on all the negative aspects of Lamarckism and none of the positive:

In some of us [women] the shaping to our end has been quite completed. The parts we are not to use have been quite atrophied, and have even dropped off; but in others, and we are not less to be pitied, they have been weakened and left. We wear the bandages, but our limbs have not grown

to them; we know that we are compressed, and chafe against them. (135-36)

The “parts” that men need for success have not atrophied, but women’s “parts” have “dropped off” because society has told women that they have no use for such parts. In *Philosophie Zoologique*, Lamarck explains the mechanism by which he claims this form of evolution occurs:

We shall shortly see by the citation of known facts in evidence, in the first place, that new needs which establish a necessity for some part really bring about the existence of that part, as a result of efforts; and that subsequently its continued use gradually strengthens, develops and finally greatly enlarges it; in the second place, we shall see that in some cases, when the new environment and the new needs have altogether destroyed the utility of some part, the total disuse of that part has resulted in its gradually ceasing to share in the development of the other parts of the animal; it shrinks and wastes little by little, and ultimately, when there has been total disuse for a long period, the part in question ends by disappearing. (108)

Lyndall’s description of women’s “atrophied,” “weakened,” and “dropped off” parts, then, follows a Lamarckian pattern of evolution exactly; for Lamarck, unused parts “ended up disappearing” because they had been rendered “totally useless” by “new circumstances and needs.” However, there is one important difference between these two passages. For Lyndall (and, we can presume, for Schreiner), women never fully forget

the “parts” that they have lost or that have “been weakened and left” because they “chafe against” the “bandages” that hold them back. This suggests that, rather than seeing Lamarckian evolution as a natural, inevitable process, Schreiner sees it as fallible and even surmountable: if women reject their circumstances and recognize the state of atrophy into which their important “parts” have fallen, if they chafe and strive, they can remedy their situations and, both metaphorically and literally, regrow the “parts” they have lost. Thus, men are helped by Lamarckism, but women are held back by it, making it necessary for Schreiner to develop a new evolutionary model in which both men and women benefit equally.

Although Lyndall points out the problems with Lamarckism and hints at a solution, she herself never fully works out that solution. Lyndall suggests one possibility—that women, for now, can find their purpose through bearing and rearing children: “The meanest girl who dances and dresses becomes something higher when her children look up into her face and ask her questions. It is the only education we have and which they cannot take from us” (139). Presumably, the “something higher” that Lyndall invokes here is a woman’s ability to educate her children when they “ask her questions” and, thus, to improve her offspring that they might pass along their acquired knowledge to their children through the Lamarckian mechanism. However, when Lyndall has her own child, it dies, and she admits (though protesting a bit too much), “I did not love it; its father was not my prince; *I* did not care for it” (213). Like all of the characters in the novel, Lyndall is an unreliable relater of her own experiences and, more importantly, her proclamations about how the world works are not applied to her own

life.⁹ Lyndall recognizes that motherhood is one way in which she may enter into communion with the world until society has evolved to a place where she is allowed, like men, to follow her own will; however, her very body rejects this compromise, producing a child who dies three hours after its birth. When Waldo asks her, ““But why do you not try to bring that time”” when women will be equal with men, Lyndall replies that she is “asleep, swathed, shut up in self,” unable to contribute to the communal evolutionary process that Schreiner imagines will eventually, through the efforts of both men and women, bring about gender equality (141).

Lyndall’s inability to “bring that time” stems from the fact that she has chosen to cut herself off both emotionally and physically from those who love her and with whom she could combine her efforts. She leaves the farm with her lover, thus abandoning Em and Waldo, and then eventually leaves her lover, refusing to let him take care of her on her deathbed. She cannot participate in communal evolution with the other people in her life because her insistence on the power of her individual will has made her incapable of seeking or giving assistance. Her ultimate failure is death, which effectively halts her evolutionary progress and which leaves behind a wake of unhappy, heartbroken people. Waldo’s death and the impending loveless marriage between Gregory and Em both result in large part from Lyndall’s failure to rely on community to strengthen her will to adapt, change, and evolve.

Although Waldo recognizes the importance of community more thoroughly than Lyndall does, he fails to seek out others until it is too late for him. In the “Times and Seasons” chapter of the novel, which bridges the childhood and adult sections of the

novel and which can be read as a universalization of Waldo's growth from childhood to adulthood, the narrator details the movement of a child's life through various stages of religion, through a rejection of that religion and a move toward Darwinism, and then out of this cold, mechanistic view of the world and into an understanding of the importance of the community and harmony of all living things. After religion has been rejected, the child embraces Darwinism as the only alternative: "Whether he looks into the mental or physical world and sees no relation between cause and effect, no order, but a blind chance sporting, this is the mightiest fact that can be recorded in any spiritual existence. It were almost a mercy to cut his throat, if indeed he does not do it for himself" (100). It is evident here that Darwinism causes despair because cutting one's throat is "a mercy" when faced with Darwinian biological determinism, with "blind chance" as the only governing spirit. Inevitably, the grown child begins to question this model:

How are these things related that such deep union should exist between them all? Is it chance? Or, are they not all the fine branches of one trunk, whose sap flows through us all? That would explain it. [. . .] This thing we call existence; is it not a something which has its roots far down below in the dark, and its branches stretching out into the immensity above, which we among the branches cannot see? Not a chance jumble; a living thing, a *One*. The thought gives us intense satisfaction, we cannot tell why. (102)

Although the free and indirect discourse the narrator employs here makes it unclear whether or not this story of a child's intellectual progress toward adulthood can be read

explicitly as the voice of Waldo, it is safe to assume that Waldo fits this model of development. Therefore, though Waldo has not yet, immediately following the “Times and Seasons” section, realized that the world is “not a chance jumble” but a “living thing, a *One*,” he reaches this understanding before he dies. Lyndall can espouse a belief in the relation of all things and the importance of community, but she does not internalize it. Waldo, on the other hand, internalizes this idea fully, but is never able to fully act upon it. As he sits against the wall, a posture from which he will never rise, he thinks, “[T]he day is coming! The day when soul shall not thrust back soul that would come to it; when men shall not be driven to seek solitude, because of the crying-out of their hearts for love and sympathy. Well to live long and see the new time breaking” (232). But Waldo does not live long enough to see such a day, and Lyndall, the one person to whom his “heart” cried out “for love and sympathy,” has died.

Waldo’s life has represented one, distinctly male version of a Lamarckian mindset; his life has been full of the “*Work*” that Lyndall attributes to men’s lives, but all of his striving led him not to material or intellectual success, but to an understanding of the way the human world works:

Of all the things I have ever seen, only the sea is like a human being; the sky is not, nor the earth. But the sea is always moving, always something deep in itself is stirring it. It never rests; it is always wanting, wanting, wanting. It hurries on; and then it creeps back slowly without having reached, moaning. It is always asking a question, and it never gets the answer. (196)

Waldo has spent his life “wanting, wanting, wanting,” first wanting answers to his questions about God and the world, but then wanting to do some meaningful work with his life. However, like the sea, Waldo “cre[pt] back slowly” to Em’s house “without having reached” an intellectual, material, or evolutionary goal. Although Waldo’s “moaning” does not appear explicitly in the text, it can be read here as his longing for communion with Lyndall and the sense of profound loss with which her death has left him. Finally, though, in the moment in which he stops “wanting” and finds life “delicious,” his life comes to an end, suggesting that Schreiner’s alternative model of progress has not entirely given up a Lamarckian framework: one must understand the importance of community in order to succeed in life and work for a common good, but one still must never give up using the will to strive for communal goals.

The communal-Lamarckian model of human progress that Schreiner proposes in *The Story of an African Farm* is never fully realized by either Lyndall or Waldo. However, while this may seem to signal that this model, too, is unsuccessful, it is important to take into account Lyndall’s insistence that the time for success, for women or, by extension, for all humanity, will come “[t]hen, but not now” (141).¹⁰ Likewise, the narrator of *African Farm* claims, “The lifting up of the hands brings no salvation; redemption is from within, and neither from God nor man: it is wrought out by the soul itself, with suffering and through time” (181). This insistence upon the importance of time in socio-evolutionary processes is apt in light of the long, slow path of progress that any evolutionary process must take. In the meantime, however, Schreiner gives us Em as an example of the unacceptable alternative to striving. She is the stable center of the

novel, the only principle character who does not die in the end and, in Lyndall's words, "her little finger has more goodness in it than my whole body" (172). However, despite Em's goodness, "[h]er idea of love was only service" and her idea of service is a maintenance of the status quo (127). She has no desire to become educated and no interest in books; when Waldo dies, she brings him buttermilk and, believing he is sleeping, "covered the glass softly at his side," saying, "He will wake soon [. . .] and be glad of it" (233). However, on this point as well as, potentially, on many others, "the chickens were wiser" (233). Thus, though Em is "good," her pending loveless marriage and stable farm life demonstrate that, even though neither Waldo nor Lyndall achieves what they have been "wanting," and even though neither character leaves behind children who will carry on their struggles, their lives are still more full of meaning and contribute more to the project of human progress, through the very act of striving and through their moments of recognition of the importance of community, than the lives of those who never try.

The community model of evolution that Schreiner proposes in *The Story of an African Farm* is revised and expanded upon in her unfinished novel *From Man to Man*, which reflects her growing, more complex understanding of the position of women. Whereas the two main characters in *African Farm* represent both genders, the two central characters in *From Man to Man* are both women, and, with one exception, the male characters in the novel are deeply flawed and even detestable. In fact, in an 1889 letter to Havelock Ellis, Schreiner writes, "The worst of this book of mine is that it[']s so

womanly. I think it's the most womanly book that was ever written, & God knows that I've willed it other wise!" ("My Other Self" 447). In a revealing comment about her writing process, Schreiner seems to claim here that her "will," ordinarily a powerful evolutionary force, has no control over her fictional output. Schreiner sees her novel as having a life of its own and an ability to become "womanly" despite her best efforts. This statement needs to be read suspiciously, however, especially in light of a letter she wrote five years earlier to Ellis in which she demonstrates her didactic intentions, telling him that she has "always built upon the fact, [that] 'From man to man' will help other people, it will help to make men more tender to women because they will understand them better; it will help to make some women more tender to others; it will comfort some women [by] showing them that others have felt as they do" ("My Other Self" 91). Perhaps Schreiner felt the need to downplay and distance herself from her feminism in the Victorian social climate, which also helps to explain why she published *African Farm* under the male pseudonym "Ralph Iron," but her concern with the position of women is easily traceable from her earliest work.

In *From Man to Man*, Rebekah and Baby Bertie¹¹ are the victims of a male-dominated world in which Darwinism represents male power and ruthlessness, and the communal revision of Lamarckism advocated in *African Farm* is emphasized not only as the most palatable evolutionary mechanism, but also as the only hope for humankind. Rebekah, who we see grow from a precocious young girl in the novel's prelude, "The Child's Day," into a wife, mother, scientist, and philosopher in the rest of the novel, entitled "The Woman's Day," gives us her version of evolutionary theory, which

emphasizes race, class, and gender equality and which proposes an egalitarian, even utopian vision of human progress thus far and the best mechanism for the future evolution of the human race. Schreiner published *Woman and Labour* while she was working on *From Man to Man*, and the outrage she expresses about the position of women in her non-fiction text is palpable in the posthumously published version of her novel.¹²

It is understandable, then, that much of the scholarship on this novel focuses on its feminism. However, several critics also note Schreiner's engagement with evolutionary theory in the novel, though none sees the evolutionary theory proposed in *From Man to Man* as a revision and expansion of *The Story of an African Farm*'s evolutionary vision. In *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, Anne McClintock claims that "*From Man to Man* is a radical rebuttal of the presiding tenets of late Victorian and colonial society: evolutionary Darwinism, the imperial ideology of racial and gender degeneration and the bourgeois Victorian institution of the sexual double standard" (284). While McClintock correctly recognizes the quarrel Schreiner has with Darwinism in the novel and the link Schreiner draws between Darwin and Victorian social ideologies, she doesn't recognize that Schreiner replaced Darwinism with a different, Lamarckian-based vision of human evolution that takes into full account her ideas about gender, race, and class. McClintock argues, "Certainly, Schreiner was never able to resolve satisfactorily the tension between her feminist and socialist understanding, on the one hand, with her Spencerian faith in a cosmic unity and design governing the universe, on the other" (288). McClintock goes on to claim, rather disparagingly, that,

“[b]eyond a vaguely Spencerian notion of inevitable progress, Schreiner lacks a theory of gender conflict and a theory of historical change” (292). As I will show in my analysis below, and as I have already done to a degree above, Schreiner had thoroughly thought through the issues of both “gender conflict” and “historical change,” and proposed an evolutionary theory that took both of these issues into serious account.

Berkman gives Schreiner more credit for her evolutionary thought, but she finds fault in Schreiner’s insistence on a progressive model of human development, arguing that, while Schreiner “was certainly neither naive nor sentimental in her optimism about the potential for progressive historical change,” she maintained a “belief in the innate human longing to create positive ideals [that], coupled with her confidence in the power of the individual to follow a new course of action, however painful, sustained her faith in the possibility of human progress” (99). Thus, for Berkman, although Schreiner was not naively optimistic, she still clung to a Victorian notion of teleological progress, a stance in which Berkman finds fault and, despite her claims to the contrary, naïveté. Berkman also finds problematic what she sees as Schreiner’s inability to fully develop a faithfully Lamarckian model of human evolution: “Despite Schreiner’s Lamarckian view of the transmission of acquired traits, there were areas where she substantially qualified her environmentalism with regard to both racial and sexual variation. The inconsistencies reveal the loose ends of her evolutionary outlook, the fact that some fraction of her thinking was still swathed in Victorian biases” (85). While Berkman accurately notes that Schreiner was very much a product of Victorian thought, it seems inappropriate to criticize her for being a product of her time, especially considering the many ways in

which she rejected Victorian ideas about race, gender, imperialism, and Social Darwinism. Further, what Berkman sees as “loose ends of her evolutionary outlook,” I see as a fairly well-formed revision of Lamarckian evolutionary theory that acknowledges the effects of both the environment (Lamarck) and selection (Darwin) on evolution.

Thus, while Schreiner recognizes the ways in which women and non-whites have been historically subjected to the Darwinian superiority of white men, she also believes that by changing social consciousness, she can help to usher in a new, more egalitarian evolutionary mechanism. In *From Man to Man*, unlike *African Farm*, she takes many of her examples of this egalitarian form of communal-Lamarckian evolution from the animal world. Whereas Doss and the beetle are subject to ruthless Darwinism in *African Farm* because they are nonhuman, the mierkat survives in *From Man to Man* because of its habit of protecting the weaker members of its species: “The survival of the mierkat, so small and defenseless on the barren plains where so many other creatures become extinct in the presence of danger and of enemies, is accountable only when you know that each mierkat acts for all; not for their own young only, but for each other, and, for the younger and more helpless, all labor and sacrifice themselves” (186). Thus, in *From Man to Man*, Schreiner not only proposes a new communal model of the evolutionary mechanism, as she does in *African Farm*, but advocates that humans work to *replace* the already operating Darwinian mechanism with a communal-Lamarckian form of evolution. Schreiner therefore steps outside of the contemporary Darwinian-Lamarckian debates in order to radically revise the scope of human abilities; *From Man to Man*

demonstrates that the human will is capable not only of guiding its own evolutionary process, but of changing the process by which humans evolve.

From Man to Man simultaneously follows the lives of sisters Rebekah and Bertie, both raised on a remote farm in South Africa, though it is primarily told from Rebekah's perspective.¹³ Rebekah marries her cousin Frank and leaves home to raise a family with him because, despite her happiness with her "placid, peaceful life," her "studious life," she felt a "vague, insatiable hunger" that "through all the ages, has summoned the human woman, in spite of the great Chaldean curse, 'I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception'" (56-57). Rebekah is seemingly driven by instinct to marry and, more importantly, bear children, which turns out to be a mixed blessing for her. While Rebekah is a loving mother and does not regret her choice to have children, Frank turns out to be a philanderer and Rebekah is eventually forced to choose between remaining in a loveless marriage and leaving Frank. She chooses the former because she has negotiated some financial independence for herself and has convinced Frank to let her raise Sartje, the daughter he fathered during an affair with their African maid, as her own.¹⁴ Thus, Rebekah becomes terribly disillusioned about love and marriage, and finds her only solace in her children, her science, her intellectual work, and her budding friendship/platonic love affair with her neighbor's recently returned husband, Mr. Drummond, her intellectual counterpart. Baby Bertie's fate is much worse than Rebekah's. She either has sex with or is raped by her tutor as a teenaged girl (the novel leaves the details ambiguous) and later becomes engaged to marry her cousin, Frank's younger brother John-Ferdinand, only to have him reject her when she confesses to him

that she is not a virgin. Heartbroken and ashamed, she abruptly moves to Cape Town to live with Rebekah and Frank, but her secret soon catches up with her, and she overhears women at a dance gossiping about her sexual history. This leads to Bertie's slow decline, as she leaves Cape Town to live with an Aunt, where her past again finds her, and then runs off with a "Jew"¹⁵ and becomes a kept woman. When the Jew throws her out after wrongly suspecting her of having an affair, Bertie becomes a prostitute and, just when Rebekah finally finds her after years of searching, she dies of what is most likely syphilis.¹⁶

Schreiner's letters are full of references to *From Man to Man*, which she began in 1873 and continued to work on until her death in 1920, and, because she added to, deleted from, and heavily revised the novel over these 47 years, her goals for the novel became more complex over time. For instance, in an 1884 letter to Ellis, she summarizes the novel in terms that emphasize her concern with both feminism and socialism: "Of course the subject of my book is prostitution & marriage. It is the story of a prostitute & of a married woman who loves another man, & whose husband is sensual & unfaithful" (*"My Other Self"* 195). However, two years later, in a letter to Pearson, she portrays her novel as a study of human nature, and close analysis of this description reveals that she is working out an evolutionary theory through her two female characters, rejecting Darwinism for its cruelty and demonstrating the power of the Lamarckian will in improving the condition of women. While her description of the novel still emphasizes its feminism, she takes a more detached and scientific view of the plights of her female characters. She asks Pearson if she may dedicate the book to him because of his

“sympathy with women” and, more importantly, his “scientific interest in her condition and development” (*Olive Schreiner Letters* 91). Schreiner’s description of Bertie in this letter is primarily as a victim of Darwinian evolution:

The younger [is] beautiful and sweet, with the clinging, *where she loves*, self-forgetful nature, incapable of enduring the anger of anyone who is near her, which forms the ideal wife in most men’s minds. She becomes a prostitute, not through any evil, but through her sweet fresh objective nature, through her loving-ness, and her non-power of opposing the human creatures who are near her. (91, emphasis in original)

Bertie is clearly an innocent who is ill-equipped for a Darwinian world in which strong men take advantage of and crush the spirits of weak women. Bertie’s only crime in Schreiner’s above description is her “loving-ness,” which makes her incapable of “enduring the anger of” and “opposing” other “human creatures.” However, despite her goodness, Bertie’s death at the end of the novel and her failure to reproduce indicate that she is unfit, in an evolutionary sense, to survive in the present world.

Rebekah, on the other hand, is strong and willful, and she survives despite similar ill treatment at the hands of a man. In the same letter to Pearson, Schreiner describes Rebekah as “reserved and self-contained with a passion for physiology, and Mill’s *Logic*¹⁷ as her particular companion.” Later in the letter, she tells Pearson that, as a reader, “[y]ou vaguely see the agony [Rebekah is] enduring and the growth that is going on in her, but it is only in the last scene of the book that you have the full key to it” (91), a description that sounds vaguely Lamarckian in its emphasis on Rebekah’s “growth.”

She goes on to say that Rebekah “grows harder and colder and deader to the outer world, more careful in the performance of her outward duties, but finding her life only in her tiny study with her books and her microscope, it is they alone which make the torture of union with an animal nature possible to her” (91). Thus, Rebekah finds her only relief from a miserable marriage in “her books and her microscope,” an indication that science will play an important role in terms of both theme and plot in the novel, but also an indication that Rebekah has begun to fulfill Lyndall’s desire for “*Work*.”

The mysterious “full key” to Rebekah’s “growth” that Schreiner references above is revealed when she describes the novel’s ending to Pearson:

Afterwards there is a scene where she finds her prostitute sister. When she is dying Rebekah sits beside her and paints before her the woman’s dream of the future, the freedom, the joy, the strength that are to be. Bertie listens, but half uneasily; there is to be all this for woman but what of man! True to her old love for them she says uneasily, ‘But, Rebekah, we don’t want anything to happen to men!’ And Rebekah kneels down by her, and paints as she sees in that moment of passion and hope the future of love; the time when men and women shall so use their sexual natures and the power they have over each other that they shall be the source of life and strength; when love shall be no more bound down to material conditions; but shall be *what it is striving to be now*, the union of mind, the foundation of the entire nature; there is no hereafter for the individual, but for the race a glorious future. She paints it as she sees it at that

moment. Afterwards when she is lying with her arms round her sister, the sister dies. (93, emphasis in original)

In this passage, Schreiner reveals Rebekah's (and, presumably, Schreiner's) desire to avoid simply explaining the evolutionary mechanism as she sees it functioning in the world, as both Darwin and Lamarck did, and to instead foresee a time when the evolutionary mechanism will have changed for the better. In her last moments, Bertie is still idealistic and loving toward men, despite her terrible treatment in their hands; when she dies, it becomes clear that the time Rebekah envisions has not yet come and, therefore, the weak are destroyed rather than protected. Until Bertie protests, Rebekah's initial vision is a fairly common feminist hope for a future when women will have "freedom," "joy," and "strength." However, once Bertie presses her, Rebekah reveals the evolutionary aspect of her vision for the future: the relations between men and women will be "the source of life and strength" rather than a struggle for power and control, and love will be not just "the union of mind," but, in evolutionary terms, "the foundation of the entire nature." Especially important here are the words that Schreiner italicizes, her insistence that love will become "*what it is striving to be now*," a phrase that places a Lamarckian emphasis on "striving" and that also endows love, a concept rather than a living creature, with its own will to evolve. Here, Schreiner's unique, if rather naively idealistic evolutionary theory becomes evident—because of the "unity underlying all nature," the concept she took from Spencer, even love has the power to "strive." Finally, Rebekah's insistence that "there is no hereafter for the individual, but for the race a glorious future" is reminiscent of the evolutionary theory espoused in *African Farm*.

Waldo's stranger tells of the man who chases Truth and realizes, as he is dying, that future generations "will mount, and on *my* work; they will climb, and by *my* stair!" (116). Similarly, Rebekah believes that "the race" will benefit from the "striving" of the "individual," whose only "hereafter" will be in the contributions she makes in this life to the "glorious future" of the race.

The differences between Rebekah, as a willful Lamarckian capable of contributing to the evolution of the human race, and Bertie, a victim of Darwinian evolution, are established in the novel's prelude "The Child's Day." The descriptions Schreiner provides of the two young girls here are strikingly similar to her descriptions of Lyndall and Em in *African Farm*. We are told that Bertie "had no greater appetite for books and learning than her hand-lamb for carrots, which it ate, as it were under compulsion, if you offered them to him, for fear of paining you, but under no other conditions whatever" (51). Bertie's lack of desire for education is significant here because it indicates that she will not spend her life, as Rebekah does, improving her intellect so that she might pass her evolved mind on to the next generation. Instead, as Rebekah later tells John-Ferdinand, "Bertie and such as Bertie have only one life possible, the life of the personal relations; if that fails them, all fails. [. . .] If the life of personal relations fails Bertie, all will have failed her" (93). Rebekah, on the other hand, is portrayed as a willful, scientifically-minded child who imagines, in one of her many daydream fantasies, that she has her own house in which "[o]ne room was covered with books from the floor to the ceiling, with a little empty shelf for her own books, and there was a microscope on the table like her father's which she was never allowed to touch; but

this one was hers!” (16) Thus, young Rebekah values education, book-learning, and scientific knowledge, indicating that she will, through her self-improvement and contributions to the collective human body of knowledge, provide a step upon which others can build. In fact, she is aware of her potential contributions to human progress when she tells her nurse, who won’t allow her to see her baby sister Bertie, “I only want to take care of it and teach it” (41). As Lovell-Smith notes about Rebekah’s childhood, “She is equipping herself not just to survive and to mother, but to transmit and extend human culture” (316). Although Lovell-Smith does not identify her reading of Rebekah as Lamarckian, she aptly describes Schreiner’s evolutionary revision; while the concepts “survive” and “mother” may be steeped in Darwinian ideology, the more important goal identified here—to “transmit and extend human culture”—demonstrates Schreiner’s communal revision of Lamarckian evolutionary theory.

Rebekah also understands the power of her own will from an early age. When Baby Bertie is born, Rebekah demands to be let into her mother’s room, where she can hear the baby crying:

“Let me in! Let me in! I say, let me in! I will—I—will—I say—I will come in!”

The baby inside had left off crying.

Rebekah heard nothing but the surging of the blood in her own ears.

Old Ayah opened the door.

“Let me in! Let me in! I will come in!” (38)

Rebekah's repetition of "will" here demonstrates her ability to achieve her goals, both personal and evolutionary, through her will alone. Her efforts are rewarded—she finally gains access to the room, despite the maid Ayah's best efforts to keep her out, a lesson she carries with her into adulthood.

In the conversation with John-Ferdinand cited above, Rebekah also describes a different kind of woman who is, unlike Bertie, capable of surviving the failure of love:

Some women with complex, many-sided natures, if love fails them and one half of their nature dies, can still draw a kind of broken life through the other. The world of the impersonal is left them: they can still turn fiercely to it, and through the intellect draw in a kind of life—a poor, broken, half-asphyxiated life, not what it might have been, like the life of a man with one lung eaten out by disease, who has to live through the other alone—but still life. (92-93)

As the novel's plot demonstrates, Rebekah is this second type of woman, who is more fit to survive in a Darwinian world than a woman like Bertie who does not have an intellectual life on which to fall back. However, Rebekah's description of the two types of women here is not simply a demonstration of Darwinian fitness; Rebekah may be more capable of surviving a ruthless world in which men betray women than Bertie is, but she also recognizes that such a survival would result in a "poor, broken, half-asphyxiated life" that is equivalent to "a man with one lung eaten out by disease." Presumably men are not faced with these same two choices—total devastation or a broken intellectual life—because they are the ones with both physical and social power. Thus, for Schreiner,

an evolutionary mechanism in which even the strongest women, those best fit for survival, are left to suffer a “broken” existence, is unsatisfactory. However, instead of simply lamenting the unfairness of a Darwinian world, Schreiner proposes, through Rebekah, an alternative vision of human evolution.

Schreiner devotes 53 pages in the middle of *From Man to Man* to a philosophical discussion of human progress, evolution, and race and gender relations that is at times tedious, especially in its length, but ultimately very revealing about Rebekah’s character and Schreiner’s worldview and evolutionary theories. Rebekah takes advantage of a quiet evening alone, when her children are in bed and Frank and Bertie have gone out dancing, to write in her notebook and pace her little private study, working out her views on human history and the future of the human race. She begins by asking herself why great civilizations always die out, “to be taken up again by some other race or class in some distant part of the globe or after the lapse of centuries—to die out there also after a time, never proceeding persistently in a straight line,” demonstrating that she does not take a naïve view of a consistently teleological model of human progress (162). She goes on to ponder the biological cause of this phenomenon, thus seeking a scientific explanation for what is essentially a philosophical or anthropological question:

Was there an immutable law, based on an organic and inherent quality in human nature, which caused this arrest? Was it futile for us to hope that human advance might ever proceed persistently and unbroken in one direction? Was that which governed its arrest an organic law, like that which ordains the length of a man’s beard, which, however long the

individual may live, when it has once reached a certain length will always stop growing? Is it absolutely futile to hope that humanity can ever advance as the fern palm grows, beautiful frond beyond beautiful frond opening one out of the other as it mounts up higher and higher?—or has the arrest and decay, so invariable in the past, being merely dependent on external and fortuitous conditions, having no one organic root in the human nature itself and therefore being possible to avoid? (162-63)

Although Rebekah is, on the surface, trying to understand the possible scientific roots of past failures of human societies, she frames the question by pitting Darwinian evolution against Lamarckian evolution. She asks whether it is “futile to hope” for a time when human progress will advance steadily, “as the fern palm grows,” and she once again uses the metaphor of climbing, one generation building upon the next, to express her hopeful vision of human progress by way of a Lamarckian evolutionary mechanism. However, Rebekah also recognizes that this is not how evolution has thus far operated, and she posits as the other possibility a Darwinian world in which the human will plays no active role, a world solely “dependent on external and fortuitous conditions” for its survival and continued progress.

Rebekah tells us that earlier that morning, when she was arguing with herself about these same questions, “she had taken first” the Darwinian “standpoint that it was organic and inevitable” (163). However, “[t]o-night, as she walked round the desk, she took the other view (which was really her own) and tried to defend the position that there was no sufficient evidence that this arrest and decay was really organic and therefore

inevitable” (163). Schreiner tells us here that the Lamarckian position was “really [Rebekah’s] own” and, as I have demonstrated in my analysis of her letters and her non-fiction work, most likely Schreiner’s own as well. Rebekah’s defense of this position sets up her eventual argument about the repression of women and non-white peoples, and demonstrates her egalitarian approach to understanding human evolution:

One thing alone would be enough to account for it—the fact that a high advance in intellectual culture and social organization has never yet been attained by any but a minute section of the human race as a whole, and always by merely a small section of the inhabitants of any single territory. That such a minute section of humanity has never been able to maintain its advance proves nothing except that humanity, being intimately in its nature a solidarity and a whole with all its parts reacting on one another, one minute fragment can never move very far ahead of the mass without ultimately being drawn back, either by internal disintegration, brought about through that body in the society itself which has not been included in the advance, or through external and violent contact with other parts of the race which have not shared its advance. That all so-called advanced societies have, in the past, always disintegrated and fallen back does not prove that a hard rim-line exists which humanity can never surpass, and cannot prove this while we are in possession of a fact which adequately accounts for this retrogression without any such supposition. (163-164)

Rebekah's claim here that humanity is "intimately in its nature a solidarity and a whole with all its parts reacting on one another" reflects Schreiner's belief in the importance of community in the evolution of humankind. For Rebekah, Darwinian evolution is a mechanism that operates when humans are not cooperating with one another, and it has always resulted in a promising human civilization dying out. Thus, our failure as humans has been our tendency to compete with one another "through external and violent contact with other parts of the race" and to reward individual achievements rather than, as Rebekah would have it, helping one another and working to improve the situations of those who "have not shared its advance." Rebekah presents Darwinian and Lamarckian (especially Schreiner's own communal-Lamarckism) evolutionary mechanisms in terms of a choice rather than an imperative, and she later provides us with the "one thing alone" and the "fact" that belies the inevitability of a Darwinian world.

As she continues to argue with herself, Rebekah thinks about the example most often cited of humanity reaching the pinnacle of achievement and then eventually failing: classical Greece. She claims that Greece's "much vaunted culture" was merely "the possession of a few males who constituted the dominant class in a few cities of Greece" and that the appearance of Greek culture was only "a delicate iridescent film overlying the seething mass of servile agricultural and domestic slaves and of women, nominally of the dominant class, but hardly less servile and perhaps ignorant, who constituted the bulk of its inhabitants" (164). Thus, according to Rebekah, Greece failed because the achievements of a few men of the "dominant class" were built upon the backs of a great "mass" of women and slaves who were not given the opportunity or the help to reach the

same level of cultural success. The “internal disintegration” that occurred in Greece, therefore, was “brought about through that body in the society itself which has not been included in the advance.” If, then, humans, especially white men, recognized that Social Darwinism and the oppression of women and of other races and classes would result in the downfall of their entire civilization, and if they then began to help those who had been oppressed for so long, they would be able to maintain a linear progression of human evolution.

However, Lamarckism alone will not solve this problem; as Schreiner has emphasized earlier in *African Farm*, only a version of Lamarckism that emphasizes the importance of community will keep human progress on a linear trajectory:

As the head of a tortoise, let it stretch it out as it will within certain limits, can never continue to advance while its hind legs are sticking in the mud; would it move, it must pull its hind legs forward. Would it prove that our loftiest ideals of human progress were futile?—man moving ever in a little ring, advancing and forever falling backward as soon as the edge is reached—and not merely that the true cry of permanent human advance must always be “Bring up your rears! Bring up your rears”? Head and heart can ultimately move no farther than the feet can carry them.

Permanent human advance must be united advance! (166)

Here, Rebekah claims that the individual will alone is not enough to ensure human progress. Instead, we must “bring up [our] rears” so that the whole of humanity is progressing at essentially the same rate and no one is left behind.¹⁸ She rejects the

Darwinian notion that there are natural limits to human progress, choosing instead in favor of the “loft[y] ideal” that Lamarckian evolutionary theory presents, in which the potential for a species’ evolution is only limited by its own will. However, for Rebekah and for Schreiner, it must be a collective, rather than individual will that drives our progress. Rebekah then extends this discussion of “bring[ing] up your rears” to include the entire globe, arguing that the oppression of people anywhere on the planet will result in the destruction of a thriving civilization, even if that civilization treats its own people well (167). For a nineteenth-century thinker, this is a radically progressive idea of global equality that both refutes the prevalent Social Darwinist thinking and rejects common Victorian assumptions about race, class, and gender.

Rebekah’s rejection of Darwinism becomes more complex as she, a mother of four children herself, posits the self-sacrificing nature of motherhood as proof of the success of species that nurture and protect one another. She responds to an imagined “You” who argues that “all evolution in life has been caused simply by this destruction of the weaker by the stronger,” presumably an imaginary follower of Darwin (185). While Rebekah over-simplifies and even, to an extent, misrepresents Darwin’s theory, her imagined opponent here is clearly not Darwin himself, whom she had read, but, rather, the hoards of scientific and sociological thinkers who popularized Darwin’s theories and used them to justify such problematic institutions as imperialism and racism. Rebekah phrases her response to this argument as the response not just of herself, but of all nature:

From every cave and den and nest, from the depths of the sea, from air and earth, from the recesses of the human breast, rises but one great ‘No!’ that

refutes you. Neither man nor bird nor beast, nor even insect, is what it is and has survived here to-day, simply because the stronger has preyed on the weaker. The law of its life and its growth and survival has been far otherwise. (185)

By portraying the entire natural world as collectively crying out “No!” in the face of this pseudo-Darwinian argument, Rebekah demonstrates that her arguments about evolution are firmly grounded in biological principles, not just in a study of human history.

Rebekah goes on to explain “the law of its life and its growth and its survival” in feminist terms, emphasizing the essential role of motherhood in the survival and advancement of any species:

From the insect, following that unself-conscious reason we call instinct, who climbs to the top of the highest bough to fasten there her eggs where the tender shoots will first sprout to feed them, on to the bird who draws the soft down from her breast to warm the nest, who toils to feed and warm, and hovers about before the feet of the dangerous stranger that he may be drawn to attack her and not find her young, and who draws up the food from her own crop to feed them, till love becomes incarnate in the female mammal feeding her young from her breast—this is my blood which I give for the life of the world—through all nature, life and growth and evolution are possible only because of mother-love. [. . .] Everywhere mother-love and the tender nurturing of the weak underlies life, and the higher the creature the larger the part it plays. [. . .] You may almost

estimate the height of development in the creature by the amount of mother-love and care he stands for. (185)

Here, Rebekah (and, most likely, Schreiner) once again seems to misunderstand Darwin, who did not deny the importance of motherhood and the protection of the young from predatory enemies. However, Rebekah's point here is that "mother-love," rather than physical strength or intellectual prowess, is the most important factor in the survival and evolution of species. She traces evolutionary development from the perspective of motherhood, moving from insect mother to bird mother to mammal mother, whose ability to feed her offspring from her own breast is described in Christian terms, as if the mammal mother were Jesus giving his "blood [. . .] for the life of the world." The most Lamarckian moment in this passage comes when Rebekah hesitantly claims that, perhaps, there is a direct correlation between the "amount of mother-love" a species gives its young and the "height of development in the creature" (185-186). This suggests an application for the human species, one that Schreiner suggests in *Woman and Labour*: if we support and revere motherhood, giving mothers the emotional and financial support they need, we will progress in our evolution as a species.

This argument is particularly important for Rebekah, who finds herself in a devastating marriage with only her intellectual work and her children to sustain her. She is a devoted mother who even asks her husband permission (which he grants) to raise his illegitimate daughter Sartje. Thus, Rebekah knows from her own life the importance of "mother-love" and seeks to justify the importance of her role as a mother through a revisioning of evolutionary theory in communal-Lamarckian terms. She tells Mr.

Drummond that every woman, even those who bear children to men they don't love (which presumably includes her), will, even "in the agony of childbirth" have a "thought [. . .] flash in her with sudden joy, 'Perhaps it will live on when I am gone and be the beautiful and the good to others'; and the thought gives her joy, though those who win good and beauty from the child may never know it had a mother or who she was" (457). Even though motherhood may be a thankless job in this life and even though most mothers will not be remembered for their contributions to the improvement of the human race, each child will "live on" and, hopefully, contribute to human evolution through "beautiful" and "good" actions.

Schreiner's evolutionary theory in *From Man to Man* gains one more layer of complexity when Rebekah insists on the artist as the pinnacle of human evolutionary achievement. Rebekah writes in her notebook that there is a "binding moving creative force [that] moves at the very heart of things," and that this force grows "more and more important and complex as the creatures mount in the scale of life, till it reaches its apotheosis in the artist, in whom the desire to create dominates all else" (189). Here, Rebekah endows the nonhuman world with creative powers, even as she recognizes that the human artist is the "apotheosis" of creativity. Now, not only must the entire world participate in egalitarian practices in order to continuously evolve and progress, not only must men recognize the importance of women and, especially, mothers in the evolutionary process, but the artist must also be seen as the ultimate evolutionary goal. Rebekah claims that this artist is one "who, not from himself but by the necessity of some

force within himself, is spent and must spend himself to produce that which gives infinite joy without ever being used up, over which there need be no struggle; for not-seeing the statue or not-hearing the story or not-singing the song makes others poorer” (189). Thus, the pinnacle of human achievement and the goal of the evolutionary process should be a state of human development in which Darwin is rendered obsolete because “there need be no struggle,” and the human purpose is to unselfishly improve the lives of others.

Schreiner’s emphasis on the artist here anticipates the modernist cult of the artist, though she would not have approved of the fascism to which the modernist insistence on the artist as the highest human form could lead. Her prose style also has many of the hallmarks of what would later be called modernist, even though on the surface her fiction often reads like a typical Victorian novel. Deborah Shapple claims that “Schreiner’s generic experimentation leads her work away from the nineteenth-century realist novel yet does not exactly gain it admittance to the ranks of modernism or even naturalism,” an argument with which I tend to agree (98). However, her novels have modernist moments, many of which clearly influenced Virginia Woolf,¹⁹ and she even describes her prose style in her letters in rather modernist terms. In an 1884 letter to Ellis, she tells him that she calls her particular writing style “writing ribbed” and claims that she is “changing a whole chapter of ‘From man to man’ from what I call the plain into the ‘ribbed’ style” (“*My Other Self*” 125). She goes on to explain what she means by “ribbed style”: “I *think* I generally write descriptions in the plain, & philosophize or paint thought in the ‘ribbed.’ (You know in knitting there are two stitches, one makes a plain surface & the other makes ribs; I think I got it from that. Ribbed knitting isn’t

smooth[,] it goes up & down, up & down)” (125). In this description, Schreiner likens her writing style to both painting and fiber arts, much as modernists tried to emulate the resonance of visual art in forms such as poetic imagism.

Her selection of Greece as a site of outstanding human achievement, despite its many flaws, also anticipates the modernist obsession with classical Greek art, literature, and culture, the most prominent example of which is James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. The narrator even tells us that Rebekah “had advanced the view that, to find any true likeness to the modern feeling, we had to go back to the life and thought of classical days, especially to the life and thought in Greece in the fourth century before Christ,” an opinion which many of the modernists would have shared. Finally, both *The Story of an African Farm* and *From Man to Man* exhibit modernist techniques long before the modernists “invented” them.

The Story of an African Farm is divided into three sections, each of which could easily belong to its own genre. The first section, “Shadows from Child Life,” reads like a melodrama both in plot and in the Dickensian villain characters of Tant’ Sannie and Bonaparte Blenkins. The second section (which is actually listed as the first chapter in Part II of the novel), “Times and Seasons,” begins with one sentence about Waldo and then launches into a detailed account of the religious development of children and their eventual rejection of Christianity. The entire section is written in the second person plural, so there are no identifiable characters (though we can presume that Waldo is to be considered the primary example of this development). It is difficult to read this section of the novel without recognizing its similarity to the “Time Passes” section of Woolf’s *To*

the Lighthouse, published 44 years after *African Farm*. Finally, the last section reads much like a realist novel, and, in terms of form, is the most conventionally Victorian part of the book. Some critics find the structure of this novel to be a failure of cohesion on Schreiner's part; Sarah Ruden attributes its "jaggedness" to the fact that Schreiner was writing a "colonial novel" (181) and says that parts of the novel are "immensely awkward, but I have learned to pretend that this isn't a novel but some other genre even more permissive" (187). However, I see *African Farm's* use of multiple genres and literary techniques as an example of what would later be termed modernist hybridity.

From Man to Man does not as clearly anticipate modernism, even though Schreiner was working on it well into the twentieth century, but this may be attributable to the fact that Schreiner never finished it and was thus unable to revise her style and structure before publication. There are, however, several moments that I consider modernist. When the narrator is describing the notebooks Rebekah filled after she had children and had less time to write, we are told that "generally there were only short scraps: outlines of stories never to be filled in, and short diary notes of a very practical nature":

And sometimes [. . .] there were short notices, so written that no one into whose hand the book should fall could have understood them; in which dashes and letters took the place of words; such as "Came into the billiard room unexpectedly. J. D.—Under the table. Ran out. Well, it doesn't matter, it doesn't matter. J. F." or "Again—again—again—to-day!" (151).

Here, Schreiner employs an early version of modernist fragmentation. We are given only bits and pieces of Rebekah's thoughts, scraps of the mind, with which to piece together a preliminary understanding of her troubles with Frank. We learn much later in the novel that Rebekah once caught Frank in a compromising position with a young girl under the pool table in their house, but we get our first hints of that affair here in modernist form.

Finally, while Schreiner's feminism was, while progressive, not terribly unusual in the late nineteenth century, she took her liberal ideas about gender a step further than most of her contemporaries were willing to, challenging gender boundaries in ways that were not usually seen until the 1920s. In *African Farm*, Gregory Rose, who is in love with but has been rejected by Lyndall, poses as a woman in order to become her nursemaid on her deathbed. The chapter in which this occurs is entitled "Gregory's Womanhood," suggesting that Rose was not motivated by a sexual desire to be near to the woman he loved as much as he was becoming a woman in order to take care of Lyndall the way a woman would. Rebekah performs a similar, though this time imaginary, gender transformation in *From Man to Man*, in which she fantasizes about "[h]ow nice it would be to be a man":

She fancied she was one till she felt her very body grow strong and hard and shaped like a man's. [. . .] It seemed she was lying on the earth, on mats in the hut, and beside her lay the woman she loved, fast asleep. She felt the little head on her shoulder, the soft hair against her cheek, and the little body within her arm [. . .]. The little one beside her moved uneasily, and as it lay so close she felt the little body throb and knew it was the life

within her that he had awakened. (She was him now, not herself any more). And such a great tenderness came over him, and he drew her close and bound his limbs about her so that she was quite wrapped about, but the little wife upon his arms slept on, not knowing how she was loved.

(202-203)

While imagining herself as a man in a loving embrace with her/his wife, Rebekah even shifts her use of pronouns, suddenly thinking of herself in terms of “him” and “he” instead of the “her” and “she” she used earlier in the fantasy. This proto-modernist understanding of the fluidity of gender becomes even more pronounced when, in the next sentence, Rebekah imagines that her/his wife’s “little child was born” and “he held it in his arms” and “put it close into the little mother’s arms against her breast and bent down over them” (203). Here, Rebekah even is able to imagine herself not as the mother she actually is but as a father to her own child, emphasizing both a hope of unity between the sexes and her own capacity to be both mother and father to her children and, perhaps, both mother and father to the human race.

It is my contention, then, that the modernism Schreiner employs in her literary technique can also be seen in her unique evolutionary theory. Although she clearly rejects Social Darwinism, she never fully dismisses Darwin’s theory of natural selection, even while she advocates for a modified, communal version of Lamarckism. This combination of evolutionary theories can be seen as a form of modernist hybridity, in which the two theories, placed side by side and in the presence of a third concept of community, will create a sum that is larger than its parts, a new vision of human

evolution that can be implemented once people have been properly educated about the importance of social equality, motherhood, the protection of the weak, and the artist for the future of the human race.

Notes

¹ In the introduction to *Woman and Labour*, Schreiner explains that she began the book in her “early youth” and worked on it until ten years before its 1911 publication, intending it to be a “book on Woman” that “touched on most matters in which sex has a part, however incompletely” (3). However, during the Boer War, while the Schreiners were away, British troops looted their house and burned her manuscript (10). Schreiner wrote the published version of *Woman and Labour* from memory, “mainly drawn from one chapter of the larger book,” and she considered it a “fragment” (12, 13).

² See Loren Anthony, “Buried Narratives: Masking the Sign of History in *The Story of an African Farm*”; Bart Moore-Gilbert, “Olive Schreiner’s *Story of an African Farm*: Reconciling Feminism and Anti-Imperialism?”; Mark Sanders, “Towards a Genealogy of Intellectual Life: Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm*”; Deborah L Shapple, “Artful Tales of Origination in Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm*”; and Malvern Van Wyk Smith, “Napoleon and the Giant: Discursive Conflicts in Olive Schreiner’s ‘Story of an African Farm.’”

³ See Joyce Avrech Berkman, *The Healing Imagination of Olive Schreiner*; Carolyn Burdett, *Olive Schreiner and the Progress of Feminism*; and Ruth Parkin-Gounelas, *Fictions of the Female Self*.

⁴ Schreiner’s German father, Gottlob Schreiner, and English mother, Rebecca (Lyndall) Schreiner, were missionaries with the London Missionary Society in South Africa (First and Scott 32-37).

⁵ A Shavian term for “vitality” that “sometimes rises to genius” (Shaw, *Man and Superman* 530). Schreiner also uses the term “woman of genius” to describe her friend Lady Constance Lytton, to whom she dedicates *Woman and Labour*.

⁶ In Shaw’s interpretation of the “Lamarckian evolutionary process,” human evolution happens “because you want [it] badly enough to keep trying for [it] until [it] come[s]” (Shaw, *Back to Methuselah* xx).

⁷ Karl Pearson presented a paper entitled “The Woman Question” at a meeting of the Men and Women’s Club, of which Schreiner was an original member (First and Scott 149). He continued his interest in this subject, and argued that the woman question “called for study by impartial minds, rather than platform appeals, for social problems would not be solved if they were subject to the ‘passion and prejudice’ of the market place” (First and Scott 287).

⁸ For Schreiner, this was a prescient moment, since she did not live to complete her novel.

⁹ Even though Lyndall manages to leave home to attend boarding school, she ultimately achieves very little that could be considered a contribution to human progress. Most importantly, she does not live long enough to become the champion of human rights that she hoped she would when she was a child and wanted to “help everything that is weak” (51).

¹⁰ Shaw argues that his brand of socio-Lamarckism must be “given enough time for it to operate” before “you can turn an amoeba into a man, or a man into a superman” (Shaw, *Back to Methuselah* xx).

¹¹ Bertie is called “Baby Bertie” even as an adult.

¹² In *Woman and Labour*, Schreiner traces the history of the division of labor between men and women. She claims that women used to be given a fair share of the labor required to sustain society, but that their labor share had been decreasing steadily for centuries, so that upon examination of “the entire field of woman’s ancient and traditional labours, we find that *fully three-fourths of it have shrunk away for ever, and that the remaining fourth still tends to shrink*” (67, emphasis in original). In contemporary society, she argues, modern technology has made the need for physical strength almost obsolete, and now women should be allowed to work, especially in an intellectual capacity, in order to contribute equally and therefore gain equal rights and freedoms. She says that “we,” women, “demand [. . .] that in this new world we also shall have our share of the honoured labour of the Children of Woman,” and she declares, “*This is our ‘WOMAN’S RIGHT!’*” (68, emphasis in original).

¹³ Rebekah is the character most analogous in intellect and temperament to Schreiner, despite her claim to identify with all of the main characters: “Rebekah is me[.] I don’t know which is which any more; but Bertie is me, & [Mr.] Drummond is me, & all is me, only not Veroni[c]a & Mrs. Drummond (except a little!). Sometimes I really don’t know whether I am I; or I am one of the others” (“*My Other Self*” 441).

¹⁴ Schreiner's portrayal of Rebekah's adopted mixed-race child is both progressive and problematic. Schreiner wants us to see Rebekah as open-minded and magnanimous for raising this child as her own, even though her husband has no interest in doing so. However, Schreiner describes Sartje in the novel as having a "little dark wizen face" whose "forehead was drawn up with wrinkles, like an old woman's, as if from some pre-natal and inherited anxiety," and claims that the likeness between Sartje and Rebekah's own son was like "the likeness between a figure carved delicately in alabaster and the same cast roughly in brown clay; but it was there" (392). Thus, while Schreiner's portrayal of Sartje is negatively racialized, it is progressive in its ability to admit physical similarities between a white child and a mixed-race child.

¹⁵ Schreiner's portrayal of "the Jew" (as she calls him throughout) in the novel is highly problematic, and several critics have noted that, despite her progressive ideas about race, she cannot fully shake off the racism instilled in her by her South African upbringing and by nineteenth-century culture. As Anne McClintock writes, "Startlingly advanced in her anti-racism and political analysis, she could fall on occasion into the most familiar racial stereotypes" (259).

¹⁶ Because the novel is unfinished, Bertie's death only appears in Samuel Cronwright-Schreiner's note at the end of the novel that tells the reader how she intended it to end.

¹⁷ Mill's *Logic* was, like Spencer's *First Principles*, a formative book for Schreiner (*Letters* 277).

¹⁸ In *Woman and Labour*, Schreiner uses a very similar example to discuss the importance of human evolution occurring for both sexes equally and concurrently:

The males and females of each human society resemble two oxen tethered to one yoke that binds them; and they must ultimately remain stationary or move forward together. That which the women of one generation are mentally or physically, that by inheritance and education the males of the next tend to be: there can be no movement or change in one sex which will not instantly have its coordinating effect upon the other; the males of tomorrow are being cast in the mold of the women of to-day. If new ideals, new moral conceptions, new methods of action are found permeating the minds of the women of one generation, they will reappear in the ideals, moral conceptions, methods of action of the men of thirty years hence; and the idea that the males of a society can ever become permanently farther removed from its females than the individual man is from the mother who bore and reared him, is at variance with every law of human inheritance. (264-65)

¹⁹ It is difficult to ignore the similarities between certain passages from Woolf's novels and essays and passages from Schreiner's work, which suggests that Woolf must have read and been heavily influenced by Schreiner. The most striking instance of similarity is a passage from *From Man to Man* (1926) that closely resembles Woolf's famous discussion of Shakespeare's sister in *A Room of One's Own* (1929):

For it is not alone through the physical destruction and annihilation of the weaker by the brutally stronger that we have suffered. What has humanity not lost by the suppression and subjection of the weaker sex by the muscularly stronger sex alone? We have a Shakespeare; but what of the possible Shakespeares we might have had, who passed their life from youth upward brewing currant wine and making pastries for fat country squires to eat, with no glimpse of the freedom of life and action, necessary even to poach on deer in the green forests, stifled out without one line written, simply because, being of the weaker sex, life *gave no room* for action and grasp on life? (Schreiner, *From Man to Man* 195, emphasis mine)

CHAPTER III

EVOLUTIONARY PROSELYTIZING: SCIENCE AND SALVATION IN SHAW'S
RELIGION OF CREATIVE EVOLUTION

In his 1944 postscript to the World's Classics edition of his 1921 play cycle *Back to Methuselah: A Metabiological Pentateuch*, George Bernard Shaw claims that this play has earned the "right [. . .] to be included in a list of world classics" because it is the first play for which he "threw over all economic considerations, and faced the apparent impossibility of a performance during my lifetime" (250-251). He laments that, like Shakespeare, he "had to write potboilers until I was rich enough to satisfy my evolutionary appetite (or, as they say, give way to my inspiration) by writing what came to me without the least regard to the possibility of lucrative publication or performance" (250). Shaw reveals himself to have suffered a typical artist's plight of trying to earn a living while still remaining faithful to his own artistic vision. However, he substitutes "inspiration," the term that "they" use, with "evolutionary appetite" here in order to raise the stakes of the struggle—Shaw sees himself not just as an artistic pioneer, but as an essential agent in the improvement of the human race. In fact, he sees a clear link

between art and science, and he claims that art is required to bridge the gaps in understanding that science has not yet been capable of filling:

Like Shakespear again, I was a born dramatist, which means a born artist-biologist struggling to take biology a step forward on its way to positive science from its present metaphysical stage in which the crude facts of life and death, growth and decay, evolution and reversion, consciousness and unconsciousness, selfpreservation and self-sacrifice, defy the methods of investigation we employ in our research laboratories, and have to be made apprehensible by fictions, pictures, and symphonies in which they are instinctively arranged in a manner which gives a mysterious pleasure to some of the readers, spectators, and listeners, and provokes others to passionate denial and persecution. When I am not potboiling for myself or others I am being driven by my evolutionary appetite to write these fictions. Even when I have the box office in view I am not free to choose the most lucrative sort of fiction. Evolution keeps creeping in. (250-51)

Shaw sees art and science as confluent and sees himself at the center of that confluence as an “artist-biologist” who creates art for the sake of science and helps both progress for the sake of human evolution. He believes it is his calling to “take biology a step forward” out of the “crude” present state it is in, and the best way he sees to do that is to create plays that solve complex scientific problems through artistic means rather than solely through work in “research laboratories.” Art, in Shaw’s case drama, also serves to make science more “apprehensible” to the nonscientists who view his plays. This is the kind of

work that Shaw believes he has finally accomplished in *Back to Methuselah*: an artistic masterpiece that, free of the shackles of the marketplace, can help audiences understand science, can shape the speed and direction of human evolution, and can transcend the laboratory in its scientific vision.

While this is a lofty self-assessment, twenty-five years after the play's original publication, of Shaw's most strange and difficult play, it helps us understand how seriously Shaw took his theory of "Creative Evolution," which he championed and developed for over half his life. As he says above, even earlier in his career, when he was writing for baser goals such as money and fame, "Evolution [kept] creeping in," demonstrating that, for Shaw, this one concern both enveloped and overshadowed all others for him, particularly in the second half of his career. The plays I will examine in this chapter, *Man and Superman* (1903) and *Back to Methuselah*, are the two most important examples of Shaw's melding of art and science to progress evolutionary aims, and they also clearly show the development of his thinking on the subject at the same time he became more free to disregard "all economic considerations."

Part of Shaw's project as a self-declared "artist-biologist" was to cast himself in the role of the visionary prophet who knows the truth but is doubted by everyone. Much of Shaw's life was spent carefully crafting his public persona, so this is just one of many roles he played. However, based on the seriousness with which he seemed to take Creative Evolution and the longevity of his advocacy of it, this was a role that was imbued with more than his usual zeal. He combined his sincere interest in the science of evolution with a modernist desire to create a new religion that would rescue humankind

from itself. In his preface to *Back to Methuselah*, Shaw traces the history of evolutionary debates as he sees them:

As the vogue of Evolution, begun by Goethe and maintained by Darwin's grandfather, faded out in 1830, neither Darwin nor his contemporaries seem to have been aware of it. The next generation accepted Natural Selection as the only method of biological development, and thereby came into conflict with the old Creative Evolutionists and with Darwin himself: a schism which obliged them to distinguish themselves as Neo-Darwinians. Before ten more years had elapsed, the Neo-Darwinians were dominating biological Science. It was 1906; I was fifty; I had published my own view of evolution in a play called *Man and Superman*; and I found that most people were unable to understand how I could be an Evolutionist and not a Neo-Darwinian, or why I derided Neo-Darwinism as a mischievous heresy, and would fall on its professors slaughterously in public discussions. (ix)

In this history, Shaw paints himself as a lone crusader against neo-Darwinism by claiming that “most people” were confused by his rejection of Darwinian evolution and emphasizing his “own view of evolution.” He also draws a clear line connecting his 1903 play *Man and Superman* with his latest project *Back to Methuselah* in order to establish his credentials as an evolutionary theorist who has been writing and lecturing about evolution since the turn of the century, rather than as a newcomer to a fairly old game. Shaw's insistence that in 1906 “the Neo-Darwinians were dominating biological science”

is also self-serving, for, as I demonstrate in the dissertation's introduction, neo-Darwinian and neo-Lamarckian theories of evolution were in fierce competition in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. By ignoring this reality and instead portraying himself as both anachronistic and prophetic, Shaw capitalizes on his already well-established public persona as an eccentric who "slaughterously" attacked his critics in order to establish his own evolutionary theory as radical and himself, like John Tanner in *Man and Superman*, as a revolutionary.

In fact, Shaw's evolutionary theory was not particularly revolutionary. He freely admits that his theory is based on Lamarck's theory of inherited acquired characters and that he borrows heavily from Samuel Butler, whose 1886 *Luck or Cunning* Shaw reviewed for the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1887. The debate as Shaw described it in the 1887 review hinged on the rhetorical strategy of the evolutionary theorist:

The question at issue is—granted the survival of the fittest, were the survivors made fit by mere luck, or did they fit themselves by cunning? [. . .] The quarrel is a pretty one; for if you decide in favor of cunning, the Darwinian will reply that it was a great piece of luck in the survivor to have that cunning; whereas, if you back luck, the Lamarck-Butlerian will urge that the survivor must have had the cunning to turn his luck to his account. ("Darwin Denounced" 278)

Here, Shaw succinctly captures the essence of the debate between neo-Darwinians and neo-Lamarckians (the role of the will) and also asserts his own belief in Butler's importance by renaming neo-Lamarckian evolutionary theory "Lamarck-Butlerian,"

thereby giving Butler a nearly equal role in the development of a theory that had been established by Lamarck almost 70 years earlier. Although Shaw was not yet a devoted “Lamarck-Butlerian” when he wrote this review, his use of this term is indicative of his later view of himself as an evolutionary theorist, for if Butler, a novelist, can become, at least in Shaw’s mind, a leading voice in the scientific community, then Shaw, a playwright, can achieve the same level of scientific credibility.

The lineage of the evolutionary theory that Shaw later calls Creative Evolution is, according to Shaw, one that progresses from Butler to Shaw to Henri Bergson, whose *L’Evolution Créatrice* was published in 1907 and translated into English in 1911. Bergson’s “élan vital” is strikingly similar to the “Life Force” that underpins Shaw’s own Creative Evolution, and in a 1918 letter to Parliament member Charles Trevelyan, Shaw establishes this lineage and explains why he and Bergson described the same phenomenon:

[T]ake two expositions that may be known to you: the third act of *Man and Superman* and Bergson’s Creative Evolution. These are totally independent of one another: Bergson and I would have written as we did, word for word, each if the other had never been born. And yet one is a dramatization of the other. Our very catchwords, Life Force and Élan Vital, are translations of one another. The Irishman and the Frenchman find their thoughts in focus at the same point; and both of them had the way pointed out by that intensely English Englishman, Samuel Butler. I can now, when asked what my religion is, say I am a creative-evolutionist

with all the confidence of John Knox, and preach just as long sermons about it. (*Collected Letters 1911-1925* 542-43)

Here, Shaw describes Butler, Bergson, and himself as a sort of holy trinity of evolution, an assessment that is supported by his insistence that Creative Evolution is a “religion.” By creating a trinity that consists of a novelist, a playwright, and a philosopher, Shaw takes evolutionary debates that were occurring primarily within the scientific community and moves them into the realm of art and philosophy, further solidifying his argument that art is needed to push science beyond its current capabilities and also establishing himself as an “artist-biologist” at the heart of the controversy. Even though Shaw kept up on recent theories and experiments in the scientific community, especially surrounding evolution, by establishing Creative Evolution as a religion, he no longer needed to rely on strictly scientific arguments to make his case for a Lamarckian evolutionary mechanism.

The reasoning Shaw provides for the similarities between his and Bergson’s theories and even terminology clearly demonstrates the ways in which Shaw manages to intertwine Lamarckian and religious rhetoric. When he claims that he and Bergson wrote entirely independently of one another, and that they would have written exactly as they did even “if the other had never been born,” Shaw is suggesting that both writers were driven by a will, a purpose, a “Life Force” or an “Élan Vital” that drove them independently toward a single theory.¹ This is a Lamarckian understanding of the production of ideas, for rather than being the product of a Darwinian coincidence (the “luck” in Butler’s understanding of Darwinism), “the Irishman and the Frenchman find their thoughts in focus at the same point” and are thus striving for the same goal, which

for Shaw is a progressive evolutionary goal. These same passages reveal a mystical element as well, for the implication of an independent yet shared goal is that both the Irishman and the Frenchman were aiming toward a single truth that was greater than both men. Shaw's comparison of himself to John Knox, while certainly tongue-in-cheek, indicates that Shaw saw himself, along with Butler and Bergson, as the founder of a new religion and even, perhaps, as someone who would be persecuted for his faith, as Knox was. While Shaw did not subscribe to any organized religion and, in fact, was very critical of religious institutions,² his rhetorical strategy here and elsewhere of turning an evolutionary theory into a new religion allows him to take his modified Lamarckism into the non-scientific mainstream and thus help to secure Lamarck (or Butler-Shaw-Bergson) as a serious contender in the evolutionary debates.

In the preface to *Back to Methuselah*, Shaw makes an even stronger case for Creative Evolution as a religion³:

Creative Evolution is already a religion, and is indeed now unmistakably the religion of the twentieth century, newly arisen from the ashes of pseudo-Christianity, of mere scepticism, and of the soulless affirmations and blind negations of the Mechanists and Neo-Darwinians. But it cannot become a popular religion until it has its legends, its parables, its miracles.

(lxviii)

This proclamation of a new “religion of the twentieth century” is not only a Shavian portrayal of himself as prophet, but also a very modernist impulse to make something new out of the “ashes” of the culture that came before. However, Shaw's “ashes” here

are not the “Wasteland” left by World War I but, rather, the failings of both Christianity and Darwinism, and the remnants of the nineteenth-century struggle between these two paradigms. And, if Creative Evolution is “newly arisen” from these ashes, then Shaw, who first exposed his audiences to this theory in *Man and Superman* and, in his own mind, was one of the first (after Butler) to reject Darwin on non-religious grounds, must be the leader, the John Knox, of this new evolutionary religion. This move toward religion is a decidedly modernist departure for Shaw from the nineteenth-century naturalists who influenced his thought and craft.⁴ Shaw takes science out of the realm of the natural world and into the modernist project of myth-making, attempting to make new meaning in a world that Darwin’s legacy had, in Shaw’s view, left meaningless.

Although Shaw often took Lamarckian evolutionary theory out of context and manipulated it for his own purposes, he was not alone in his impulse to find a replacement for Darwinism, and particularly neo-Darwinism. Although neo-Darwinism had pulled ahead of neo-Lamarckism in the race for scientific legitimacy by the time Shaw published *Back to Methuselah* in 1921, it was still an even contest when Shaw published *Man and Superman*, and even the 1920s and 1930s saw surges in the popularity of Lamarckism within the scientific community, usually fueled by new “discoveries” that prompted a reexamination of the theory.⁵ In the general public’s understanding, however, the differences between Lamarckism and Darwinism were negligible—both represented an explanation for the origins of species, particularly the human species, that took God out of the equation. What Shaw brought to the table was a distinctively Lamarckian (even if Shaw took some license with Lamarck’s theory), anti-

Darwinian layperson's explanation of human evolution that intentionally focused on the human ability to change our circumstances as a way to relieve anxieties about the human role in a chaotic and unpredictable world.

By calling his theory *Creative Evolution* and giving it a religious structure, he tapped into the strong desires of many for a new creed that would synthesize science and humanism. When Shaw wrote *Man and Superman*, he was already a formidable public figure, and his considerable celebrity was even more well-established by the time he wrote *Back to Methuselah*. In addition to his plays, he wrote volumes of essays and articles, and he was an incredibly popular public speaker (every speech he gave was covered in the newspapers). Thus, Shaw's Lamarckism both influenced and was influenced by popular discussions of evolution and the infusion of Lamarckian thought and rhetoric into social, political, and literary culture. Shaw's considerable ego allowed him to see himself as simultaneously the prophet of his new religion and the spokesman for his new science, and, while clearly this persona is highly exaggerated, Shaw's immense popularity and public visibility helped him to shape the cultural understanding of evolutionary theories.

While a good deal of Shaw criticism focuses on the Life Force and on Creative Evolution, critics rarely consider Shaw's work and ideas seriously within this cultural context, nor do they examine the scientific roots and details of his theory, preferring instead to see Shaw as either a visionary or an eccentric for creating his own evolutionary theory that encompasses religion, philosophy, and science.⁶ Many critics believe that Shaw, like Butler and Bergson, was dealing with evolution solely from a religious and/or

philosophical perspective rather than from a scientific one, and they read Shaw's theory as a hubristic attempt to create a new religion rather than also considering its relationship with and even impact on contemporary scientific debates. They also fail to consider how deeply intertwined evolutionary theory was in the early twentieth century with Shaw's other primary concerns: socialism and eugenics.

Thus, the critical approaches to Shaw's Creative Evolution and the role of this theory in his plays tend to fall into two categories: those who contextualize Shaw's theory within the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, especially within the context of philosophy and religion, but fail to take into account contemporary scientific debates between neo-Darwinians and neo-Lamarckians (and even fail to attribute Shaw's theory to Lamarck at all), and those who put Shaw's theory in the context of late-twentieth and twenty-first-century evolutionary debates, using Shaw to make a point in support of or in opposition to intelligent design. Most critics seem to find Shaw's Creative Evolution either an inspiring theory that they wish to prove right or further evidence of the anachronism on which Shaw's persona is partially based. I find both of these approaches problematic because neither recognizes the complex history of evolutionary thought and the influence of the neo-Darwinian/neo-Lamarckian controversy on the lay understanding of human evolution, and neither accurately historicizes Shaw's plays and essays within his specific cultural moment, taking into account not only evolutionary debates, but also related political movements like socialism and eugenics. The theory of evolution that Shaw begins in *Man and Superman* and which culminates in *Back to Methuselah* is not simply an out of date, curmudgeonly

reaction to Darwin and a desire to go against the grain, nor is it simply an abstract philosophical concept or an attempt to create a new religion. Rather, it is in step with late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century theories of evolution and, although Shaw pushes Lamarckism further than the scientists do and holds on to it longer than many, he is driven by many of the anxieties that others were experiencing: fear of degeneration, response to war, rejection of capitalism (and thus social Darwinism), convictions about eugenics, a sincere interest in the science of evolution, and a desire to be taken seriously as a scientific thinker himself.

A 1916 letter from Shaw to H.G. Wells demonstrates Shaw's conception of himself as a scientific thinker particularly well. In it, Shaw criticizes Wells for not having yet rid himself of the "[h]astily bolted and still undigested nonsense that passed as science in [his] South Kensington days," which Shaw believes keeps him rooted in "Neo-Darwinian lunacy, when it was scientific to think of Darwin as a giant and of [Samuel] Butler as a nobody" (*Collected Letters 1911-1925* 441-42). In contrast, Shaw asserts himself as a contemporary scientist whose own evolutionary theory is cutting-edge in comparison to Wells' nostalgic Darwinism:

My biology is all right: I explained it before the amazed [Caleb] Saleeby at my first lecture. You will find it all in the third act of *Man and Superman*, in the creed of Mr Britling [*Mr. Britling Sees It Through*, H.G. Wells, 1916], and in the passage from my essay on Darwin in which I sweep away the silly controversy about the inheritance of acquired habits—as if, Good God! there were any habits but acquired habits to an

evolutionist—and explain exactly how the inheritance occurs. I am simply the greatest biologist of this age if every man had his due; and dont you forget it. (442)

The lecture to which Shaw refers here is “Life,” which he gave as part of a Fabian series of lectures on Oct. 27, 1916. Dr. Caleb Saleeby, a famous eugenicist, was the chair for the lecture, and, as noted in a newspaper report on the lecture, Shaw sought to “impress the chairman with his scientific attainments (as he confessed)” (“The World in Chains”). The self-portrait Shaw paints here—for Saleeby, for Wells, and for the much larger audience of his lectures, essays, and plays—is of a renaissance man who can comprehend and even create science as deftly as he can create dramatic characters. Even though neo-Darwinian and neo-Lamarckian biologists and naturalists had been debating the inheritance of acquired characteristics for decades, Shaw claims he is able to “sweep away the silly controversy” in one essay and thereby forever relegate Darwin to the dusty bookshelf.

Thus, Shaw’s “biology,” his proposal for the mechanism of human evolution, goes from being “all right,” scientifically sound, to making him “simply the greatest biologist of this age if every man had his due.” While this final statement, particularly with the coda “and dont you forget it,” is typical Shavian rhetorical flourish, meant as a joke for himself and Wells, it is important not to dismiss this statement as hyperbole without first examining how Shaw presented himself elsewhere as a “scientist” or a “biologist” and how he felt about his own ability to educate the public about “exactly how the inheritance occurs,” sweep away “silly” controversies, and create a new religion

of evolution. While it is always difficult to determine when Shaw is serious, it is important to separate Shaw's anachronistic persona from his earnest engagement with contemporary science.

Shaw's lifelong commitment to socialism and his interest in eugenics both dovetailed nicely with Lamarck's theory, which made him particularly receptive to Lamarckian ideas, and his resulting wide range of political and intellectual circles made him an influential Lamarckian salesman. Shaw was a prominent member of the Fabian Society, which emphasized gradual, policy-driven socialist reforms and working within the system, as opposed to the revolutionary politics advocated by other socialists. This form of socialism was particularly well-suited to a Lamarckian worldview because of its emphasis on gradual change. If Lamarckian evolutionary theory, particularly in the hands of Shaw, emphasized gradual mental and physical changes over thousands of years, then the Fabian program could work in a similar way. Both required will for such change to occur, and Lamarckism was much more egalitarian than the Darwinian alternative in which competition, rather than socialist cooperation, was required.

The eugenics movement, on the other hand, was primarily populated by Darwinists, but there were a variety of eugenic approaches being advocated in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, and Shaw tended to support those approaches, namely positive eugenics, that were more closely in line with a Lamarckian viewpoint.⁷ Further, as I demonstrate in Chapter IV, even though most eugenics advocates considered themselves Darwinists or neo-Darwinists, they often employed Lamarckian language in their explanations of eugenic ideas, even though they would never have identified

Lamarckism as their influence. Shaw lectured and wrote numerous essays on both evolution and eugenics, often tying both of these fields of inquiry to socialism, and *Man and Superman* and *Back to Methuselah* serve as the literary bookends to the most fertile period in his thought on these issues. While neither play enjoyed the stage successes of many of his other plays, due in large part to their experimental natures and the difficulties in staging them, both sparked discussion and debate about Creative Evolution and, more generally, Lamarckism. Although these two plays are commonly viewed as attempts by Shaw to champion an outdated evolutionary theory and, particularly *Back to Methuselah*, as crackpot science fiction, it is more productive to view them as evidence of Shaw's reciprocal relationship with an important moment in early twentieth-century scientific, philosophical, and political thought. Further, these plays represent two instances when Shaw broke free from more conventional theatrical forms, demonstrating that the plays that are the most radical in their ideas are also the most radical in form.

In a 1919 letter, Shaw claims that “*Man & Superman* is the first attempt to dramatize [Creative Evolution] in English,” making it an essential starting point for demonstrating his serious engagement with Lamarckism (*Collected Letters 1911-1925* 601). Later, in the Preface to *Back to Methuselah*, he claims that in the “Don Juan in Hell” scene (Act III of *Man and Superman*) he “took the legend of Don Juan in its Mozartian form and made it a dramatic parable of Creative Evolution,” but, because he was “then at the height of [his] invention and comedic talent,” he “decorated it too brilliantly and lavishly” so that “nobody noticed the new religion in the centre of the

intellectual whirlpool” (lxxiii). Essentially, Shaw claims here that he was too masterful a playwright, too brilliant a comedian, for the real purpose of his play, the exposition of Creative Evolution, to be taken seriously: “By good luck and acting, the comedy triumphed on the stage; and the book was a good deal discussed. But as its tale of a husband huntress [the other three acts of *Man and Superman*] obscured its evolutionary doctrine I try again with this cycle of plays [*Back to Methuselah*] that keep the point all through” (lxxiv). It is this “tale of a husband huntress,” however, that I find most revealing of Shaw’s Lamarckism.

While the “Don Juan in Hell” act of *Man and Superman* is certainly Lamarckian, and I will discuss it in detail here, my primary objective in my analysis of *Man and Superman* is to demonstrate that even when Shaw is at his best as a playwright, engaging his audience with humorous dialogue and a love-story plot, he is still shaping his audience’s ways of thinking about human evolution, pulling them away from Darwin and pushing them toward Lamarck. This play is also remarkable in that Shaw manages to incorporate both socialism and eugenics into a drama that is intended as a primer on Creative Evolution, demonstrating that, for Shaw, Lamarckism has practical applications beyond explaining the evolution of the human race. In fact, for Shaw, evolution is not just an explanation of human origins but a prescription for how to live and what to do in order to continue evolving in the most progressive way. While most of the criticism written on this play has teased it apart, some focusing on the religious aspects of Shaw’s Creative Evolution, some concentrating on his treatment of Ann as a New Woman, and most treating the Don Juan in Hell act as a separate entity from the rest of the play,⁸ I am

interested in putting the pieces back together and adding the largely missing piece of the play's Lamarckism in order to reveal *Man and Superman* as an ambitious early-modernist project that attempts to fuse science, religion, and politics in order to create a new paradigm for twentieth-century human life and development that replaces the Darwinian and social-Darwinian model of the previous century.

One aspect of this project's break with the nineteenth century is Shaw's experimentation with form in *Man and Superman*. To begin with, the subtitle of *Man and Superman* is "A Comedy and a Philosophy," demonstrating that this is either more than just a play or a dramatic revision of audiences' expectations for plays. Further, it was published as a book (1903) before it was ever performed (1905). It is written in four acts, but the third act, "Don Juan in Hell," is a lengthy dream sequence not necessary to the production of the play and was first staged as a separate production in 1907 (the intact play was not performed as a whole until 1915). Shaw intentionally wrote the play so that it could be performed without this act (*Back to Methuselah* lxxiii). In addition, Shaw includes in the printed version of the play an "Epistle Dedicatory" to London *Times* dramatic critic Arthur Bingham Walkley, which serves as a lengthy preface, and "The Revolutionists' Handbook and Pocket Companion," ostensibly written by the main character John Tanner. The staged version was most often performed without the "Don Juan in Hell" act, and audiences did not have access in the theatre to the "Epistle Dedicatory" or "The Revolutionist's Handbook." Thus, *Man and Superman* contains text that is not stageable and can therefore only be experienced in print. In fact, in a "P.S." to his "Epistle Dedicatory," Shaw refers to *Man and Superman* as "this book of ours,"

thereby deemphasizing the fact that it is a play (xxxvii). While long prefaces were certainly not unusual for Shaw, the addition of a rarely-staged third act, which also includes a musical score, and a handbook written by the main character results in a hybrid form that must be both seen and read to be fully appreciated. This creates an impossible situation in which audiences are not privy to the textual frame of the play, and readers, who do have access to this textual material, miss out on the effects of the play's staging.

In his article "Modernism in Drama," Christopher Innes points out that drama is the most difficult genre to define as modernist because of its necessary limitations: the stage itself "has a pre-set architectural frame" that limits experimentation, the nature of drama as a public performance makes it "subject to normative pressures from the spectators as a group," and "imitation was always present, being the essential basis of acting" (131). Nonetheless, he identifies several practitioners of modernist drama, including Shaw, whose "refurbishing of traditional melodrama and romance" he sees as an important contribution to modernist theatre (147). Innes acknowledges that "[c]ompromises had to be made if viable work was to be produced for the stage, and in drama the most influential practitioners of Modernism are defined by the infusion of a modernist spirit into standard theatrical forms" (147). He sees Shaw as a prime example of this strategy, using *Man and Superman* as a particularly important instance of this modernist spirit (147).⁹ However, I would take Innes' analysis a step further to argue that by creating a work of art that can neither be fully comprehended through the act of reading nor through the act of attending the theatre, Shaw frustrates audience

expectations and complicates generic boundaries, anticipating the Dadaists and other more experimental dramatists who followed him.

Even Shaw's didacticism, which is usually seen as one of his most nineteenth-century traits as playwright, often disrupts the naturalistic sensibility of his plays, and this is especially the case in *Man and Superman*, where the entire third act is a long discussion with practically no action. In his extensive "Epistle Dedicatory" in *Man and Superman*, Shaw insists that his "conscience is the genuine pulpit article," and announces that "it annoys me to see people comfortable when they ought to be uncomfortable; and I insist on making them think in order to bring them to conviction of sin. If you don't like my preaching you must lump it. I really cannot help it" (viii). Here Shaw sets himself up as a "preacher" rather than a playwright, reminding us that he saw his theory of Creative Evolution as a religion and himself as proselytizer. Rather than allow his audience to sit back and enjoy the play, he wants to show them the error of their ways like an effective preacher leading his parishioners away from sin, a strategy that in some ways prefigures Brecht's anti-Aristotelian playwriting and directing methodologies.

The problem with Shaw's "preaching" and his insistence on making people "uncomfortable," however, is, as he claims later in the preface to *Back to Methuselah*, that the desired reformatory effect was not usually achieved because of his considerable "comedic talent" (lxxiii). Despite Shaw's own perceived, and perhaps real, failures, his real achievement in this play is in finding a form through which to preach this sermon on multiple levels of cognition. Although the most blatant expositions of his Lamarckian Creative Evolution are in the third act, the preface, and the Revolutionist's Handbook, the

nontraditional marriage plot of the staged three acts as well as the characters who inhabit that plot provide a dramatic representation of Creative Evolution at work. As a result, Shaw communicates his Lamarckian message even in the most light-hearted moments of the staged play and demonstrates to audiences that will, purpose, and his mystical Life Force are, in the Shavian universe, the arbiters of change and the mechanism of human evolution.

Despite its experimental nature, *Man and Superman* consists, first and foremost, of a marriage plot in which John Tanner (also called Jack), a confirmed bachelor, socialist, and “artist-philosopher” (xxix) who shares many of Shaw’s progressive ideas, is pursued cunningly and relentlessly by Ann Whitefield, his friend from childhood and now, after the death of her father, his ward. Ann finally wins in the end when Tanner succumbs to the pull of her vitality and, presumably, to her innate need to procreate with a worthy partner, and they become engaged. The “Don Juan in Hell” act is a dream sequence in which the main characters of the play are transformed into Don Juan (Tanner) and Doña Ana (Ann). Don Juan teaches Doña Ana about the Life Force and the importance of working toward a Superman. In this re-reversal of the reversed cat-and-mouse plot of the rest of the play, here it is Don Juan who convinces Doña Ana to view the world as he does and to submit herself to the Life Force. Many critics have read this emphasis on the woman’s role as mother, in both “Don Juan in Hell” and the main action of the play, as anti-feminist and have criticized Shaw’s portrayal of “vital” women.¹⁰ And, while this is certainly problematic in some ways, the primary impulse behind this focus on parenting is evolution rather than sexism. Shaw believes that “geniuses,” both

male and female, should reproduce in order to propagate a higher order of human. This is both Lamarckian and eugenic, as it involves both the belief that evolution can be progressive and can be controlled by the will, and the belief that selective breeding is one way to harness the Life Force and ensure the progress of the human race.

In the “Epistle Dedicatory,” Shaw argues that his portrayal of Ann chasing Tanner (whom he calls “Don Juan” in this passage) is not simply a restaging of conventional gender roles, but a means of exposing the truth of courtship:

And so your Don Juan has come to birth as a stage projection of the tragicomic love chase of the man by the woman; and my Don Juan is the quarry instead of the huntsman. Yet he is a true Don Juan, with a sense of reality that disables convention, defying to the last the fate which finally overtakes him. The woman’s need of him to enable her to carry on Nature’s most urgent work, does not prevail against him until his resistance gathers her energy to a climax at which she dares to throw away her customary exploitations of the conventional affectionate and dutiful poses, and claim him by natural right for a purpose that far transcends their mortal personal purposes. (xviii-xix)

Here, Shaw reveals that our mythology of Don Juan and those like him, of the lothario pursuing the reluctant woman, is a fantasy that we insist on believing because it helps us uphold our marriage conventions. In Shaw’s world, women in whom the Life Force runs strong, women with strong Lamarckian wills intent on carrying out “Nature’s most urgent work,” are the pursuers who eventually throw off all conventions to fulfill “a purpose that

far transcends their mortal personal purposes,” that is, creating the next generation of men and women who will be stronger and smarter and more capable than those of the previous generation, and who will eventually propagate the Superman.

However, Shaw’s failure to provide men with an active role in the progressive evolution of the human species is unsettling. If the role of the man is to resist the woman’s advances for as long as possible, finally succumbing to his fate at the last possible minute, then it is difficult to see how this is anything but a repackaged (and misunderstood) Darwinian metaphor of predator and prey, victor and victim, despite Shaw’s insistence to the contrary. In the scenario Shaw presents above, the strongest, most fit woman is the one who can trap a man and get him to submit to her, and thus she will be the one who will be able to reproduce. And, in fact, the play seems to reinforce this philosophy: Ann is cunning and manipulative and eventually wins the unsuspecting and highly resistant Tanner as her husband. However, both the quotation from the Epistle Dedicatory and the play itself do not reinforce Darwinism as they at first seem to but, rather, demonstrate Shaw’s revision of Lamarckism, in which the struggle between man and woman is not a Darwinian struggle to survive but instead a competition of wills. And, rather than the woman’s will winning, as Tanner seems to think it does throughout most of the play, this battle of wills actually helps both man and woman realize their own purposes more fully. As Shaw says, “The woman’s need of [man] [. . .] does not prevail against him until his resistance gathers her energy to a climax at which she dares to throw away” social conventions. Thus, rather than painting a scenario in which the woman overcomes the man with her strength of will, the man’s resistance itself is the thing that

“gathers her energy” and makes her stronger. It is the opposition of their wills that ultimately brings both man and woman to a place where their wills can bend toward one another to achieve a common purpose: “to carry on Nature’s most urgent work.” Shaw revises the Lamarckian emphasis on the individual will in order to adapt it to human romantic and reproductive relationships, which he sees (at this early stage of his theory’s development) as the key to evolutionary success.

If Ann and Tanner are the mother and father of the Superman, or at least taking the next generation in the right direction, then Roebuck Ramsden represents the sterility of the previous generation. Shaw begins *Man and Superman* with a stage-direction description of Ramsden, pseudo-uncle to Ann and joint guardian (with Tanner) of her after her father’s death. Shaw and Tanner both have a great deal of fun at Ramsden’s expense, portraying him as a well-meaning liberal whose ideas are, nonetheless, hopelessly outdated. He is a relic of the Victorian period who was once progressive for his time but who now seems a bit silly in contrast with the revolutionary Tanner whose modern ideas scandalize Ramsden. Shaw tells us that Ramsden was born “in 1839, and was a Unitarian and Free Trader from his boyhood, and an Evolutionist from the publication of the Origin of Species. Consequently he has always classed himself as an advanced thinker and fearlessly outspoken reformer” (42). Shaw’s mention of Darwinism here alongside Unitarianism and Free Trade, ideas that have more obviously lost their progressive appeal, effectively pokes fun at those who still subscribe to Darwinian thought. Thus, just as Darwinism was once a radical alternative to institutional religion (as was Unitarianism), Shaw now sees Lamarckism as a radical

alternative to Darwinism. When Shaw mocks Ramsden as “an advanced thinker and fearlessly outspoken reformer,” he wants his audience to see that *he* is actually the advanced thinker and reformer. Shaw also describes Ramsden’s study, which contains busts of John Bright and Herbert Spencer, a portrait of Richard Cobden, pictures of Harriet Martineau, George Eliot, and T.H. Huxley, “autotypes of allegories by Mr G.F. Watts (for Roebuck believes in the fine arts with all the earnestness of a man who does not understand them), and an impression of Dupont’s engraving of Delaroche’s Beaux Arts hemicycle, representing the great men of all ages” (42). Here, we see that Ramsden’s heroes are largely dated in their relevance, and that, once again, Darwinism is being disparaged—Huxley was a vocal supporter of Darwin, and Spencer’s theory, though decidedly Lamarckian, was popularly misunderstood as “Social Darwinism.” Thus, by making Darwinism seem, like other Victorian ideas, a musty relic of an older age, just like Ramsden himself, Shaw sets the stage for the new ideas about evolution that Ann and Tanner represent.

When we are introduced to John Tanner, the contrast between the young and vital “artist-philosopher” and the much older and stodgier Ramsden is striking. Tanner is a eugenic specimen whose “certain high chested carriage of the shoulders, a lofty pose of the head, and the Olympian majesty with which a mane, or rather a huge wisp, of hazel colored hair is thrown back from an imposing brow, suggest Jupiter rather than Apollo” (47-48). Tanner is Greek god to Ramsden’s studied gentleman, and Ramsden is appalled by Tanner’s outspoken radicalism. He tells Octavius, Ann’s adopted brother/suitor and

Tanner's best friend, that Octavius's friendship with Tanner is his only "drawback" in his romantic pursuit of Ann primarily because of the pamphlet Tanner has just written:

I have in my hand a copy of the most infamous, the most scandalous, the most mischievous, the most blackguardly book that ever escaped burning at the hands of the common hangman. I have not read it: I would not soil my mind with such filth; but I have read what the papers say of it. The title is quite enough for me. [*He reads it*] The Revolutionist's Handbook and Pocket Companion. By John Tanner, M.I.R.C., Member of the Idle Rich Class. (45)

Here Ramsden exposes himself as a narrow-minded curmudgeon who literally judges a book by its cover, while Tanner, before we even meet him, is portrayed as a Shavian hero whose ideas make people uncomfortable (Shaw's own intent with *Man and Superman*). If Ramsden considers himself an advanced thinker, yet is shocked by just the title of Tanner's book with its suggestion of revolution, then we can assume that change is in the air and that new ideas will soon oust the previous generation's "advanced" opinions. In this way, Shaw sets the stage for the overthrow of Darwinism by Creative Evolution, which is ironic considering that Lamarck's theory, on which Creative Evolution is based, preceded Darwin's by 50 years. While we learn from the stage directions (or from his physical appearance if viewing the play) that Tanner is physically robust and attractive, we now discover, based on Ramsden's description of his book, that he is also intellectually promising, making him the perfect mate for Ann, whom we soon meet.

In the stage directions that introduce Ann, we are told that she is “a well formed creature, as far as that goes; and she is perfectly ladylike, graceful, and comely, with ensnaring eyes and hair” (54-55). Here, however, Shaw downplays the importance of Ann’s appearance with the phrase “as far as that goes,” which can be read to mean either that appearance is not the most important quality in a woman, or that appearance only goes so far. Instead, the majority of Shaw’s description of Ann focuses on her vitality. He points out that even if you were to “turn up her nose, give a cast to her eye, replace her black and violet confection by the apron and feathers of a flower girl, strike all the aitches out of her speech,” she would still be a woman who would “make men dream” (55). This is because “Vitality is as common as humanity; but, like humanity, it sometimes rises to genius; and Ann is one of the vital geniuses” (55). Shaw manages to work in a socialist argument here, claiming that vitality, and therefore evolutionary fitness, can not be determined by economic class and social status, but rather by a more egalitarian “vitality” that can not be attached to one particular group of people.¹¹

Despite Ann’s “vitality,” which may seem to imply sexual energy, she is not an “oversexed person” but rather “a perfectly respectable, perfectly self-controlled woman, and looks it; though her pose is fashionably frank and impulsive” (55). Ann “inspires confidence as a person who will do nothing she does not mean to do; also some fear, perhaps, as a woman who will probably do everything she means to do without taking more account of other people than may be necessary and what she calls right. In short, what the weaker of her own sex sometimes calls a cat” (55). Ann uses the guise of respectability to assert her own will, and there is a Lamarckian implication here in the

description of her as “self-controlled”—she controls her own destiny by going after what she wants. Yet this is not mere husband hunting: Ann is driven by the Life Force, which is what makes her a “vital genius,” a woman who knows that Tanner will be the best eugenic match for her.

While “weaker” women might call Ann a “cat,” we are supposed to understand that she is much more than that; she may appear to be simply using her feminine wiles to snag a man, but it is important for the *reader* of these stage directions¹² to understand that she is in fact using every tool available to her to snag the right man, the man with whom she can create (eventually, over the course of generations) the Superman. This, for Shaw, is one important difference, particularly in women, between sexuality and vitality: a woman who possesses irresistible sexuality can attract many men, but a woman who possesses vitality can attract and choose the man who will best help her serve the Life Force.

While Ann’s version of genius, vitality, can easily appear to be the mother-instinct repackaged and as a form of genius inferior to Tanner’s artist-philosopher genius, and certainly Shaw’s portrayal of women is never as progressive as he thinks it is, careful analysis of the play reveals that Ann’s Lamarckian purpose is actually more honed than Tanner’s and, therefore, she is more evolutionarily developed. Further, Ann does not act only out of maternal instinct; she uses intellect to show the reluctant Tanner that marrying her will be the best way to serve the Life Force. In her quest to acquire Tanner as a mate, Ann manipulates everyone around her, including Tanner, to achieve her purpose. First, we find out that Ann requested that her father name Tanner and Ramsden as her joint

guardians in his will, much to Ramsden's displeasure (209). In all of the discussion of the Whitefield will, it is difficult to ignore the alternative, Lamarckian reading of "will," especially when she announces, after getting her way, "Then we are all agreed; and my dear father's will is to be carried out" (59). Here, "will" is both the document and the desire, and we can also see that it is not really Whitefield's "will" that is being carried out but Ann's.

Tanner also uses the word "will" when disparaging Ann to Octavius: "Tavy: that's the devilish side of a woman's fascination: she makes you will your own destruction" (61). While this type of "will" is degenerative rather than progressive, Tanner immediately expands upon his claim and demonstrates that he does, in fact, understand the power and vitality of Ann's will as a Lamarckian evolutionary force:

OCTAVIUS. But it's not destruction: it's fulfillment.

TANNER. Yes, of her purpose; and that purpose is neither her happiness nor yours, but Nature's. Vitality in a woman is a blind fury of creation. She sacrifices herself to it: do you think she will hesitate to sacrifice you?

OCTAVIUS. Why, it is just because she is self-sacrificing that she will not sacrifice those she loves.

TANNER. That is the profoundest of mistakes, Tavy. It is the self-sacrificing women that sacrifice others most recklessly. Because they are unselfish, they are kind in little things. Because they have a purpose which is not their own purpose, but that of the whole universe, a man is nothing to them but an instrument of that purpose. (61)

In Tanner's understanding, Ann is an instrument of the Life Force who has sacrificed herself for the larger purpose of the "whole universe," namely for the purpose of improving the human race for generations to come. While this portrayal of Ann as simply a vessel whose instincts, or the Life Force, propel her to procreate is certainly problematic, it is also a reversal of the stereotype of the "cat" who sacrifices others for her own selfish purposes. As Tanner notes, women "tremble when we are in danger, and weep when we die; but the tears are not for us, but for a father wasted, a son's breeding thrown away" (62). While this may seem to be yet another essentializing portrayal of a woman bent on procreation, from a Lamarckian and eugenic perspective, it is the most noble purpose, far less selfish than fearing for the life of one individual, a husband. Further, Ann is much more than an instinctual vessel; instead, she has agency and is clear about her purpose, and she does not actually seem to be "sacrificing" anyone or anything, including herself, but rather using her own will to make both herself and Tanner stronger, more capable partners for one another and, ultimately, for the benefit of humanity.

While Tanner is on the mark in many ways in his assessment of Ann, at this point in the play he is still blind to the fact that he is destined to play an important role in Ann's "purpose." He claims that Ann will sacrifice any man on the altar of the Life Force, but what Tanner sees here as a sacrifice, giving up one's freedom in order to help a woman fulfill her procreative purpose, he later comes to realize is his own purpose, which Ann was capable of seeing long before Tanner was. Although Tanner has not yet figured out that he is the evolutionarily appropriate mate for Ann, he does recognize that Octavius is not. Tanner claims that a "great artist," like Octavius, "has been known as a bad

husband” because he idealizes women as muses and therefore “he is a child-robber, a blood-sucker, a hypocrite, and a cheat. Perish the race and wither a thousand women if only the sacrifice of them enable him to act Hamlet better, to paint a finer picture, to write a deeper poem, a greater play, a profounder philosophy!” (62-63) Tanner includes himself here in the category of “artist” by including philosophers and, immediately after this speech, using the second person plural to refer to artists (“ourselves,” “our minds”) (63). He therefore does not see himself as the object of Ann’s purpose, and he certainly does not see his own purpose as in line with hers, even though he can recognize how essential her purpose is—without it, according to Tanner and Shaw, the race would perish. When his role in this evolutionary scheme is finally revealed, we see that Ann is actually the more willful and therefore more evolutionarily developed of the two; Tanner rises to meet Ann’s will and finally sees that his purpose has been intertwined with hers all along.

While it is easy to read the relationship between Ann and Tanner as a stereotypical cat and mouse game, with Ann hunting and eventually trapping the unwilling Tanner as her husband, Shaw makes it clear early in the play that this metaphor is a dangerously Darwinian one. While Tanner is trying to convince Octavius that an artist (Octavius) is the worst type of husband for a woman like Ann with a strong mother-instinct, he claims, “Of all human struggles there is none so treacherous and remorseless as the struggle between the artist man and the mother woman,” to which Octavius replies, “[I]t is out of the deadliest struggles that we get the noblest characters” (63). Octavius’s response is Darwinian dogma: the fittest species emerge from the struggle to survive.

However, Tanner quickly rejects his premise: “Remember that the next time you meet a grizzly bear or a Bengal tiger, Tavy” (63). For Tanner, and clearly for Shaw, Darwinism as a means of creating stronger, healthier creatures, especially humans, is too violent, too deadly, and ultimately a ridiculous way to conceptualize human progress. However, despite Tanner’s protests, Octavius is actually fairly accurately predicting the future here, except that the mouse in the game will be Tanner rather than Tavy. And, ultimately, this struggle does, indeed, result in “the fittest species”—at the end of the play, the audience is to assume that Ann and Tanner, or more likely the ancestors of their offspring, will produce the superman.

The conflict between Tanner’s anti-Darwinian rhetoric and the play’s seemingly Darwinian love plot at first appears to complicate Shaw’s evolutionary stance. However, Shaw is actually carefully delineating his position here. First, at this point in the play, Tanner is not yet a fully-developed Shavian character; he has yet to come to the full realization of his role in serving the Life Force and his duty to the human race. Therefore, when he rejects all struggle out of hand, he is overstating Shaw’s case against Darwin. In fact, Shaw’s objection to Darwinism had very little to do with Darwin himself and much more to do with the extremism of the neo-Darwinian insistence on chance, violence, and strict materialism. Shaw here seems to instead be distinguishing between two different types of struggle. The type of struggle to which Tanner assumes Octavius is referring is the brutal, violent struggle common in neo-Darwinian metaphors; however, as Shaw demonstrates in the play’s love plot, there is another kind of struggle that is much more compatible with his own revised Lamarckism: a battle of the wills

rather than a battle of “tooth and claw” or of resources.¹³ The struggle between Ann’s and Tanner’s *wills* will actually produce the “noblest characters” because they will both become better servants of the Life Force as a result of bending their wills toward one another.

But at this point in the play, Tanner still conceptualizes female-male relations in terms of a deadly struggle, and he sees this struggle as counterproductive and something to be avoided, despite his advocacy for the Superman in his “Revolutionist’s Handbook.” While Tanner recognizes the social and biological importance of Ann’s will to have children and improve mankind, he downplays the role of men in this project and particularly resists his own involvement, even though, if he were capable of assessing the situation objectively, he would most likely agree that he is the most suitable mate for Ann. His revolutionary ideals extend as far as rejoicing in Octavius’s sister Violet’s pregnancy, which is at first assumed to be out of wedlock, and he encourages her family and friends to see this as “her highest purpose and greatest function—to increase, multiply, and replenish the earth” rather than “looking as ashamed and disgraced as if the girl had committed the vilest of crimes” (65). Tanner can respect and even lionize the mother instinct in Violet because there is no man in the equation to be trapped by marriage (they assume at this point that she has been impregnated by a “scoundrel” who has absconded) (64). He even goes so far as to argue that “Violet is going to do the State a service,” suggesting, eugenically, that Violet is the right sort of woman to have a child and that the State will profit from her efforts (65).

However, when talking to Octavius about Ann, Tanner sees the matter differently. While he still emphasizes how important it is for women to have children, he imagines any possible relationship between Ann and Octavius in pseudo-Darwinian terms, as a dangerous struggle that will demolish Octavius: “You think that you are Ann’s suitor; that you are the pursuer and she the pursued; that it is your part to woo, to persuade, to prevail, to overcome. Fool: it is you who are the pursued, the marked down quarry, the destined prey” (92). Tanner’s language here of “pursuit,” “marked down quarry,” and “prey” casts the mating ritual between men and women as a predator-prey relationship, with the woman in this case as the predator and the man as the unsuspecting prey waiting to have his life snatched from him. When Tanner finally realizes that he, not Octavius, is the one who has been “hunted” by Ann all along, he cries, “Then I—I am the bee, the spider, the marked down victim, the destined prey,” reinforcing his view of Ann as the predator who will metaphorically take his life from him (108). Tanner’s metaphors are a muddle of erroneous Darwinian ideas; the sexual selection process between a male and a female of the same species does not involve the hunt and kill of a predator-prey relationship, and the competition between two rival males for a female, which could be portrayed as a deadly Darwinian struggle, is not at issue here (except, perhaps, as subtext).

Regardless of his accuracy, though, Tanner is clearly objecting to the mating ritual on Darwinian grounds: he does not want to find himself a helpless Darwinian victim of natural selection, and instead seeks desperately to step outside of this paradigm and assert his will against Ann’s. On the surface, the result is the same: Ann and Tanner

get married, regardless of whether the struggle that got them there was Darwinian or Lamarckian. However, for Shaw, the distinction is in the details: from the struggle between the wills of Ann and Tanner, two changed people have emerged who are prepared to do the work of the Life Force, demonstrating that will is the driving force behind evolution, whereas in the Darwinian version, Tanner would have entered the marriage defeated, a Darwinian loser.

Although the audience is primed to initially empathize with Tanner for wanting to avoid Ann's clutches and maintain his roguish independence, the play forces an almost immediate recognition of the fact that Ann's will is stronger and her purpose more well-defined and even more noble (in the Shavian universe) than Tanner's. When Tanner declares, "No woman shall ever enslave me in that way," Ann responds, "But, Jack, you cannot get through life without considering other people a little bit" (77). Tanner then protests, "To consider you, as you call it, is to substitute your will for my own. How if it be a baser will than mine? Are women taught better than men or worse? Worse, of course, in both cases" (77). While Tanner insists that his will is nobler than Ann's and that he was "taught better" than she, the audience can easily see through this rhetoric in order to determine that Ann, who remains calm during this scene while Tanner becomes increasingly agitated, makes the more convincing argument here. While Tanner wants to rebel against the expectations of other people, Ann dares to violate her family's expectations that she will marry Octavius in order to choose a more suitable mate to help her advance the human race. She recognizes that "considering other people" does not mean considering the petty social conventions that people deem important but, rather,

considering the entire human race. This requires acting in ways that may look selfish and manipulative on the surface but which ultimately work toward a common good. Shaw demonstrates here that while men may have the benefits of better educations (they have been “taught better”), women are instinctually more in tune with the Life Force and, therefore, with the steps and sacrifices necessary to achieve the common human goal of improving the race. Thus, we can see Shaw’s revision of Lamarckism at work in this exchange between Ann and Tanner. Ann’s strength of will is not in service of herself alone; instead, she “consider[s] other people” and therefore uses her will for a greater good.

Though Ann may not yet be the Superperson whom she is driven to create with Tanner, she still possesses both intellect and maternal instinct. However, when reading or viewing the play, it is easy to overlook her intellect and to instead see her manipulation as a function of her maternal instinct rather than as evidence of her Lamarckian “cunning.” Susan C. Stone asserts that Ann “is mother-woman, triumphant in her clash with genius-man; however, she has certainly nothing in herself of the genius” (133). However, in making this assertion, Stone is overlooking her own argument earlier in this same article, responding to Shaw’s portrait of George Sand in the Epistle Dedicatory to *Man and Superman*¹⁴: “Shaw sees the combination of the mother-drive and the genius-drive as a complication; the two forces are in competition, with the genius-urge surpassing the mother-urge. At the same time the combination seems to strengthen the rare being who possesses it” (131). It is possible, then, that Shaw endows Ann with both

characteristics, and gives her one more: the ability to identify the mother-drive as the priority which is best in service of the Life Force.

Ann also has the insight and strength of character to use her genius-drive in the service of motherhood and to disguise her intellect as a tactic for achieving her purpose. As Barbara Bellow Watson notes, “The Shavian heroine (or hero) is expected to assess herself and her choices without illusion. And between her alternatives she is expected to choose fearlessly on the side of life” (61). Ann is not simply endowed with instinct, but is gifted with an intellect that provides her with the capacity to decide whether or not she will follow that instinct and to discover the best means of carrying out her decision. This is what makes Ann a vital genius rather than simply endowed with vitality: as Shaw says in his initial description of her, “Vitality is as common as humanity; but, like humanity, it sometimes rises to genius; and Ann is one of the vital geniuses” (55). Whereas most women want to have children and they possess the vitality necessary to find a mate and reproduce, Ann possesses genius to go along with that vitality that allows her to select the *right* mate, which makes her a Lamarckian success story: her combination of intellect, maternal instinct, and strong will make her the perfect mother for Shaw’s Superman.

Shaw illustrates Ann’s intellect by demonstrating her ability to use men’s impressions of her, and indeed the impressions of all those she manipulates, to her benefit, putting on the appropriate hat for each step in her quest to become the mother for the Superman. Ramsden views Ann as an innocent, asserting that she “is only a woman, and a young and inexperienced woman at that” (*Man and Superman* 52). Ann plays on Ramsden’s assessment of her maturity by responding, when asked to decide between

guardians, “I feel that I am too young, too inexperienced, to decide” (58). She then reinforces this childish role by reverting to the language of a small girl: “And I shall have my dear Granny¹⁵ to help and advise me. And Jack the Giant Killer. And Jack’s inseparable friend Ricky-ticky-tavy” (59). Here, Ann uses infantile language to successfully disguise her agenda—to remain attached to Tanner without seeming to want this—and hides the depth of her intellect under a guise of childish banter and self-deprecation. Even the name Ann Whitefield “suggests commonplace innocence and nobility” (Vogt 55), which she manages to disprove by exploiting it for her own purposes. However, this seeming innocence is, as Tanner recognizes, an act designed to hide her true intentions. Tanner believes that Ann plays the innocent in order to manipulate those around her for her own selfish purposes, but as Tanner soon learns, her machinations are all designed to help her achieve her goal of marrying Tanner, a goal that will ultimately help her create the Superman.¹⁶

However, despite Ann’s desire to hide her intellect in order to appear innocent, when she is alone with Tanner, she drops her act and asks him to recognize her for the intelligent woman she is:

ANN. I am so glad you understand politics, Jack: it will be most useful to you if you go into parliament. But I am sorry you thought my influence a bad one.

TANNER. I don’t say it was a bad one. But bad or good, I didn’t choose to be cut to your measure. And I won’t be cut to it.

ANN. Nobody wants you to, Jack. I assure you—really on my word—I don't mind your queer opinions one little bit. You know we have all been brought up to have advanced opinions. Why do you persist in thinking me so narrow minded? (77)

Ann is begging to be recognized as an intellectual with opinions as important as Tanner's, yet her failure to pursue this recognition in the rest of the play proves that she is capable of realizing her priorities, which include more than pursuing "queer opinions." Just as Ramsden could not fathom Ann the predator, Tanner cannot yet reconcile Ann the intellectual. It is not her lack of either of these attributes that allows these opinions to be formed, but rather her ability to decide which aspects of her character she must play on and which she must hide in order to fulfill her instinctual vision for humanity and serve the Life Force in the role for which she was born.

If Ann is to give birth to the Superman, then it follows that she is something of a Superman herself, and that Shaw was simply using *Superman* as the universal-male pronoun. Fredric Berg claims that, in *Man and Superman*, Ann is actually the "instinctive Superman" (148) and asserts that "Ann, the Superman, know[s] (instinctively) that all ideas are transitory, and that the real importance is serving the Life Force by propagating the species" (149). However, in a society that has yet to embrace Shaw's liberal ideas about marriage, Ann and Tanner must ultimately wed in order to fulfill the eugenic drive of the Life Force. Tanner's views on marriage are decidedly Shavian, but he eventually succumbs to the necessity of such a union and to the power of Ann's will because, in Tanner's words, "Vitality in a woman is a blind fury of creation.

She sacrifices herself to it: do you think she will hesitate to sacrifice you?" (61). He also knows, as he claims in "The Revolutionist's Handbook," that "[t]he essential function of marriage is the continuance of the race" (260).¹⁷ When Tanner finds out about Violet's supposedly illegitimate pregnancy, he declares with delight that Violet has done what all women were born to do and, moreover, has done so without the ridiculous constraint of marriage:

She has turned from these sillinesses [of frivolous bourgeois life] to the fulfilment of her highest purpose and greatest function—to increase, multiply, and replenish the earth. And instead of admiring her courage and rejoicing in her instinct; instead of crowning the completed womanhood and raising the triumphal strain of 'Unto us a child is born: unto us a son is given,' here you are . . . all pulling long faces and looking ashamed and disgraced as if the girl had committed the vilest of crimes.

(65)

In fact, for Tanner, the father is insignificant: "What on earth does it matter who [the father] is? He's done his part; and Violet must do the rest" (66). Although it seems that Shaw, who shares many of Tanner's philosophies, places the entire burden of parenthood on the mother, Tanner will soon be duped by his own assumptions, demonstrating that Shaw and Tanner, though similar, are not necessarily one.¹⁸ In this case, then, Tanner can be seen as an underdeveloped representation of the ideal father for the Superman: he is not perfect, but he will do for now.¹⁹

And, as Tanner himself claims in “The Revolutionist’s Handbook,” “The proof of the Superman will be in the living; and we shall find out how to produce him by the old method of trial and error, and not by waiting for a completely convincing prescription of his ingredients” (218). This reference to scientific trial and error is a denouncement of Darwinism, where evolution takes place through what is essentially chance rather than through a conscious testing out of different models. The scientific method that Tanner proposes here posits evolution as an experiment being conducted by mankind rather than as an explanation for a phenomenon out of our control. Thus, for Tanner and, we know from other work on the subject, Shaw, the Superman will be produced through a Lamarckian mechanism in which human will plays a crucial role but with the added twist of man as self-experimenter with his own evolutionary process. As a result, we cannot know if Tanner, or even if Tanner’s child, will be the Superman. Rather, Shaw suggests that all we can do is recognize Tanner’s characteristics as temporarily suitable “ingredients” (willfulness, iconoclasm, socialism, and intellect) and try our best, trusting that, because the Life Force is pushing us in that direction, the Superman will eventually emerge.

Although Shaw’s Life Force philosophy can be seen as simply a Lamarckian desire for the will-driven human race to improve itself, the eugenic language used in *Man and Superman*, especially by Tanner, demonstrates that Shaw sees his ideas about motherhood in practical as well as philosophical terms. While many eugenics advocates were attracted to eugenics as a way to control undesirable populations, Shaw saw eugenics as a way to implement Creative Evolution on a policy level. In the play, Tanner

misinterprets Violet's motives for becoming pregnant as eugenic and lauds her by claiming that "Violet is going to do the State a service" by bearing a child (67) and that she was "right to follow [her] instinct" because "vitality and bravery are the greatest qualities a woman can have, and motherhood her solemn initiation into womanhood" (83). Tanner's sentiments echo the eugenic discourse of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, and in particular the words of Sir Francis Galton, who coined the term "eugenics" in 1883 and argues in a 1901 *Popular Science Monthly* article that women of the upper classes should be given incentives to bear and raise more children at a younger age as a service to the human race:

The possibility of improving the race of a nation depends on the power of increasing the productivity of the best stock. This is far more important than that of repressing the productivity of the worst. They both raise the average, the latter by reducing the undesirables, the former by increasing those who will become the lights of the nation. It is therefore all important to prove that favor to selected individuals might so increase their productivity as to warrant the expenditure in money and care that would be necessitated. An enthusiasm to improve the race would probably express itself by granting diplomas to a select class of young men and women, by encouraging their intermarriages, by hastening the time of marriage of women of that high class, and by provision for rearing children healthily. The means that might be employed to compass these ends are dowries, especially for those to whom moderate sums are

important, assured help in emergencies during the early years of married life, healthy homes, the pressure of public opinion, honors, and above all the introduction of motives of religious or quasi-religious character.

Indeed, an enthusiasm to improve the race is so noble in its aim that it might as well give rise to the sense of a religious obligation. (Galton 229)

Galton's desire to instill "enthusiasm" for reproduction in young, upper-class women corresponds to the "vitality and bravery" in reproductively-inclined women that Tanner so admires, and Tanner's emphasis on service to the "State" echoes Galton's detailed plan to provide a variety of forms of state support for upper-class women who reproduce, with the implication that it is in the best interest of the nation to facilitate this type of eugenic program.

Galton also, like Shaw, makes it clear here that he favors positive eugenics over negative eugenics, and therefore focuses on ways to get the "best" people to procreate rather than "repressing the productivity of the worst." While certainly neither Shaw nor Galton was above negative eugenics,²⁰ and *Back to Methuselah* contains its fair share, positive eugenics is most in keeping with Shaw's Creative Evolutionary doctrine. In "The Revolutionist's Handbook," Tanner makes an argument about the importance of supporting women in their maternal endeavors that is so similar to Galton's that we could almost deem it plagiarism:

If a woman can, by careful selection of a father, and nourishment of herself, produce a citizen with efficient senses, sound organs, and a good digestion, she should clearly be secured a sufficient reward for that natural

service to make her willing to undertake and repeat it. Whether she be financed in the undertaking by herself, or by the father, or by a speculative capitalist, or by a new department of, say, the Royal Dublin Society, or (as at present) by the War Office maintaining her “on the strength” and authorizing a particular soldier to marry her, or by a local authority under by-law directing that women may under certain circumstances have a year’s leave of absence on full salary, or by the central government, does not matter provided the result be satisfactory. (253-254)

While we certainly cannot take Tanner as Shaw’s mouthpiece and therefore can not attribute this sentiment entirely to Shaw, it is important to note that the eugenic program that Shaw poses here is not unlike similar programs he proposed elsewhere throughout his life.

Some critics have sought to excuse Shaw’s interest in eugenics by claiming that Shaw made the handbook purposely outrageous,²¹ but his later writing on the subject reveals this to be an early admiration of Galton’s ideas and a way to test the waters for the eugenic policies that he would advocate more strongly in the coming years. In a 1916 letter to W.J. Bassett-Lowke (a fellow Fabian), Shaw connects his evolutionary theory with the practice of eugenics: “The moral is that to obtain any perceptible evolution within a historic period we must discover the science of eugenics, and acquire a eugenic art” (*Collected Letters 1911-1925* 434-35). Here, Shaw shows how eugenics can be used within a Lamarckian evolutionary paradigm: the evolution he seeks is one that can be controlled by humans rather than happening accidentally, and one way to acquire that

control is through the practice of eugenic breeding. Further, Shaw's insistence that "eugenic art" must be acquired suggests that he saw his plays as contributions to this eugenic project. Thus, the eugenic ideas that Tanner proposes in the play, which may seem contradictory to the Life Force and Creative Evolution, are actually in keeping with Shaw's understanding of Lamarckian human evolution.

Act III of *Man and Superman* is the Lamarckian exposition of Shaw's play, providing the philosophical, scientific, and eugenic basis for understanding the marriage plot of the rest of the play. Most importantly, this act shows Ann and Tanner as ideal versions of themselves; it takes the unspoken subtext of the marriage plot of the other three acts and makes it explicit, so that we can see the Creative Evolution philosophy that underpins the rest of the play. Tanner falls asleep and dreams this act, which consists primarily of a conversation between Don Juan (played by the same actor as Tanner), Doña Ana (played by the same actor as Ann), the Statue (played by the same actor as Ramsden), and the Devil (played by the same actor as Mendoza, the Spanish brigand Tanner meets at the beginning of Act III, before he falls asleep). Doña Ana dies as an old woman and immediately meets Don Juan, her former suitor and the man who killed her father, the Statue. Juan informs Ana that she is in hell, which shocks her because of her devout Christianity and purity in life. However, we soon discover that hell is not evil and heaven is not sacred. Rather, each suits a different temperament, and the inhabitants are free to move between the two planes. Hell is for artists, for those who love beauty and music, and heaven is for philosophers, who prefer to spend their time in silent contemplation. Both planes seem to represent higher states of existence, and the debate

between the four characters soon reveals that, while hell is certainly more attractive to most people, heaven is the refuge for those who have achieved a higher evolutionary state.

This act prefigures *Back to Methuselah*, where only young children care about art and the more evolved creatures, the ancients, give up all humanly and corporeal cares to contemplation. In fact, even though Shaw uses the vocabulary of earth, heaven, and hell to describe the three planes of existence, these planes can easily be transposed to steps on the evolutionary ladder. Don Juan tells Ana that “hell is the home of the unreal and of the seekers for happiness,” while heaven is “the home of the masters of reality” and earth is “a nursery in which men and women play at being heroes and heroines, saints and sinners; but they are dragged down from their fool’s paradise by their bodies: hunger and cold and thirst, age and decay and disease” (142). Thus the evolutionary order is inverted—rather than hell being a step below earth, it is a step above earth, which is the lowest evolutionary form. As we will see later in *Back to Methuselah*, the tyranny of the body²² is the human encumberment that Shaw most wants to escape through the evolutionary process. If men and women are “dragged down” by their bodies on earth and hell focuses too much on happiness, art, and pleasure, then heaven with its “reality” is the ultimate evolutionary goal. In fact, Don Juan goes on to differentiate hell and heaven in terms of the objects of their contemplation. Juan says that those happiest in hell are those who “enjoy the contemplation of such romantic mirages as beauty and pleasure,” whereas those happiest in heaven, like himself, “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” (143). Don Juan has clearly evolved beyond the need for amusement by beauty, art, and music, and is instead focused solely on “Life,” which he describes as a “force,” echoing Shaw’s “Life Force.”

However, life in general is not Juan’s interest, but rather “the work of helping Life in its struggle upward,” a clearly Lamarckian emphasis on evolution as progress rather than evolution as simply change for better or worse (144). Further, Juan’s use of the word “struggle” here echoes Tanner’s earlier rejection of the struggle between men and women; Juan, who knows better than Tanner, sees “struggle” in the way Shaw sees it, not as a Darwinian battle to the death but as a productive struggle to improve. Juan sees the human brain as the largest obstacle to the upward progress of the abstract “life” to which he refers, arguing that humans have an evolutionary advantage because of their brains, and yet are still obligated to cultivate and further evolve those brains. In a Socratic debate with the Devil, who argues that “all Man’s reason has done for him is to make him beastlier than any beast” and that “one splendid body is worth the brains of a hundred dyspeptic, flatulent philosophers,” Don Juan rejects this defense of the body:

You forget that brainless magnificence of body has been tried. Things immeasurably greater than man in every respect but brain have existed and perished. The megatherium, the ichthyosaurus have paced the earth with seven-league steps and hidden the day with cloud vast wings. Where are they now? Fossils in museums, and so few and imperfect at that, that a knuckle bone or a tooth of one of them is prized beyond the lives of a thousand soldiers. These things lived and wanted to live; but for lack of

brains they did not know how to carry out their purpose, and so destroyed themselves. (144)

Here, Juan implicitly rejects Darwinian evolutionary theory by suggesting that other life forms have “been tried,” which implies that rather than coming into and out of existence through natural selection, dinosaurs were an experiment that was consciously “tried” and failed. While this sounds as though Shaw has a religious purpose in rejecting Darwinism, as though it were God who “tried” this experiment, we know from Shaw’s extensive writing on the subject that he is referring to the Life Force, that intangible and abstract manifestation of “life” that Juan so wants to contemplate.

While Lamarck certainly did not advocate a Life Force, Juan’s claim that the dinosaurs “wanted to live” but didn’t “know how to carry out their purpose” because of “lack of brains” implies that non-human life forms not only have a “purpose” beyond their basic survival, but that humans themselves are not special in their possession of purpose, a decidedly Lamarckian position. In *Zoological Philosophy*, Lamarck claims that “the will, which has been regarded as the source of all actions in animals, can only be present in those which possess a special organ for intelligence; and that even in these, which include man himself, it is not always the motive of the actions performed” (355). Thus, all organisms have life and purpose, and are consequently part of the evolutionary process, but only those that have well-developed brains and know how to use them can successfully use their wills to consciously evolve into higher life forms.

The Devil, however, disagrees with Juan’s perspective, arguing that death, not life nor will nor brains, drives evolution:

[T]he power that governs the earth is not the power of Life but of Death; and the inner need that has served Life to the effort of organising itself into the human being is not the need for higher life but for a more efficient engine of destruction. The plague, the famine, the earthquake, the tempest were too spasmodic in their action; the tiger and crocodile were too easily satiated and not cruel enough: something more constantly, more ruthlessly, more ingeniously destructive was needed; and that something was Man, the inventor of the rack, the stake, the gallows, the electric chair; of sword and gun and poison gas: above all, of justice, duty, patriotism, and all the other isms by which even those who are clever enough to be humanely disposed are persuaded to become the most destructive of all the destroyers. (146-47)

The Devil is forwarding a Darwinian argument here, which is skewed by Shaw's negative perceptions of Darwinism. While Darwin would never have argued that humans arose because something "more ingeniously destructive was *needed*," the notion of destructiveness as the evolutionary impulse is clearly the Shavian take on Darwinism as a "fatalistic" explanation of evolution.²³ The Devil also, like Don Juan earlier, discusses nonhuman species as examples of the evolutionary process. Whereas Don Juan explains the rise of humans as stemming from a need for brains in the world, the Devil explains the same phenomenon as stemming from a need for a more efficient method of destruction in the world. Shaw, then, satirizes Darwinism, particularly the neo-

Darwinian emphasis on brutality and competition, by making the Devil's pseudo-Darwinian argument seem both ridiculous and unappealing.

Don Juan's more attractive explanation for the human tendencies toward destruction and for the seemingly slow and even currently degenerative state of human evolution takes on a socialist tint when he refutes the Devil's argument. In this way, Shaw suggests that socialism is one method of consciously changing humans so that they may begin again on a path toward a more rapid and more progressive evolutionary process: "It is not death that matters, but the fear of death. It is not killing and dying that degrades us, but base living, and accepting the wages and profits of degradation. Better ten dead men than one live slave or his master" (149). Thus, rather than believe, like the Devil, that destructiveness and death are an intrinsic part of human nature, Juan argues that "base living" accounts for these human characteristics. This socialist argument, that "accepting the wages and profits of degradation" causes the worst of human behavior, serves Juan well as an explanation of the role of social and economic pressures in human evolution or devolution. Shaw's audiences would undoubtedly rather hear that they are forced into destructive behavior by environmental conditions than that they are born killers. However, unlike Darwinists, who would claim that these environmental factors are the pressures that drive evolution, Shaw makes it clear that humans can overcome their environments through a will-driven Lamarckian process. Thus, by linking socialism to evolution, Shaw provides a familiar mechanism by which people can take charge of their own evolutionary process and begin on a progressive, Lamarckian evolutionary path.

If socialism is, for Shaw, one method of controlling the evolutionary process, then eugenics, particularly positive eugenics, is another, equally important means by which humans can take charge of their own evolution. Don Juan's insistence on Life as a subject worthy of contemplation and his own mission of "helping Life in its struggle upward" becomes a practical concern when he explains to Doña Ana what woman's role, and therefore her own role, is in assisting life's struggle:

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. She knows by instinct that far back in the evolutionary process she invented him, differentiated him, created him in order to produce something better than the single-sexed process can produce. Whilst he fulfils the purpose for which she made him, he is welcome to his dreams, his follies, his ideals, his heroisms, provided that the keystone of them all is the worship of woman, of motherhood, of the family, of the hearth. (150)

Here, Don Juan explains Shaw's view, in 1903, that reproduction is the key to evolution and that the reproductive instinct lies solely with the woman, so much so that she "created" man in order to fulfill this purpose. While this explanation of the differentiation of the two sexes into different bodies (as opposed to species that reproduce asexually or are hermaphroditic) is not exactly scientific, it demonstrates Shaw's emphasis on the importance of the female role in evolution.

In fact, the entire play of *Man and Superman* revolves around Ann's pursuit of Tanner as her ideal eugenic mate in order to reproduce with him. Shaw frames this chase as the work of the Life Force but, nonetheless, it is Ann in whom the Life Force is strongest and who must manipulate Tanner into submission in order to secure the future of the race. Woman's purpose is "fulfilling Nature's behest," while man's is only to "fulfil [. . .] the purpose for which [woman] made him." While this certainly gives women a more important role in the evolutionary process, it also problematically places the reproductive burden on women, forcing them to shoulder the majority of the responsibility for serving the Life Force and improving the human race. In the meantime, once they have fulfilled their temporary reproductive obligations, men are free to live lives full of "dreams," "follies," "ideals," and "heroisms" as long as their first duty is to their female counterparts and their purpose.

Don Juan even sees romantic love as child's play, a vestige of an earlier state of evolution, and envisions a time when reproduction will be seen solely as an evolutionary purpose rather than as serving any sentimental or crudely practical purpose:

The great central purpose of breeding the race: ay, breeding it to heights now deemed superhuman: that purpose which is now hidden in a mephitic cloud of love and romance and prudery and fastidiousness, will break through into clear sunlight as a purpose no longer to be confused with the gratification of personal fancies, the impossible realization of boys' and girls' dreams of bliss, or the need of older people for companionship or money. [. . .] Do my sex the justice to admit, Señora, that we have always

recognized that the sex relation is not a personal or friendly relation at all.

(162-63)

Juan's insistence here that sexual relations between men and women are solely for the purpose of "breeding the race" and that any other rationalizations we make for ourselves are merely a "mephitic cloud" that hides their true purpose seems on the one hand to reduce humans to animals, mating without the relationships that we think define our humanity. In this same speech, he argues that marriage ceremonies should dispense with their language of love and commitment and instead honestly state the true purpose of marriage: breeding (163).

In "The Revolutionist's Handbook," Tanner takes this argument a step further, claiming that marriage should not be a requirement for reproduction (a very Shavian argument) because "it is quite sufficiently probable that good results may be obtained from parents who would be extremely unsuitable companions and partners," but "mating such couples must clearly not involve marrying them" (222). Because of this, Tanner argues that "marriage, whilst it is made an indispensable condition of mating, will delay the advent of the Superman as effectually as Property, and will be modified by the impulse towards him just as effectually" (223). Thus, what Tanner is attempting to do here is actually not to reduce human relations to breeding alone but, rather, to divorce reproduction from love. While reproduction may be coldly calculated based on desirable traits and "good results," this mating compatibility should not bind a couple together for life; instead, they should be free to choose a suitable partner.

The problem with this proposal is that, by relieving couples of the burden of marriage for reproduction, women would be left with the burden of caring for the children. Tanner makes a half-hearted attempt to remedy this situation by suggesting that women be paid, perhaps by the state, for their services, but he never directly addresses this real problem of unequal burden. And, not surprisingly, this is Doña Ana's primary objection to Don Juan's diatribe against mixing love and reproduction in Act III:

ANA. Yes, Juan: we know the libertine's philosophy. Always ignore the consequences to the woman.

DON JUAN. The consequences, yes: they justify her fierce grip of the man. But surely you do not call that attachment a sentimental one. As well call the policeman's attachment to his prisoner a love relation.

ANA. You see you have to confess that marriage is necessary, though, according to you, love is the slightest of all human relations.

DON JUAN. How do you know that it is not the greatest of all human relations? far too great to be a personal matter. [. . .] (164)

Ana's point here about "consequences to the woman" is a very practical one that, from her point of view, makes marriage an essential safeguard for women in the act of reproduction. Although she is certainly more sentimental than Juan throughout much of this act, she is also much more practical, and she serves as a reminder to the audience that, while Juan's philosophies and proposals might be Shavian ideals, they are not yet practical, a fact that even Juan must admit: the potential consequences for a pregnant unmarried woman "justify her fierce grip of the man." Ana is willing to concede to the

idea of marriage and reproduction without love as long as women are not abandoned to raise children alone, while Juan is willing to concede that marriage is currently necessary for reproduction as long as no one is under the illusion that it has anything to do with love.

This compromise is ultimately unsatisfactory for Shaw, and reveals one of the most difficult obstacles for Shaw in establishing his theory of Creative Evolution: Shaw is a socialist and women's rights advocate and therefore strongly supports women's equality and emancipation, and he also opposes the marriage conventions that have been imposed by both law and tradition; however, he also passionately believes that women must be encouraged to have children in order to advance the human race. These conflicting positions cause Shaw to paint himself into a corner of contradiction from which he does not manage to escape in *Man and Superman*. However, he later figures out an escape, albeit one that will most likely take millennia to achieve: the future that he envisions in *Back to Methuselah* of a human evolutionary state that will dispense with human reproduction as we know it altogether, thereby relieving women of the reproductive burden causes him this philosophical crisis in *Man and Superman*.

At the end of the dream section of Act III, Don Juan finally wins his argument, persuading not the Devil, who was always just a foil and never his true target, but Doña Ana, who decides that she wants to go to Heaven with him (173). When she asks the Devil where she can find the Superman and he replies that “[h]e is not yet created,” Ana ends the scene in a revelatory burst of passion: “Not yet created! Then my work is not yet done. [*Crossing herself devoutly*] I believe in the Life to Come. [*Crying to the*

universe] A father! a father for the Superman!” (175) This is a religious experience for Ana: the devout Catholic girl has been converted to Shaw’s religion of Creative Evolution and is determined to devote her life (or her afterlife) to the creation of the Superman. The “Life to Come,” which she once conceived of as a Biblical heaven, has undergone a secular transubstantiation and is now the evolutionary future of the human race.

Ana’s conversion is a reversal of the conversion that happens in the three comedy acts of *Man and Superman*; whereas Tanner is the one who finally submits to Ann’s superior understanding of the Life Force in the main action of the play, here it is Ana who submits to Tanner’s Life Force vision. This is reinforced when, shortly after Tanner awakes from his dream at the end of Act III, Hector Malone (Violet’s secret husband) informs Tanner, “Miss Whitefield tracked you at every stopping place: she is a regular Sherlock Holmes,” to which Tanner responds, “The Life Force! I am lost” (178). In this moment, Tanner, like Ana moments before, is struck with the full weight of the meaning of the Life Force, and this is the beginning of his acceptance and eventual embracement of his role as “father for the Superman.” This role reversal serves as further evidence of Shaw’s complex revision of Lamarckism: while the individual will alone is important for the evolution of the species, what is even more essential, especially in human evolution, is the interplay between the wills of two mating partners. Ann and Tanner, Ana and Juan make one another stronger by challenging and resisting the other. In the first case, Ann is ultimately the victor, while in the second case, it is Juan who prevails; however, in both

cases, each partner is improved by the interaction, which, in Lamarckian terms, will allow the child they ultimately produce to inherit those more highly developed traits.

This Lamarckian revision is exemplified by Shaw's claim in the preface to *Man and Superman* (quoted above) that the "woman's need" of man to help her advance the human race "does not prevail against him until his resistance gathers her energy to a climax," at which point she "claim[s] him by natural right for a purpose that far transcends their mortal personal purposes." While Ann has been chasing a resisting Tanner and, in the Act III "Philosophy," Tanner has been hard at work converting a defiant Ana to the religion of Creative Evolution, each of these principal players has been evolving. The final act of *Man and Superman* brings this "energy to a climax" when Ann and Tanner finally decide to get married. Tanner makes his final stand against Ann when he "explosively" tells Ann, "I wont, wont, wont, wont, WONT marry you" and compares marriage to hanging: "Does any man want to be hanged? Yet men let themselves be hanged without a struggle for life, though they could at least give the chaplain a black eye" (206). Here, Tanner's resistance to Ann has reached its climax and he sees himself in a desperate "struggle for life," but it is his lifestyle, not his life, that he is struggling for, and therefore he does not win the battle. However, he immediately realizes, in his epiphanic moment, that the greater good outweighs his own selfish purposes: "We do the world's will, not our own. I have a frightful feeling that I shall let myself be married because it is the world's will that you should have a husband" (206). In this sense, Shaw's evolutionary theory has nothing to do with what is best for individuals or with individual will; rather, he, like Schreiner, is interested in a collective, cooperative will

where individual wills are subsumed by a larger purpose, the “world’s will.” For Shaw, the “world’s will” is governed not by God nor even by personified Nature but, rather, by the Life Force, which seems to be simultaneously mystical and biological—it a sort of collective unconscious of the “life,” or vitalism, within each individual.

Tanner and Ann simultaneously succumb to the will of the Life Force in that “climax” that Shaw predicted. In this moment, Ann and Tanner submit to one another; although Ann is technically the victor in that she has met her goal of marrying Tanner while Tanner has not met his goal of resisting her, both make compromises in this moment that demonstrate that they are both under the power of the Life Force and each other in ways they never before realized. Further, this final scene simulates the sex act, reminding the audience of the primary purpose for their impending marriage:

TANNER. I will not marry you. I will not marry you.

ANN. Oh, you will, you will.

TANNER. I tell you, no, no, no.

ANN. I tell you, yes, yes, yes.

TANNER. No.

ANN [*coaxing – imploring – almost exhausted*] Yes. Before it is too late for repentance. Yes.

[. . .]

TANNER [*seizing her in his arms*] It is false. I love you. The Life Force enchants me. I have the whole world in my arms when I clasp you. But I

am fighting for my freedom, for my honor, for my self, one and indivisible.

[. . .]

TANNER [*groaning*] Oh, that clutch holds and hurts. What have you grasped in me? Is there a father's heart as well as a mother's?

[. . .]

ANN [*panting, failing more and more under the strain*] Jack: let me go. I have dared so frightfully—it is lasting longer than I thought. Let me go: I cant bear it.

TANNER. Nor I. Let it kill us.

ANN. Yes: I don't care. I am at the end of my forces. I don't care. I think I am going to faint. (209-10)

In the beginning of this scene, the tension between Ann and Tanner that has driven the plot of the play but also the development of both characters in the name of the Life Force reaches its pinnacle as their resistance to one another devolves into a childlike exchange of “no, no, no” and “yes, yes, yes.” At the moment when they are trying most strongly to resist each other, words fail these two eloquent characters and their protestations are revealed to the audience for the childish games that they truly are. Shaw here conveys the message that all of the material and selfish objections one may have to a eugenic or Life Force-directed pairing are childish when compared to the greater good that the pairing will serve. Also, this initial exchange provides yet another instance of gender role

reversal within the play: if we read this scene as a sexual simulation, then we have here Tanner resisting Ann's advances, saying "no" to her "yes" and "you will."

As the scene continues, this sexual pantomime becomes even more clear: the stage directions describe Ann as "coaxing" and "imploring" Tanner, and later Tanner as "groaning" and Ann as "panting" and eventually almost fainting from the exertion. When Ann finally becomes "exhausted" from the effort of trying to get Tanner to submit to her will, she makes her final, cryptic plea for Tanner to submit "[b]efore it is too late for repentance." By using the word "repentance" here, Shaw evokes a religious context, which underscores the importance of their pairing: if Ann is unsuccessful in convincing Tanner to marry her, the human race will suffer for it. Tanner is left to fight a losing battle against the Life Force for his "freedom" and his "self, one and indivisible," which highlights what Shaw sees as the true struggle in evolution: the evolutionary mechanism is not a struggle between competitors for life and death but, rather, a struggle between the needs and desires of the petty self and the needs of the human race as a whole and, most importantly, of the Life Force; it is a struggle between the individual will and the collective will. What Tanner finally realizes is that there is a "father's heart as well as a mother's," indicating that even though Ann is the one who had the vital genius to instinctively recognize how best to serve the Life Force, he, too, is powerless to resist it. This nod to the importance of fatherhood as well as motherhood also demonstrates Shaw's distress over placing the entire burden of reproduction on women: Tanner's role in fathering the superman will not be passive. When the intensity of their interaction has finally reached a point where both Ann and Tanner believe it will kill them, Ann nearly

faints. This demonstrates the extreme effort Ann has exerted in order to achieve her evolutionary goal, and she was successful in the face of mental and physical exhaustion: at the moment both characters have both finally given up their mutual resistance, they are caught in their compromising embrace by the rest of the play's characters, to whom Ann exclaims (while "reeling," and "with a supreme effort") "I have promised to marry Jack" (210).

Despite the fact that both Ann and Tanner have directed their wills toward service of the Life Force, with Tanner at last realizing that he can not resist Ann and Ann finally dropping her games and manipulative behavior, Tanner resolutely declares to all present in his last speech of the play that their impending marriage should not be viewed the customary way:

I solemnly say that I am not a happy man. Ann looks happy; but she is only triumphant, successful, victorious. That is not happiness, but the price for which the strong sell their happiness. What we have both done this afternoon is to renounce happiness, renounce freedom, renounce tranquility, above all, renounce the romantic possibilities of an unknown future, for the cares of a household and a family. (212)

Here, Tanner echoes Juan in his discussions of Heaven and Hell: Hell is entertaining, and a certain traditional kind of happiness can certainly be found there, but it is not for everyone, and it is certainly not for the "strong," those who see a future beyond their own immediate pleasure. For those people, who seek to improve the world, Heaven offers quiet contemplation of the universe. Just as both Juan and Ana renounce the pleasures of

the flesh offered by Hell in order to contemplate the Superman in Heaven, Tanner and Ann renounce their individual happiness in order to join together for the greater good. There is a reminder here, though, of Tanner's insistence in the *Revolutionist's Handbook* that marriage should not be a requirement for reproduction: Tanner seems to be suggesting that, given a different set of social circumstances, it would not be necessary for he and Ann to renounce their happiness and their freedom "for the cares of a household and a family," but could instead simultaneously serve the Life Force and their own interests. When Tanner ends his speech by claiming that any wedding gifts they receive "will be instantly sold, and the proceeds devoted to circulating free copies of the *Revolutionist's Handbook*," he demonstrates that he hopes to change these binding social restrictions by spreading his own revolutionary ideas so that the next Ann and Tanner will not have to make such heavy sacrifices in order to participate in the progressive evolution of the human race (212).

However, the play ends with typical Shawian irony when Violet responds to Tanner's plan to sell their wedding gifts and get married in a courthouse by saying, "You are a brute, Jack," and Ann retorts, "Never mind her, dear. Go on talking" (212). The final line of the play comes from Tanner, who replies, "Talking!" which is followed by "*Universal laughter*" at this joke (212). Ann's response here suggests that she does not take Tanner nearly as seriously as he takes himself (nor should she), and Tanner feigns offense at her suggestion that his ideas are just "talk" with no substance. On one level, Shaw seems to mean this as a joke on himself: his entire play, regardless of how seriously he takes the ideas he presents, is really just "talk" that is incapable of

accomplishing much of substance. On the other hand, though, the fact that Shaw includes Tanner's Revolutionist's Handbook in the book version of the play demonstrates that he hopes that these ideas are, in fact, more than just talk and that perhaps they will spark thought and discussion that will begin to change and shape the way people think and act. Talk is, indeed, just talk, but it is also the beginning of something else. *Man and Superman* is the beginning of an evolutionary theory that Shaw will continue to develop over the next two decades, culminating in *Back to Methuselah*, in which he attempts to solve many of the problems with which he wrestles in this earlier play. Shaw may be unsure in 1903 about whether or not Creative Evolution is just talk, but by 1921, he has developed a concrete plan for the future of human evolution for the next 30,000 years.

Back to Methuselah is the play that Shaw saw as his magnum opus, the result of decades of developing his theory and "religion" of Creative Evolution, and many of the constraints he placed upon himself and difficulties he was unable to resolve in *Man and Superman* are, for better or worse, remedied in this five-play cycle. Over the course of two decades, Shaw develops Creative Evolution from a reactionary stance against neo-Darwinism that relies heavily on Butler to his own all-encompassing vision for the human race. No longer is there a fuzzy, ill-defined "Life Force" that courses through every person in varying strengths and is at times indistinguishable from God; no longer is the Superman the ultimate goal of the evolutionary process; no longer is reproduction, particularly motherhood, the driving force behind and the essential ingredient of evolution. In Act III of *Man and Superman*, Don Juan explains to the Devil that his

strongest desire in life has been to “conceive something better than myself” and to “striv[e] to bring it into existence”: “That is the working within me of Life’s incessant aspiration to higher organization, wider, deeper, intenser self-consciousness, and clearer self-understanding” (167). This need of the universe to improve itself, coursing through him, has caused him to see love, art, and religion as distractions from this evolutionary goal:

It was the supremacy of this purpose that reduced love for me to the mere pleasure of a moment, art for me to the mere schooling of my faculties, religion for me to a mere excuse for laziness, since it had set up a God who looked at the world and saw that it was good, against the instinct in me that looked through my eyes at the world and saw that it could be improved. (167)

The first two of these principles are upheld in *Back to Methuselah*: both love and art are important for “pleasure” and “schooling,” but only in the early development and education of the children, and they are quickly rejected once the children mature into adulthood. Religion, however, takes on an entirely new dimension in the play cycle. Whereas in 1903, Shaw sees the world religions, particularly Christianity, as institutions founded upon fallacies that are irrelevant to the world as he sees it, by 1921 he has created what he sees as a new world religion that is not a “mere excuse for laziness” and that privileges innovation over complacency and obedience.

However, this “religion of the twentieth century” (*Back to Methuselah* lxviii) is more than a faith or worldview; it is also a scientific theory, and Shaw is very clear that it

should be viewed as such. Early in the preface to *Back to Methuselah*, he explains that he has “written *Back to Methuselah* as a contribution to the modern Bible” in order to make his theory “more entertaining than it would be to most people in the form of a biological treatise” (xvii), and later in the preface he explains his reasoning: “I knew that civilization needs a religion as a matter of life or death; and as the conception of Creative Evolution developed I saw that we were at last within reach of a faith which complied with the first condition of all the religions that have ever taken hold of humanity: namely, that it must be, first and fundamentally, a science of metabiology” (lxxii). On the one hand, Shaw’s first impulse is, as it always had been as a popular playwright, to hold his audiences’ attention, to entertain them. However, his declaration here that he has made *Back to Methuselah* more entertaining by writing it as a Biblical contribution elides the fact that, despite the play cycle’s subtitle “A Metabiological Pentateuch” with its clearly Biblical reference, Shaw has still written this as a series of five plays, not as narrative or poetry or history. He has written plays instead of a “biological treatise” because, finally, he is not a biologist; he is a playwright, and the best way he knows to communicate his ideas is through the dramatic medium. Thus, *Back to Methuselah* is, in Shaw’s mind, a hybrid of several genres and disciplines that encompasses them all and more—it encompasses every aspect of human existence.

In the years between the publication of *Man and Superman* and the publication of *Back to Methuselah*, Shaw became more well-informed about the evolutionary science of his day and became a more vocal critic of neo-Darwinism, but the onset of the twentieth century brought with it many cultural problems and anxieties that added new urgency to

his convictions and helped him to reframe the problems he saw. By 1921, instead of using Creative Evolution as a way to advocate socialism, protest oppressive marriage and property laws, and dabble in positive eugenics, Shaw looks to Creative Evolution as the only way out of the cultural despair left in the wake of World War I:

If the Western Powers had selected their allies in the Lamarckian manner intelligently, purposely, and vitally, *ad majorem Dei gloriam*, as good Europeans, there would have been a durable League of Nations and no war. But because the selection relied on was purely circumstantial opportunist selection, so that the alliances were mere marriages of convenience, they have turned out, not merely as badly as might have been expected, but far worse than the blackest pessimist had ever imagined possible. How it will all end we do not yet know. When wolves combine to kill a horse, the death of the horse only sets them fighting one another for the choicest morsels. (lx-lxi)

Here, Shaw takes evolutionary theory out of the realm of biology and, much like Spencer before him, applies it to human social and political systems, in this case international policy and warfare. Once again, rather than seeing Lamarckism and Darwinism as two competing explanations for the evolution of human and non-human species, Shaw sees these two theories as two competing modes of behavior. If only we had chosen to use a Lamarckian process in selecting our allies rather than relying on “purely circumstantial opportunist selection,” World War I may not have happened or, at the very least, the aftermath may have been more tolerable. It is not clear how, exactly, Shaw sees

Lamarckism operating in this context: he has taken the concept of “purpose” and expanded it to mean that any decision made with the best evolutionary interests of the human race in mind has been made “in the Lamarckian manner” and is therefore preferable. The alternative he presents looks like Darwinism in that he uses the term “circumstantial selection,”²⁴ but he seems to purposely conflate that term with the marriages for money that he so despises in order to make Darwinism look like the “convenient” choice, or the easy way out. Thus, in Shaw’s construction, World War I can be blamed on the fact that world leaders chose the lazy Darwinian way of dealing with international problems rather than forging a more creative Lamarckian path that would have put the best interests of the human race ahead of mere convenience and opportunism. The final line of the quote points to the violence Shaw sees inherent in Darwinism, which he is able to link to the war. If Darwinism is needlessly violent, it makes sense, in Shaw’s mind, that its natural byproduct would be the most violent and destructive war in human history.

The war increases the urgency for Shaw of perfecting his evolutionary vision, but it also helps him discover the best goal for the Lamarckian mechanism: ever-increasing longevity. At a time when the war caused Shaw and his contemporaries to look around and ask, “What went wrong?” Shaw answers this question in a novel way: “If Man now fixes the term of his life at three score and ten years he can fix it at three hundred or three thousand, or even until a sooner-or-later-inevitable accident makes an end. Surely our ruinous world wars should convince him of the necessity for at least outliving his taste for golf and cigars if the race is to be saved” (xvi). Here, Shaw identifies what he sees as

the core problem that caused the war: humans do not live long enough to mature to an age where they have enough wisdom and experience to make the decisions necessary to ensure that we do not destroy ourselves. He also claims here that humans can “fix” the lengths of their own lives, that death is neither natural nor necessary. Shaw tells us that this seemingly radical claim “is not fantastic speculation: it is deductive biology, if there is such a science as biology” (xvi). By applying the principle of deductive reasoning, from logic, to the biological sciences, Shaw demonstrates his thought process, and he also, in his typically flippant style, calls into question the entire discipline of biology as a way of demonstrating that this, much like religion and politics and economics, is up for debate, that there are no scientific or spiritual absolutes. Therefore, death, once thought inescapable by both scientific and religious institutions, is now one more thing that can be overcome by a Lamarckian will.

Shockingly, Shaw’s support for this claim that death can be overcome, that human life can be extended, perhaps indefinitely, comes from his arch-nemesis August Weismann, the leading proponent of neo-Darwinism. When Shaw needs Weismann to support his claims, he calls Weismann “a very clever and suggestive biologist who was unhappily stultified by Neo-Darwinism,” making it seem as though Weismann was the hapless victim of neo-Darwinism rather than its progenitor.²⁵ In a 1919 letter to William Archer, however, Shaw proclaims, “Butler cried in vain in the wilderness to warn us. Darwin led to Weismann; and Weismann led straight to the devil,” which seems to place all of the blame for the evil of neo-Darwinism directly on Weismann’s shoulders (*Collected Letters 1911-1925* 600). The argument that Shaw takes from Weismann in the

preface to *Back to Methuselah* to make his point about death is that “as certain living organisms, though they multiply by splitting into living halves, never die, death is neither natural nor inevitable” (xvi). This is the scientific jumping-off point for the theory he presents in *Back to Methuselah* that humans could, in fact, live indefinitely.

This prospect of ever-increasing longevity is the solution Shaw sees to all of the problems currently plaguing the human race. Because of this, it is important to examine Shaw’s source for this idea. Even though Shaw cites Weismann as proof that “death is neither natural nor inevitable,” Weismann’s actual words on this subject are much more ambiguous on this point than Shaw would like them to be. Although Weismann did write that “no reason can be given which would demonstrate the impossibility of such an achievement” of immortality in metazoan (multi-celled) organisms, and he acknowledges that “there is no clear reason in the physical condition of unicellular organisms why the cycle of life, *i.e.* of division, growth by assimilation, and repeated division, should ever end,” these statements need to read in the context of Weismann’s larger argument, which Shaw clearly did not do (qtd. in Kirkwood and Cremer 115). In the second quotation, Weismann is referring solely to single-celled organisms, whose sole cell is capable of reproduction, not metazoans whose reproductive “germ” cells have differentiated from the non-reproductive somatic cells, which carry no genetic material. In the first quotation, while Weismann is careful not to say that immortality is completely impossible in metazoans, this is only because he is attempting to be measured in the scope of his proclamations. What Weismann actually believed was that “life is endowed with a fixed duration, not because it is contrary to its nature to be unlimited, but because

the unlimited existence of individuals would be a luxury without any corresponding advantage” (qtd. in Kirkwood and Cremer 103), and he believed that life after reproduction was useless to the species and, therefore, the process of natural selection would cause those organisms in which somatic cell death occurred to surpass those inclined toward immortality (Kirkwood and Cremer 103). Thus, while Weismann does concede that immortality is theoretically possible—cells could, indeed, go on reproducing indefinitely—he sees no circumstance in which this could possibly be advantageous to the species. In fact, this idea of the supremacy of the survival of the species over any benefits to the individual is one important philosophical divergence between Shaw and Weismann (besides, of course, Weismann’s neo-Darwinism).

Weismann sees the non-reproductive individual’s uselessness to the species as the factor that allows for natural selection against immortality:

In regulating duration of life, the advantage to the species, and not to the individual, is alone of any importance. . . . It is of no importance to the species whether the individual lives longer or shorter, but it is of importance that the individual should be enabled to do its work towards the maintenance of the species. This work is reproduction, or the formation of a sufficient number of new individuals to compensate the species for those which die. As soon as the individual has performed its share in this work of compensation, it ceases to be of any value to the species, it has fulfilled its duty and it may die” (qtd. in Kirkwood and Cremer 103).

For Weismann, the utility of the longevity of the individual to the species is what matters, not the experience of the individual. If a life is useless after reproduction or, in more complex species, after rearing and ensuring the survival of the offspring, then there will be no favorable selective process for longevity. Shaw, on the other hand, emphasizes the experience of the individual. Even though he claims that his ultimate concern is the improvement of the human race as a whole, he can not get past the artist's tendency to romanticize the individual and privilege the unique individual life. Also, he manages to escape the question of reproduction altogether: in the final play of the cycle, humans are hatched fully formed from eggs, so to question the value of a life after reproduction would be to question the value of the entire life. Thus, while both Shaw and Weismann are interested in the idea of longevity, and Shaw uses Weismann out of context to support his theory, Weismann is ultimately focused on the biological importance of post-reproductive life from the perspective of natural selection within species, while Shaw is focused on the socio-political importance of the individual from a Lamarckian perspective that allows for the inheritance of all characteristics acquired over a lifetime. In this Lamarckian paradigm, longevity creates an advantage because, especially if reproduction can be delayed (or can occur indefinitely), the longer one lives, the more that individual can develop and improve.

At the end of his lengthy preface to *Back to Methuselah*, Shaw makes it clear that this idea of longevity is the cornerstone of his evolutionary philosophy, and that this play is meant to succeed where *Man and Superman* failed:

By good luck and acting, the comedy [Acts I, II, and IV of *Man and Superman*] triumphed on the stage; and the book was a good deal discussed. But as its tale of a husband huntress obscured its evolutionary doctrine I try again with this cycle of plays that keep to the point all through. I abandon the legend of Don Juan with its erotic associations, and go back to the legend of the Garden of Eden. I exploit the eternal interest of the philosopher's stone which enables men to live for ever.

(lxxiv)

Shaw's desire here to strip away the pleasant conventions of a play in order to "keep the point" of evolution constantly in his audiences' and readers' minds reveals that he is identifying first and foremost as the prophet of Creative Evolution and only secondarily as a playwright. He has also rejected secular iconography (Don Juan) in favor of the Biblical inspiration of the Garden of Eden, demonstrating how seriously he takes his evolutionary theory as a major world religion.²⁶ However, he has also combined this Biblical origin story with his Lamarckian convictions, and he sees the legend of the "philosopher's stone" as an elixir of life as the image that will allow him to link religion with science. In early Christian lore, Eve took the philosopher's stone out of the Garden of Eden, and in *Back to Methuselah*, the concepts of death and immortality are the primary concerns for Adam and Eve in the first play of the Pentateuch. This first play sets up the much more scientific evolutionary philosophy that is presented in the rest of the play, providing a seamless transition from Shaw's re-imagined religious origin story

to his evolutionary origin story, demonstrating that what Darwin put asunder (science and religion), Shaw can re-synthesize.

The idea that death is not inevitable is one important scientific foundation for the evolutionary theory that Shaw forwards in *Back to Methuselah*, and recapitulation theory is the other. Adherents to recapitulation theory believed that “ontogeny (individual growth) recapitulates phylogeny (the course of evolution),” and focused primarily on the embryonic stage of development, during which they believed the entire evolutionary history of a species was relived in a compressed period of time (Bowler, *Evolution* 169-70). Although Lamarck did not advocate recapitulation, it became an important aspect of neo-Lamarckian evolutionary theory in the late nineteenth-century and retained adherents until the 1920s (Bowler, *The Eclipse of Darwinism* 19, 101). Thus, it is not surprising that Shaw, who drew most of his scientific inspiration from the neo-Lamarckians, incorporated recapitulation into his evolutionary prophecy in *Back to Methuselah*.

In the preface to his play cycle, Shaw provides his unique interpretation of recapitulation, carefully linking the Lamarckian inheritance of acquired characteristics to embryonic recapitulation. He uses the example of learning to ride a bicycle to argue that, while some acquired characteristics are seamlessly transmitted to the next generation, others experience a “relapse” effect (xix). When a cyclist’s child learns to ride a bike for the first time, “he does not pick up the accomplishment where you left it, any more than he is born six feet high with a beard and a tall hat,” and yet he does not relapse “to the very beginning, but to a point which no mortal method of measurement can distinguish from the beginning” (xix). Shaw’s idea here is that progress in the development of these

kinds of habits will happen incrementally and that the memory of these habits is stored in each new generation. Shaw did not immediately associate this idea of incremental and relapsing inheritance of acquired habits with recapitulation. In a 1907 letter to Greek scholar Gilbert Murray,²⁷ Shaw explains his theory using the same bicycle metaphor he uses in the preface to *Back to Methuselah* and asks Murray for “a nice Greek word” for “this phenomenon of relapse—something that will sound Weissmanic, like panmixia” (*Collected Letters 1898-1910* 728-29, sic).²⁸ Shaw seems to be trying his hand at scientific invention, attempting to come up with his own scientific terms that will rival Weismann’s, thereby challenging Weismann on his own level, rather than simply using the scientific writing of others to bolster his playwriting.

It is not clear whether or not Murray provided Shaw with the word “recapitulation,” but when he published this theory in nearly identical form in the preface to *Back to Methuselah*, he immediately followed it with a section entitled “The Miracle of Condensed Recapitulation” that ties this method of inheriting acquired characteristics to the recapitulation theory to which many neo-Lamarckian biologists and naturalists subscribed. This time, he uses as his example the Italian painter Raphael (Sanzio), who “had to learn to paint apparently as if no Sanzio had ever handled a brush before” (xxi). Shaw’s “apparently” here indicates the minute increments of progress to which he refers earlier, and he immediately connects this concept of relapse in an acquired skill like painting to the fact that Raphael’s body’s ability to function had also relapsed and had to once again “learn to breathe, and digest, and circulate his blood” (xxi-xxii). Shaw’s ensuing discussion of recapitulation, although written in a literary style that personifies

Raphael's embryonic state, is actually a quite accurate description of recapitulation theory: "[H]e had to go back and begin as a speck of protoplasm, and to struggle through an embryonic lifetime, during part of which he was indistinguishable from an embryonic dog, and had neither a skull nor a backbone. When he at last acquired these articles, he was for some time doubtful whether he was a bird or a fish" (xxii). Shaw is describing the stages of embryonic development, which many evolutionary biologists and naturalists had mapped as evidence of recapitulation. For instance, pictures of the human embryo at a stage that looked like a fish were used to prove that humans had progressed in their evolution from fish to human (or, more accurately, that "fish" had been one of many former stages of human evolutionary development). This fusion of Shaw's somewhat questionable interpretation of the Lamarckian inheritance of acquired characteristics with his accurate description of recapitulation theory allows him to gain scientific credibility for the rest of his theory of Creative Evolution that he presents in the preface and the play cycle. In fact, even the literary style he uses in personifying Raphael's embryonic state helps to condition his readers allow him literary license in the play itself while still accepting the theory the play expounds as scientifically credible.

But Shaw's play cycle is not simply a literary exposition of recapitulation theory. Rather than seeing recapitulation as simply an explanation for a phenomenon, he sees it as a mechanism that can be manipulated through a Lamarckian will-driven process to aid in the improvement of the human race.²⁹ He points out that Raphael (and thus all humans) "had to compress untold centuries of development into nine months before he was human enough to break loose as an independent being" and complains that "even

then he was still so incomplete that his parents might as well have exclaimed ‘Good Heavens! have you learnt nothing from our experience that you come into the world in this ridiculously elementary state? Why cant you talk and walk and paint and behave decently?’” (xxii) Instead of using recapitulation merely as evidence that humans have evolved from more primitive species, Shaw uses it to demonstrate that we emerge into the world woefully ill-equipped.

Shaw sees recapitulation as evidence that we have not evolved far enough, but also as evidence that we have the capability of evolving far beyond our current state:

The time may come when the same force that compressed the development of millions of years into nine months may pack many more millions into even a shorter space; so that Raphaels may be born painters as they are now born breathers and blood circulators. But they will still begin as specks of protoplasm, and acquire the faculty of painting in their mother’s womb at quite a late stage of their embryonic life. They must recapitulate the history of mankind in their own persons, however briefly they may condense it. (xxii)

This is Shaw’s great synthesis: not only will humans biologically progress into higher and higher forms, as the recapitulation theorists demonstrated, but recapitulation will allow us to emerge from our mothers’ wombs not as infants but as fully developed adults who can “talk and walk and paint and behave decently.” In other words, Shaw has taken recapitulation, combined it with his revised Lamarckian understanding of the inheritance

of acquired habits, and reconceived it as one of two primary mechanisms of Creative Evolution (longevity being the other).

This is a much more sophisticated engagement with evolutionary theory than he demonstrated in *Man and Superman*, where his concept of will-driven Lamarckism relied heavily on his semi-mystical Life Force and his science came primarily from Butler. In *Back to Methuselah*, both preface and play cycle, Shaw demonstrates that he has done his homework in the intervening years and has developed a distinctly Shavian theory of evolution that is grounded in the scientific evolutionary debates of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries and yet at the same time pushes past science in order to create a holistic vision for the future of the human race that encompasses science, religion, and politics.

Shaw's interpretation of evolution in *Back to Methuselah* is unique for many reasons, but primarily because it is both vitalist and firmly rooted in contemporary science. It is not simply a layperson's vitalist philosophy, like Bergson's *L'Evolution Créatrice*, nor is it a scientific paper supported by laboratory or naturalist research. Instead, it is a conscious hybrid of the two, a "metabiology" that allows him the intellectual freedom of the first and the credibility of the second, which helps him to appeal to a wide audience. While Lamarckism was falling out of favor by the 1920s, it was still alive and well in the public imagination,³⁰ which is all that matters for Shaw—he is, after all, not really writing for scientists, but for other intellectuals and for middle-class audiences who have been following his career for decades. Further, Shaw was realistic about the fact that his play cycle may never actually be performed, so, while he

wrote it for the stage, he also wrote it assuming that the majority of people would encounter it in its written form.³¹ In a 1920 letter, Shaw admits that *Back to Methuselah* is more suited to reading than performance: “My new play, which will be published early next year, may not be worth translating as far as the theatre is concerned, as, though it is a single work, it consists of five long plays, all quite impossible except for a very thoughtful and advanced audience. But it will be good reading” (*Collected Letters 1911-1925* 701). Interestingly, Shaw thinks that only “advanced” audiences will be able to grasp *Back to Methuselah* in its staged form, but that the written text will be accessible to a much wider audience, a clear reversal from the history of theatre as entertainment for audiences composed of many illiterate members who would never have been able to read the plays. However, despite its length and difficulty of production, *Back to Methuselah* attracted much public attention in both England and America. The major newspapers carefully covered its publication and subsequent performances, and the play inspired public lectures ranging from literary explications to church sermons.³² In this way, Shaw’s play cycle made an important contribution to public discourse about both human evolution and religion. More importantly, he kept Lamarckism alive in the public imagination by imbuing it with new mystical possibilities grounded in scientific credibility.

The first play of Shaw’s Pentateuch, “In the Beginning,” takes place in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve as the main characters. Shaw establishes religious credibility for Creative Evolution by beginning with his own interpretation of Genesis, the first book of the Biblical Pentateuch. Adam and Eve learn important lessons in

Shaw's Eden, but these are Shavian lessons, not Biblical lessons. In this Eden, the Serpent teaches Adam and Eve about life, death, reproduction, and Lamarckism, rather than tempting them into sin. These lessons are meant for the audience as much as they are for Adam and Eve because Shaw sees his audiences as newcomers to the religion of Creative Evolution who must be educated about the way this new world he has created works, just as Adam and Eve are educated by the Serpent about how their new world works. We, too, are neophytes. Shaw is, after all, rewriting religious and biological history, so we must go back and relearn from the beginning. Just as the Biblical Genesis provides an explanation for human suffering that is rooted in the choices made by the first humans, Shaw's "In the Beginning" reveals the source of the social and political problems that plague the modern world.

The original sin in Shaw's Eden is not the act of disobeying God and eating from the Tree of Knowledge; it occurs instead when Adam and Eve choose to relinquish their gift of eternal life.³³ The play opens with Adam and Eve encountering death, in the form of a dead fawn, for the first time. This shocking experience causes them to meditate on their own lives and to consider whether they want to live forever or eventually die. They are both terrified that one of them will die and leave the other alone, but Adam is also terrified of living forever; he has become bored with himself, and the prospect of eternal life has left him depressed. He tells Eve that he likes her, but "I do not like myself," and then imagines a more palatable alternative to eternal life as he knows it: "I want to be different; to be better; to begin again and again; to shed myself as a snake sheds its skin. I am tired of myself. And yet I must endure myself, not for a day or for many days, but

for ever. That is a dreadful thought” (3). Adam’s desire raises two interpretive possibilities: he could be talking about reincarnation, where he dies and begins again in a new body each time, or he could be referring to a Shavio-Lamarckian idea of personal progress, in which he is constantly striving to remake himself into a better person, always growing and never remaining stagnant.

Eve is much more content with her life and her longevity, but her discovery of death frightens her about the prospect of abandoning or being abandoned by Adam. In response to this anxiety, the Serpent teaches her a new word, “birth,” that provides a third way for humans to “begin again and again”:

Listen. I will tell you a great secret. I am very subtle; and I have thought and thought and thought. And I am very wilful, and must have what I want; and I have willed and willed and willed. [. . .] And at last I found a way of gathering together a part of the life in my body— [. . .] I gathered a part of the life in my body, and shut it into a tiny white case made of the stones I had eaten. [. . .] I shewed the little case to the sun, and left it in its warmth. And it burst; and a little snake came out; and it became bigger and bigger from day to day until it was as big as I. [. . .] Soon there will be as many snakes in Eden as there are scales on my body. Then death will not matter: this snake and that snake will die; but the snakes will live.

(6)

The Serpent’s story of her own reproductive process is clearly how Shaw envisions the first births taking place: reproduction could not rely on mating occurring between a male

and a female because there were not necessarily two of every species on the planet. Rather, the female creature first had an idea to reproduce, then “thought and thought” about it, and then willed it to happen. Shaw has taken great license with Lamarckian evolutionary theory here, but the basic premise is nonetheless Lamarckian: the use of the will helps the animal create a new bodily function.³⁴ This prospect of reproduction gives Adam and Eve a way out of eternal life because they can now replicate themselves and thus allow their species to live forever even if they as individuals do not.

After recounting her own reproductive narrative, the Serpent goes on to tell Eve the story of Lilith, who created Adam and Eve by willing herself to reproduce. By telling this story, the Serpent shows Eve that humans can also use their wills to create progeny and ensure a type of eternal life. According to the Serpent, Lilith “had a mighty will: she strove and strove and willed and willed for more moons than there are leaves on all the trees of the garden” in order to create life (7). This process caused Lilith terrible pain, so much so that “[s]he said it must never be again: that the burden of renewing life was past bearing: that it was too much for one” (7). This revelation caused her to give birth to two new creatures instead of just one: both Adam and Eve were created when Lilith “cast the skin” (7). Once again, Shaw emphasizes the role of the will in creation, but he adds a new complication to this story of Lilith’s reproduction: childbirth is painful and a difficult cross for women to bear. This revision of the curse of painful childbirth that God places on Eve in Genesis reflects Shaw’s discomfort with the unequal roles men and women must play in human reproduction. Instead of making childbirth Eve’s punishment for sin, Shaw makes it her inherited legacy from Lilith for the continuation of

the human race. He also makes it a process upon which Lilith has improved by adding a man for help. Women must still bear the majority of the reproductive burden, but men were created to help women with this burden, and this system is clearly far from perfect. This is, after all, just the beginning of humanity: in Shaw's Lamarckian paradigm, humanity should continue to improve upon the childbirth process until this burden is completely relieved. And indeed, these improvements unfold over the next four plays. Although it takes many millennia to accomplish, evolution eventually relieves women of their reproductive burdens.

The Serpent explains Lilith's reproductive process as the result of imagination, which establishes Lilith as the original Shavio-Lamarckian: "She told it to me as a marvellous story of something that never happened to a Lilith that never was. She did not know then that imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire; you will what you imagine; and at last you create what you will" (8). This is Shaw's doctrine of Creative Evolution in a nutshell. Although many of the evolutionary processes he describes in *Back to Methuselah* are rooted in legitimate (if debated) scientific theories, this basic doctrine is pseudo-Lamarckian at best. However, it has enough Lamarckian elements—particularly the idea that it is possible to "create what you will"—to convince audiences that what they are witnessing in this first play is the answer to all of their concerns about Darwinism. Shaw claimed in a 1907 letter that "[e]ver since Darwin's discovery of Natural Selection obliterated the true theory of Evolution in Europe and explained the universe as a senseless chapter of cruel accidents, religion has practically ceased to exist in England" (*Collected Letters 1898-1910* 672-73). His

religious reinterpretation of Lamarckism as a mystical process of using the imagination and the will to fulfill desires allows him to sell Creative Evolution as a viable alternative to the void left by Darwinism because it melds science with religious elements to create a palatable hybrid for people who are uncomfortable with the “senseless” and “cruel” nature of Darwinism. This helps to explain why Shaw’s plays and other popular representations of Lamarckism or pseudo-Lamarckism kept Lamarckism alive in the popular imagination long after it had lost favor with the majority of scientists.

Although Eve is delighted by the possibility of immortality through reproduction, which will ensure the continuation of the species in the event of her accidental death, Adam is enamored by the possibility of death, and therefore operates as an opposing force to Eve in the play. After Adam and Eve learn about death, they learn about love, fear, and jealousy, and in the face of all of these new emotions, Adam resolves to die in 1000 years and to make vows with Eve to love one another until that point, which the Serpent tells them is called marriage (15-16). The Serpent, however, tells Adam that she does not make vows because she “fear[s] certainty as you fear uncertainty. It means that nothing is certain but uncertainty. If I bind the future I bind my will. If I bind my will I strangle creation” (16). Eve agrees with this, arguing, “Creation must not be strangled,” but Adam forces her to make vows anyway, telling her, “[I]f you must create, you shall create within the bounds of those vows” (16). Whereas Eve has fully embraced Lilith’s legacy of creation, Adam has embraced death and only begrudgingly allows Eve to create new life.

The Serpent operates as an ambiguous character in this play because of her role in both teaching Eve about creation and teaching Adam about death. This Serpent is clearly not diabolical like the Biblical serpent, nor does she directly cause any kind of fall from grace; however, by acting as the fount of knowledge for Adam and Eve, she sets in motion the two human functions that Shaw sees as the root of all human problems: mortality and female-centric reproduction. Although it is not clearly highlighted as such, the moment that Adam and Eve make their vows can be seen, in Shavian terms, as their original sin because it fixes Adam's lifespan at 1000 years and it condemns Eve to a life of childbirth with little help from Adam.

In the second act of this play, we see Adam and Eve when they are a few centuries older and have produced multitudes of children. Both Adam and Eve seem stuck in their routines—he digs in the garden and she spins flax—and the stage directions tell us that they “have lost their youth and attractive grace” but are nevertheless “strong and in the prime of life,” demonstrating the possibilities of longevity (17). The major difference between the two, as we soon discover through their interactions with one another and with their son Cain, is that Adam is unhappy and sees no promise in his children, while Eve still has hope for a better future, even though she recognizes that Cain has turned out to be unbearably violent and boorish. She draws this hope from the fact that some of her children are literary—they “tell beautiful lies in beautiful words”—, some make music, some are sculptors, mathematicians, astronomers, inventors, and prophets (29). These children “never want to die, because they are always learning and always creating either things or wisdom, or at least dreaming of them” (29).

Unlike Adam, who fixed his own life at 1000 years because of the unbearable thought of living forever, and even Eve, who has become bored with her own life and sometimes laments the fact that she still has 700 years left to live, their children have developed talents and intellectual interests that give them something to live for.

However, once again, the force of death and destruction opposes this affirmation of life and longevity. In this second act of “In the Beginning,” the force of death is represented by Cain, who has invented murder. He murdered his brother Abel, as he did in the Biblical book of Genesis, and now spends his time hunting and warring, spreading death wherever he goes. Eve laments, “Through him and his like, death is gaining on life. Already most of our grandchildren die before they have sense enough to know how to live” (31). While Eve, who reaffirms the value of life every time she creates another child, sees the danger in this shortening of the lifespan, Adam is nonplussed: “No matter. [. . .] Life is still long enough to learn to dig, short as they are making it” (31). For Adam, who has no aspirations beyond digging in his garden, the length of life makes little difference. Eve, however, has a vision that extends beyond her current situation: “Yes, to dig. And to fight. But is it long enough for the other things, the great things? Will they live long enough to eat manna?” (31) Digging and fighting here represent the things that Shaw sees most humans doing in present day; “digging” represents the menial activity like working to make money and participating in mindless sports like golf, while “fighting” represents the wars, on a large scale, and the petty political disagreements, on a smaller scale, that occupy the majority of a nation’s time and resources. Adam and Cain, like most of the people Shaw witnesses around him, are content with their

respective digging and fighting and therefore do not possess a Lamarckian will to improve themselves.

Eve, on the other hand, is the most Shavian character in the play; she, like Shaw, is able to see the larger problem for the human race that is posed by a shortened life span:

Will they learn all the ways of all the stars in their little time? It took Enoch two hundred years to learn to interpret the will of the Voice. When he was a mere child of eighty, his babyish attempts to understand the Voice were more dangerous than the wrath of Cain. If they shorten their lives, they will dig and fight and kill and die; and their baby Enochs will tell them that it is the will of the Voice that they should dig and fight and kill and die for ever. (31)

Eve's prediction here is what Shaw sees as fully realized in his own time: not only do people "dig and fight and kill and die," but their religious leaders encourage them to do so in the name of God, and have done so for millennia. Shaw puts in Eve's mouth what he will demonstrate more explicitly in the later plays: human life is too short to be meaningful, and certainly too short to allow for any kind of real evolutionary progress. In fact, our short lives are even "dangerous" and could lead to degeneration or, at the very least, stagnation, either of which would be antipathetic to his neo-Lamarckian vision of human progress.

The play ends with Adam and Eve doing what they have always done—digging and spinning. Adam still cannot see past the work in front of him, and orders Eve, "Go on with your spinning; and do not sit there idle while I am straining my muscles for you"

(31). While Adam abhors an idle body, Eve detests Adam's idle mind: "If you were not a fool you would find something better for both of us to live by than this spinning and digging" (31). Eve recognizes that there is progress to be made, that there is hope for a future that extends beyond digging and spinning, that there might be "something else" in the world that will eventually be brought about by the few promising offspring they have created. Eve has the last words of the play, in which she prophesies, "Man need not always live by bread alone. There is something else. We do not yet know what it is; but some day we shall find out; and then we will live on that alone; and there shall be no more digging nor spinning, nor fighting nor killing" (32). Eve's prediction here is significant for what it reveals about Shaw's vision of the future: he does not simply wish to improve upon our current way of life, but to replace it altogether with something new. We "will live on" this "something else" "alone," with no more need for our old way of life. As he demonstrates in the later plays, this "something else" is a complete eradication of the body in favor of the mind, brought about by the evolutionary possibilities offered by longevity and recapitulation.

This play presents the double bind in which humans find themselves: they show increasing promise through the Lamarckian mechanism (learning, growing, willing, and trying), but they are also increasingly overtaken by death, the legacy of both Adam and Cain, which acts as an opposing force to any progress made by humankind. If life gets shorter and shorter, then humans have less and less time to grow and develop and make themselves better. Shaw's audiences viewing this play in 1921 would have easily been able to see the effects of this shortened lifespan on human history, which is why the next

play takes place in present day: they already know what happens in the time between these two plays that has culminated in the most horrific war in history, and they can look around to see that their political leaders have failed them and social problems abound. This is the legacy of Cain, and there are only a few glimpses of Eve's promise left. This is Shaw's "Wasteland."

The second play of *Back to Methuselah*, "The Gospel of the Brothers Barnabas," takes place in present-day, "[i]n the first few years after the war of 1914-18," and focuses on two brothers: Conrad Barnabas, a biology professor, and Franklyn Barnabas, an ex-clergyman, who are in the process of creating the "Gospel of the Brothers Barnabas," which predicts that the human lifespan will eventually increase to 300 years. The Barnabas brothers are like the two halves of Shaw as he sees himself while writing *Back to Methuselah*, a biologist and a religious scholar, and the text they are creating has religious overtones (it is a "gospel") just as his "Metabiological Pentateuch" does. In their discussions over the course of the play with Franklyn's daughter Savvy; William Haslam, a new clergyman and Savvy's suitor; Joyce Burge, the Prime Minister of England; and Henry Hopkins Lubin, Burge's main political rival, the brothers reveal their concern that the current average lifespan is far too short to achieve any real understanding of a field like biology or religion, and it is certainly too short of a span over which to develop mature, competent political leaders. This last assertion is proven by the presence of Burge and Lubin in the play, who are both fairly slow-witted men more concerned with political sniping than with being productive leaders. This play reveals two important theses for Shaw: first, all political problems are actually biological, which

means they could be solved by extending the human lifespan; second, the Bible is a scientific text or, in other words, religion and science are inextricably intertwined and are, in fact, two ways of describing the same process of life.

Shaw's argument in the preface that a Lamarckian selection of European allies would have prevented World War I is bolstered in this play by the suggestion that politics would be much improved if the Lamarckian will were used to increase the human lifespan. Through the incompetent and self-important characters of Burge and Lubin and the scathing critiques of these characters offered by Conrad and Franklyn Barnabas, Shaw demonstrates that the English political system is severely flawed and is beyond any hope other than increased longevity. Before Burge and Lubin arrive, Conrad expresses his distaste for politicians: "It was hard enough to stand the party politicians before the war; but now that they have managed to half kill Europe between them, I cant be civil to them, and I dont see why I should be" (42). Conrad expresses what, in 1921, most members of his audience were probably feeling in the wake of the war. Politicians are no longer seen as men of little consequence who engage in petty arguments with little relevance to the average citizen; now, they are capable of killing half of Europe. Franklyn exhorts Burge and Lubin to confess that the peace treaty that ended World War I "was a scrap of paper before the ink dried on it" (67). His explanation for this travesty is that "[t]he statesmen of Europe were incapable of governing Europe" because instead of "a couple of hundred years' training and experience," they had "a few years at the bar or in a counting-house or on the grouse moors and golf courses" (67). This has brought Europe to a point, post-war, where "we are waiting, with monster cannons trained on

every city and seaport, and huge aeroplanes ready to spring into the air and drop bombs every one of which will obliterate a whole street, and poison gases that will strike multitudes dead with a breath” (67-68). In Franklyn’s assessment, while the war itself was horrific, the ineptitude demonstrated by politicians in orchestrating the end of the war was in many ways worse. While the violence and destruction of the war were difficult to endure, the post-war anxiety about political leaders’ inability to prevent another war is unbearable.

However, Conrad makes it clear that he and Franklyn “are not blaming” Burge and Lubin for this situation; instead, they recognize that these men and their counterparts “hadnt lived long enough” to do anything differently (68). This is because they, like all people, are “mere human mushrooms who decay and die when they are just beginning to have a glimmer of the wisdom and knowledge needed” to run a government, and are therefore incapable of solving the political and social problems raised by our civilization (65). Shaw manages here to raise the discourse about politics in general and the war, specifically, above the level of partisan disagreements; for once, he is not pointing to a particular political or economic system (socialism) or to specific policy proposals (i.e. property inheritance reform) as solutions to what ails England. Rather, he looks at the larger picture, the broad evolutionary history of mankind that has reduced human lifespans, and he reveals this lack of longevity as the one overarching problem that has caused all of the problems he identifies. This represents a clear shift in Shaw’s thinking, which can be attributed to both his expanded study of evolutionary theories and his reaction to World War I. Shaw, like most modernists, responds to this catastrophic war

by radically changing his approach to his subject matter, both in form and content. Whereas *Man and Superman* included Tanner's "Revolutionists' Handbook" with its detailed prescriptions for how to change society, *Back to Methuselah* takes a long view of social reform that is focused on improving the human species in order to improve civilization.

If Shaw sees beyond party politics in this play, he also sees beyond the battles between members of the religious and scientific communities that, 62 years after Darwin published *On the Origin of Species*, were still raging.³⁵ Although Shaw is fundamentally opposed to all religious institutions, particularly the hypocrisy and bureaucracy inherent in them, he is, at heart, a vitalist who is disturbed by the materialism of Darwinism. While his homage to the Bible in *Back to Methuselah* may seem like a cynical attempt to gain support for his theory of Creative Evolution from the Christian contingent in the evolution debates, his ultimate goal is to demonstrate that there is a vital force in the universe—life—that is driving evolution. And, while he does not necessarily endorse Christian doctrine himself, his purpose in tying the Bible to science and evolutionary theory is twofold: he wants to establish Creative Evolution as a new religion and he wants to emphasize the importance of literature as an evolutionary conduit.

Back to Methuselah is, after all, a work of literature and a "contribution to the modern Bible," and so, by acknowledging the significance of Genesis, Shaw is setting up his audience to recognize his play as both a religious and a scientific text. Conrad tells Burge, Lubin, Savvy, and Haslam that the Garden of Eden "was a first attempt at biology," and Franklyn argues that "the poem is our real clue to biological science. The

most scientific document we possess at present is, as your grandmother would have told you quite truly, the story of the Garden of Eden” (58, 70). Of course, the Garden of Eden to which they refer here is Shaw’s Garden of Eden, the interpretation of the first part of Genesis that makes up the first play of the cycle. But nonetheless, Conrad and Franklyn are pointing to the original immortality of Adam and Eve and the fact that they invented natural death and natural birth in order to cope with the horrifying possibilities of accidental death and immortality (70-71). This is what Shaw sees as the beginning of science, the “first attempt at biology,” because it involves the creation of new biological processes. Just as Shaw sees evolution as a tool for progress rather than simply an explanation of a mechanism, he views biology as the active manipulation of bodily functions rather than simply a study of those functions.

As a further means of intertwining theology and biology, Shaw has Franklyn describe the “Fall” of Adam and Eve as the moment that Adam invented death, because then he no longer worried about meticulously caring for the Garden of Eden. The invention of death begat the invention of birth, which allowed him to treat Eve poorly because he could have a replacement for her if he wanted to. It was then it was a slippery slope to murder, meat-eating,³⁶ and war (72-73). These sins like murder and spousal abuse, which serve as evidence of Adam’s fall from grace, are also the diseases of civilization that Shaw believes can be cured through a process of Creative Evolution that will increase the human lifespan. Thus, in the Shavian paradigm, the person who blames the decline of civilization on sin and the person who blames it on biology or devolution are both correct because the origins of both are the same.

To provide further evidence of the link between science and religion, Conrad claims that Genesis could be rewritten in biological jargon and still retain the same story and the same message:

If you want the professional humbug of rewriting the Bible in words of four syllables, and pretending it's something new, I can humbug you to your heart's content. I can call Genesis Phylogenesis. Let the Creator say, if you like, 'I will establish an antipathetic symbiosis between thee and the female, and between thy blastoderm and her blastoderm.' Nobody will understand you; and Savvy will think you are swearing. The meaning is the same. (74)

Conrad here is claiming that Genesis is the story of evolutionary origins because it is a literary representation of the first humans. "Phylogenesis," the evolutionary process of a species as it moves through a variety of forms, begins with an original form, just as Genesis begins with two original humans. The blastoderms, or sex cells, are "antipathetic" because they are differentiated in men and women. From a Biblical point of view, this is the work of God; from a Creative Evolutionist's point of view, this is the work of Life struggling to create itself and progress toward higher and higher forms. Conrad's point here is that the religious and scientific communities (particularly Lamarckians) would be able to unite with a single cause if they just understood that they are speaking about the same thing using different languages. This argument, however, is somewhat disingenuous. Adam and Eve are two fully-formed human beings, not single-

celled organisms from whom the human species eventually evolved. Therefore, they cannot be the progenitors of the human race from the standpoint of evolutionary theory.

However, by privileging the role of the “poem,” or literature, in scientific understanding, Shaw makes it clear that he takes the Garden of Eden as a metaphor for origins, not as the literal beginning of human life. In this reading, then, Adam and Eve might themselves be two blastoderms that will eventually develop, through phylogenesis, into two humans. This metaphor is one way of making both the science and the religion of Creative Evolution “come alive” for his audiences. As Franklyn Barnabas laments to his brother, “Unless this withered thing religion, and this dry thing science, come alive in our hands, alive and intensely interesting, we may just as well go out and dig the garden until it is time to dig our graves” (39-40). His reference here to Adam’s pointless “digging” in the first play indicates that Creative Evolution is merely a “delusion” unless it has adherents; it is, after all, an evolutionary philosophy that requires people to actively participate in their own evolution, so if they do not embrace the philosophy, the evolution will not occur (39). Just as Franklyn and Conrad want to ensure that their book on the subject of longevity is “alive” and “interesting,” so to does Shaw want to ensure that his play, which is his version of the Barnabas Brothers’ book, fascinates his audiences rather than bores them.

The play ends when the brothers reveal that they do not have a magic “powder” or “bottle” to make people live 300 years; instead, they are prophesying that longevity is simply a “thing that’s going to happen,” it “might happen to anyone,” including “the parlor maid,” and the only control they have over making it happen is to “put it into

men's heads that there is nothing to prevent its happening but their own will to die before their work is done, and their own ignorance of the splendid work there is for them to do" (79). As Conrad puts it, "Spread that knowledge and that conviction; and as surely as the sun will rise tomorrow, the thing will happen" (79). The brothers' emphasis here on the egalitarianism of the "thing"—longevity—demonstrates Shaw's socialism: we find out in the next play that the "thing" actually does happen to the Barnabas's parlor maid, and this is probably because she was exposed to the ideas of her employers, which instilled in her the "conviction" that there was "splendid work" to be done. This "thing" that the brothers predict will happen, however, is not simply a spontaneous occurrence. Rather, it is driven by what the brothers variously call "the Eternal Life" (71), "the force behind evolution, call it what you like" (77), "God" (77), and "the power my brother calls God" (77). Franklyn calls the power "God" because he is a theologian, but he is also clear that this power may be called by any name one chooses.

By nodding toward God while simultaneously resisting narrowly defining this "force," Shaw attempts to appeal to those who find the idea of a creator-controlled universe comforting while also emphasizing the grand design inherent in his version of evolution. Franklyn explains to Lubin that this force has an "eternal pursuit" of "omnipotence and omniscience" that is shared by individuals: "Greater power and greater knowledge: these are what we are all pursuing even at the risk of our lives and the sacrifices of our pleasures. Evolution is that pursuit and nothing else. It is the path to godhead. A man differs from a microbe only in being further on the path" (71). When Lubin asks him when this goal might be attained, Franklyn replies, "Never, thank God!

As there is no limit to power and knowledge there can be no end. ‘The power and the glory, world without end’: have those words meant nothing to you?’ (71) This articulation of the human evolutionary goal represents a departure from Shaw’s earlier writing on the subject. Rather than imagining the “Superman” as the ultimate evolutionary goal, which must be achieved through judicious breeding driven by the Life Force, Shaw now sees humans on an endless path of improvement.

Shaw also stirs a controversy here that was (and still is) at the heart of many evolutionary debates: when Franklyn claims that the only difference between a man and a microbe is their progress along this linear evolutionary path, he unequivocally rejects the arguments made by those who claimed that humans were created specially by God and bore no relation to microbes or other non-human organisms. However, he also adds a mystical element to his theory by suggesting that the “soul” plays a role in evolution:

I tell you men capable of such willing, and realizing its necessity, will do it reluctantly, under inner compulsion, as all great efforts are made. They will hide what they are doing from themselves: they will take care not to know what they are doing. They will live three hundred years, not because they would like to, but because the soul deep down in them will know that they must, if the world is to be saved. (80)

Franklyn has little faith in humans to consciously desire and therefore strive for the improvements that will be most beneficial to the species. However, “the soul deep down” in those select few who are “capable of such willing” will guide them toward the appropriate evolutionary goal. This idea that the human soul “will know” how to save

the world suggests that humans possess unconscious knowledge that can lead them to their own salvation. The significance of the soul for Creative Evolution is twofold: In a religious interpretation, the soul connects humans to a mystical universal force, which could be called God, the Life Force, or the Creator, and this connection pushes us toward the path of salvation for the human race. In a scientific interpretation, the soul is a metaphor for recapitulation; we unconsciously understand what we need to do to “if the world is to be saved” because we hold within our “souls” the entirety of human history. Although we do not consciously remember it, we have seen lifespans decrease over time, and we know “deep down” that we must increase longevity in order to ensure human progress. Shaw blends Lamarckism with theology in order to create a new hybrid evolutionary theory that is uniquely his own. The Barnabas brothers plant the seeds for this theory in this second play of the cycle, but they have no way of predicting the fantastical future that will result from it in the final three plays.

The third play, “The Thing Happens,” takes place in 2170 A.D., 250 years after the Barnabas brothers created their “Gospel” of longevity. In this imagined future, nations have become incapable of self-governance, so England has “imported educated negresses and Chinese to govern” them because the English prefer mindless diversions like “marine golf” over civic duty and thoughtful reflection (91). Shaw attempts to be even-handed in his representation of the races by portraying Confucius, an important figure in the government of the “British Islands” (85), as much more intelligent and thoughtful than the popular president Burge-Lubin (an amalgamation of the two politicians from the second play), and by pointing out that while the Chinese and

negresses are governing the British Islands, the Chinese have imported Scots to govern China because no nation is capable of governing itself well.

Despite these nods toward racial egalitarianism, however, this play reveals Shaw's anxieties about race and exposes the ugly underside of his seemingly positive theory of Creative Evolution. Shaw has no problem seeing equality among the classes because he is, after all, a socialist. In fact, just as the Barnabas brothers predicted in the second play, the "thing" has happened to Franklyn's parlor maid, Mrs. Lutestring. In addition, Haslam, the clergyman from the second play, has also experienced this leap in longevity. Both characters are now over 250 years old, and they have both lived productive lives and contributed to society in important ways because they have had the time to become thoughtful and wise, regardless of the fact that they began their lives in very different social positions. However, they are both white, and, strikingly, the "thing" does not happen to a single person of color in the entire five-play cycle. This demonstrates that, while Shaw was eager to use Creative Evolution as a socialist means of eradicating economic stereotypes, he was unsure how to account for racial differences in human evolution.

Shaw's race anxiety is manifested in the character of Burge-Lubin, who is engaged in a long-distance flirtation with the Minister of Health, a "handsome Negress" (93). Burge-Lubin uncomfortably admits to Mrs. Lutestring that he is drawn to black women because he finds their "color" more attractive than that of white women (120). He then asks Mrs. Lutestring if she has read "a very interesting book by the librarian of the Biological Society suggesting that the future of the world lies with the Mulatto,"

which prompts Mrs. Lutestring to tell Haslam that “if the white race is to be saved, our destiny is apparent” (120). Burge-Lubin’s suggestion that racial mixing might be the “future of the world” is the last straw for Mrs. Lutestring, whose advanced age has allowed her to develop wisdom far beyond that of Barnabas and Burge-Lubin. She and Haslam decide to marry in order to produce “children [who] will live three hundred years” and thereby ensure the continued superiority of the “white race” (120). The fact that Shaw makes a clearly inferior character like Burge-Lubin sexually attracted to women of other races and ready to accept that the “future of the world lies with the Mulatto,” while the clearly superior long-lived characters find this problematic, indicates that he, too, disapproves of miscegenation and believes that the “white race” must “be saved” from the likes of Burge-Lubin. In order to demonstrate this, the play ends with Burge-Lubin’s realization that now that it is possible that he might live for centuries, he must become more responsible. His first act of “responsibility” is to break off his affair with the Negress (127). He has therefore seen the error of his ways and has been effectively educated by the presence of these evolutionarily advanced humans. Shaw has identified racial mixing as a social and evolutionary problem, a position with which many of his audience members in 1921 would have agreed. He has also provided a positive-eugenic solution to this problem, and he creates a fantasy world in the final play in which this solution is successful and race is no longer a problem, not because humans have achieved racial harmony, but because, by virtue of being the first to develop an evolutionarily superior trait (longevity), the white race has prevailed.

The fourth play, "The Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman," takes place in 3000 A.D., 830 years after the "thing" happened. The setting for this future reality is geographic Ireland, which is now a region, along with the other British Isles, that is made up entirely of longlivers. Shortlivers reside elsewhere in the world (Baghdad is now the capital of "British Commonwealth") and visit Ireland on pilgrimages to consult the "Oracle," one of many longlivers who take turns wearily putting on shows for the shortlivers, complete with smoke and lights, in an elaborate temple. The scene opens with an "Elderly Gentleman" who has been wandering in Ireland and has become overcome by the "despair" that inflicts shortlivers who spend too much time among the long-lived. Because it is deemed unsafe for a shortliver to explore Ireland unaccompanied, he is cared for by Zoo, a 56-year-old longliver who looks like Savvy from "The Gospel of the Brothers Barnabas" (138). This play represents a turn toward negative eugenics and even genocide as mechanisms for advancing the human race and disposing of those who are not advancing quickly enough. If the previous three plays have been focused on the evolutionary possibilities of the human race and the promise of progress that longevity provides, then this play demonstrates what happens when some members of the species advance more quickly than others. In this play, Shaw is clearly wrestling with the ethical issues presented by this prospect, and the solutions decided upon by the longlivers, whom we are conditioned by the previous three plays to prefer to the shortlivers, would have been shocking to audiences.

Zoo and the elderly gentleman, whom she calls "Daddy," have a long discussion while she is babysitting him during which the audience begins to understand how

dedicated the longlivers are to maintaining their longevity and preventing any evolutionary relapse. Zoo reveals that she “specialize[s] in babies” because “[m]y first was such a success that they made me go on” (141). She is clearly describing state-sponsored motherhood of the sort that Shaw and others advocated in the twentieth century; Zoo has been chosen as a mother for the community because her first child turned out well. Further, Zoo informs Daddy that longlivers never care for their children past the age of 10, and that “I shouldn’t know my two eldest if I met them” (142). This practice, while shocking to Daddy, demonstrates that longlived children are born much more advanced than their shortlived counterparts; while Shaw does not explicitly refer to recapitulation in this play, we can assume, based on the detailed examples of recapitulation in the final play, that the longlived children in this play advance through more stages of development in their fetal states than shortlived children do. From Shaw’s perspective, this would be an evolutionary advantage, and one more indication that the longlivers are more evolutionarily desirable than their shortlived peers. Thus, in this Shavian future, reproduction has become a vocation for the most eugenically successful mothers, but recapitulation has also relieved these women of some of the burden of child-rearing.

While positive eugenic practices are currently the longlivers’ primary means of ensuring their future success, they are also beginning to demonstrate tendencies toward negative eugenics. Zoo tells Daddy that the children of longlivers “occasionally revert to the ancestral type, and are born shortlived,” but that the longlivers “weed them all out” (160). However, while Zoo assures Daddy that they would have no problem “assist[ing]

Nature” in this process, since “a good garden needs weeding,” their interference is actually unnecessary because a shortlived child of a longliver “naturally becomes discouraged” by his “infirmities of mind and temper” and therefore “refuses to live”; rather than committing suicide, “[h]e simply dies. He wants to. He is out of countenance, as we call it” (160-61). While negative eugenics practices were often (though by no means always) advocated by those in the Darwinian or neo-Darwinian evolutionary camps because these practices were seen as assisting or accelerating the process of natural selection, Shaw manages here to propose a Lamarckian model of negative eugenics. In the preface to *Back to Methuselah*, Shaw argues that Darwin’s theory “converted the crowd” because it was “easier to understand” than Lamarckism, largely because Darwin had taken “Selection From Without,” the breeding that had been carried on for centuries by “pigeon fanciers, dog fanciers, gardeners, stock breeders, or stud grooms,” and expanded upon it (xxxix, xl). Shaw does not deny that this type of artificial selection is effective, but to him it is clearly not a means of achieving long-term gains in human evolution. Therefore, rather than having the longlivers kill their anomalous shortlived children and “weed” them out like gardeners or stock breeders do, Shaw imagines that these children actively will themselves to die. Thus, the longlivers do not practice “Selection From Without,” nor do their shortlived children die as a result of an inability to survive, as natural selection would have it; rather, they consciously participate in their own fate, exerting their wills as a means of escaping the “pain and depression” that coexistence with the longlivers will cause. While this is certainly a Shavian twist on Lamarckism rather than a strict application of that evolutionary theory,

the fact that Shaw has turned the will to use in negative eugenics indicates that he sees the benefits of weeding out the unfit members of a species, but wants to find a non-Darwinian mechanism for doing so.

However, even though the longlivers avoid blood on their hands in the eugenic “weeding” process of their undesirable shortlived children, there is plenty of evidence in this play that the murderous trait that began with Cain, was so abhorred by his parents, and resulted in the horrific wars of ensuing generations has persisted in the longlivers. Zoo tells Daddy that he is an “evil child” and that “[w]e kill evil children here. We do it even against our own wills by instinct” (156). Unlike their shortlived counterparts like Daddy, who still greatly admire honor on the battlefield, the longlivers try very hard to suppress their murderous instincts, but they are still encumbered by the legacy of Cain. Daddy inflames this instinct in Zoo for the first time in her life, which forces her to “reconsider my whole political position. I am no longer a Conservative” (157). She goes on to explain the difference between the political parties, and their main debate:

We have two great parties: the Conservative party and the Colonization party. The Colonizers are of the opinion that we should increase our numbers and colonize. The Conservatives hold that we should stay as we are, confined to these islands, a race apart [. . .]. They say that our power and our peace depend on our remoteness, our exclusiveness, our separation, and the restriction of our numbers. Five minutes ago that was my political faith. Now I do not think there should be any shortlived people at all. (157)

If Shaw truly believes that the future of the human race depends on longevity, then he would clearly side with the Colonizers, since the isolationist strategy proposed by the Conservative party would restrain the number of longlivers in existence. The doctrine of “Colonization” allows the superior lifespan and intellect of the longlivers to spread to all humanity.

However, the dark side of colonization is that it relies on the subjugation and even extermination of shortlivers. As Zoo and Daddy debate the value of shortlivers, she asks him whether it is “worth living for short a time” and if he is “any good to [him]self,” and she argues that shortlivers “only encourage the sin of pride in us, and keep us looking down at you instead of up to something higher than ourselves” (158). She eventually concludes, after painting shortlivers as children who have no prospects of ever growing up, “Therefore I say that we who live three hundred years can be of no use to you who live less than a hundred, and that our true destiny is not to advise and govern you, but to supplant and supersede you. In that faith I now declare myself a Colonizer and an Exterminator” (159). If we take Zoo’s conversion here as an at least partially serious reflection of Shaw’s own convictions, even allowing for hyperbole, this represents a radical political and philosophical departure for the socialist Shaw. Granted, Shaw’s socialism was primarily of the Fabian variety, which advocated certain forms of imperialism and belied its discomfort with the proletariat by favoring gradualist rather than revolutionary reforms. However, the majority of Shaw’s writing up until the time when *Back to Methuselah* was published makes it difficult to believe that he would

endorse such draconian measures as the extermination of evolutionarily inferior humans, even 1000 years in the future.

On the other hand, if we look forward to the next decade of his career, it is possible to view this thought experiment in extreme forms of negative eugenics as the seeds of his later attraction to both Italian fascism and Stalinism (Holroyd 143-46, 244). In a 1931 letter to *The Times* (London), Shaw praises the effectiveness and efficiency of Russian government because it “excludes from official authority and from the franchise the ignorant, the incompetent, the indifferent, the corrupt, and the pugnacious and politically incapable masses who [. . .] can make no intelligent use of their votes, and are the dupes of every interest that can afford the cost of gulling them” (*Agitations* 276). Here, Shaw demonstrates his frustration for the “masses,” which is a natural outgrowth of the evolutionary frustrations portrayed in *Back to Methuselah*: Burge and Lubin, and later Burge-Lubin, are exactly the kinds of “incompetent,” “pugnacious,” and “politically incapable” human specimens that Shaw believes are responsible for atrocities like World War I and, more generally, for many of the failures of the human race. In “The Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman,” this frustration finds its solution not in the exclusion of these masses from government but, because the world of his play cycle is a fantastical futuristic realm in which he can take his inclinations to their extremes, the extermination of the shortlived “masses.” Again, a decade later, Shaw takes Zoo’s extremist rhetoric in *Back to Methuselah* and applies it to the real world. In 1932, a year after returning from a trip to the Soviet Union, Shaw wrote, “Our question is not to kill or not to kill, but how to select the right people to kill” and, “[T]he essential difference between the Russian

liquidator with his pistol (or whatever his humane killer may be) and the British hangman is that they do not operate on the same sort of person” (qtd. in Holroyd 253). Even if we allow for typical Shavian hyperbole in these statements, Shaw’s progression from the fictional and futuristic Colonizers’ desire to supplant the inferior shortlivers by any means necessary to his real-world advocacy of killing the “right people,” even if it is still difficult to determine who those might be, demonstrates that the project of human evolution has become for Shaw more than a scientific theory, more than a religion, more than a utopian fantasy; it has become a means of perfecting the human race and eradicating the “weeds” that slow human progress at any cost, even if it means that the violence of Cain that was so abhorrent in “In the Beginning” becomes one of the tools by which these evolutionary goals are achieved. As Zoo tells Daddy, if colonization were successful and there were no longer shortlived countries to which the longlivers could send their “undesirables,” they would simply “[k]ill them,” because “[o]ur tertiaries [those in their third century] are not at all squeamish about killing” (161). Shaw himself, it seems, is becoming less squeamish about killing.

“The Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman,” like the play before it, also reveals a complex and at times disturbing racial dynamic. The longlivers who reside together in the former British Isles are, we can assume, all white, and they view colonization in much the same way as their nineteenth and twentieth-century predecessors did. Zozim, a longliver, explains the position of the Colonizers to the British Envoy, who is leading the group of tourists from which Daddy had become separated earlier in the play: “[T]he general opinion among the Colonizers is in favor of beginning in a country where the

people are of a different color from us; so that we can make short work without any risk of mistakes” (176). When the Envoy asks with great concern what he means by “short work,” Zozim quickly replies, “Oh, nothing, nothing, nothing,” which the stage directions tell us he utters “with obviously feigned geniality” (176). Zozim’s repetition of “nothing” indicates that he protests too much and that the Colonizers do, indeed, plan on exterminating shortlivers and on starting with those of a “different color” in order to make the process easier. However, he also says that they have been thinking of starting their colonization process in North America, because “the Red Men of that country used to be white” but they “passed through a period of sallow complexions, followed by a period of no complexions at all, into the red characteristic of their climate” (176). When he points out that “several cases of long life have occurred in North America,” which is another reason they want to start there, Daddy asks if he has “considered the possibility of your colony turning red,” to which Zozim replies, “That wont matter. We are not particular about our pigmentation” (176). In one exchange, Zozim demonstrates two seemingly conflicting views of race: on the one hand, shortlivers of a different race than the majority of the longlivers will be easier to colonize, presumably because they are all the more inferior due to their race, but on the other hand, the longlivers do not care what “pigmentation” they ultimately acquire, signaling that the increase in intellect and experience caused by their longevity has allowed them to move beyond any prejudice on the basis of skin color.

Further, Zozim’s explanation of the development of the North American skin color, which seems to suggest that pigmentation is a product of the environment, and his

revelation that many longlivers have emerged from that area (presumably the “thing” continues to happen to people all over the world) indicate that race is no longer a criteria by which the longlivers judge their fellow men. This is consistent with other aspects of the longlivers’ thought. Religion is unimportant: the longlivers no longer know the word “church,” and Zozim tells the Envoy that “[t]he old uns prefer Mahometans” to Christians, but not for any particular reason. Nationality no longer holds any meaning, and Zoo dismisses all discussions of origins as silly stories that people make up to tell children, arguing that it is a “ridiculous thing to call people Irish because they live in Ireland! you might as well call them Airish because they live in air. They must be just the same as other people” (145-46).³⁷ And, in general, there is a vast communication gap between the longlivers and the shortlivers that Zoo explains by referring to “dead thought,” which the oracles must study in order to understand the visitors. She explains that “thoughts die sooner than languages” and that even though she understands Daddy’s language, “I do not always understand your thought” (139). In other words, the major concerns of the past, such as religion, nationality, and “pigmentation,” which are still major concerns for the shortlivers, are now “dead thought” for the longlivers that must be studied like an ancient language. Thus, Shaw has eradicated as “dead thought” all of the major twentieth-century concerns that kept people fighting with one another. The only remaining prejudice for the longlivers is lifespan, which Shaw has conditioned his audience to view as a legitimate means by which to judge human quality. In the futuristic fantasy world that Shaw has created, one step away from the evolutionary paradise of the final play, all social ills can be eradicated by exterminating the shortlivers.

Shaw has created a world for himself in which negative eugenics practices are morally acceptable: if those who live 300 years unmistakably occupy the evolutionary high ground, if all of the messy twentieth-century conflicts about race, class, and religion are now ancient history, and if evolutionary progress is truly the only human goal worth pursuing, then the Colonizers have a moral imperative to eliminate those who impede the progress of the human race and keep their fellow men from achieving increasingly beneficial heights of intellectual, physical,³⁸ and experiential progress. Shaw seems to be advocating an increasingly violent trajectory of negative eugenics measures. And, indeed, we see this escalation occur by the end of the play: when Daddy finally appears before the Oracle, she unceremoniously kills him as an act of pity. The final words of the play belong to the Oracle, who says, “Poor shortlived thing! What else could I do for you?” (188)

However, despite all of the indications that Shaw is sanctioning this move toward violence in the name of evolutionary progress, he forces us to question whether or not the longlivers are truly better in every way than the shortlivers. It is Daddy, a shortliver, who gives the most eloquent and heartfelt speech of the entire play. Zozim, regurgitating Shavio-Lamarckian dogma, tells Daddy, “You could live three centuries if you chose,” suggesting that the “thing” happening—the onset of a longer lifespan—is solely a matter of conscious willpower. Daddy responds with a thoughtful, humanistic defense of shortlivers:

That is what the fortunate always say to the unfortunate. Well, I do not choose. I accept my three score and ten years. If they are filled with

usefulness, with justice, with mercy, with good-will: if they are the lifetime of a soul that never loses its honor and a brain that never loses its eagerness, they are enough for me, because these things are infinite and eternal, and can make ten of my years as long as thirty of yours. I shall not conclude by saying live as long as you like and be damned to you, because I have risen for the moment far above any ill-will to you or to any fellow-creature; but I am your equal before that eternity in which the difference between your lifetime and mine is as the difference between one drop of water and three in the eyes of the Almighty Power from which we have both proceeded. (178-79)

Zozim is “impressed,” and responds, “You spoke that piece very well, Daddy. I couldn’t talk like that if I tried. It sounded fine” (179). But then, in the next breath, he cries, “Ah! here come the ladies,” and the stage directions tell us that he feels “relief” at this development (179). Daddy “pass[es] from exaltation to distress” due to this dismissive response to his speech, and laments, “It means nothing to him: in this land of discouragement the sublime has become the ridiculous” (179). Daddy’s speech reminds the audience of all that is lost in the longlivers’ world: “justice,” “mercy,” “good-will,” and “honor” mean little to them because they have become almost completely intellectualized, with little cause for emotion. Further, this speech is an example of beautiful, compelling rhetoric, a skill that has, as Zozim’s comment makes clear, been lost by the longlivers. Shaw, who has made his living and gained celebrity as a wordsmith, seems to be mourning this loss of human expressiveness along with Daddy.

We can therefore assume that there are other aspects of the longlivers' beliefs and behavior that make Shaw uncomfortable, which helps to account for the moral ambiguity present in his portrayal of negative eugenics. However, as the final play demonstrates, even if Shaw regrets the loss of certain human qualities he holds dear, he considers this an acceptable price to pay for the evolutionary achievements it buys.

The *Back to Methuselah* Pentateuch ends with a return to Eden in "As Far as Thought Can Reach," but this is a new Eden, a utopia of the future that is populated entirely by longlivers. It is now 31,920 A.D., so Shaw has covered the entire conceivable timeframe of human existence, from the creation of Adam and Eve to a future 30,000 years after the play was written. Just as the book of Revelation ends the Bible with predictions about the future and the end of life on Earth for humans, Shaw ends his foundational text for the religion of Creative Evolution with predictions about the human evolutionary trajectory. All humans now live indefinitely, until an accident befalls them, and Shaw has sidestepped the problem of the gender inequity of childbirth and childrearing by having humans hatch fully formed from giant eggs. He uses recapitulation theory to explain why humans now emerge from their eggs, after a two-year incubation period, as fully functioning seventeen-year-olds. These "children" experience a four-year childhood, which is really the equivalent of most people's adulthoods, during which they become passionately involved in love affairs with one another, ardently pursue and worship the arts, and dread outgrowing this phase of their lives. After four years, they become "ancients" who have grown tired of physical love, art, music, each other, and all fleshly concerns, and now wander as ascetics who are

interested only in the pleasures of profound thought and in experimenting with the powers of their minds. In the final and most radical play of his Pentateuch, Shaw reveals the evolutionary goal toward which he has been building throughout the entire play cycle: he wants to eradicate the body entirely and turn humans into pure thought. Clearly, this goes beyond any of the work being done or predictions being made by his contemporaries studying evolution and, in that it relies on evolution rather than salvation, it is a radical departure from Christian theology. In rejecting the body as an evolutionary obstacle, and in the process rejecting nearly everything that humans use to distinguish themselves as human, Shaw makes his most original contribution to the canon of evolutionary thought.

Shaw's first step toward eradication of the body is to remove human reproduction from the bodies of women. This solves two problems for him: it allows him to relieve women of the burden of reproduction that, during his lifetime, contributed to a reduction of the birthrate among upper-class and educated women, and it moves humankind one step closer to his goal of dispensing with the body altogether. In an article Shaw wrote in 1920 for the American women's magazine *McCall's*, entitled "Woman Since 1860 as a Wise Man Sees Her," Shaw recognizes that many women, especially those "brought up amid the feminist movement of the second half of the nineteenth century," underwent a "revolt against maternity" in large part because of the "very unequal share of the burden of reproduction which falls to men and women in civilized communities" (11). While he finds this revolt unacceptable because it will eventually result in "race suicide," he offers these women hope in Creative Evolution: "the rebels against nature may be the pioneers of evolutionary changes which may finally dispose of the less pleasant incidents of

nutrition, and make reproduction a process external to the parents in its more burdensome phases, as it now is in many existent species” (11). *Back to Methuselah*, which Shaw was working on when he wrote this article, proposes exactly this: in this final play, children are hatched from giant eggs as seventeen-year-olds, which is certainly a “process external to the parents” and which makes breastfeeding (which Shaw awkwardly calls the “less pleasant incidents of nutrition”) obsolete.

In the meantime, Shaw believes that women will be assuaged by the promise that someday in the very distant future, this science fiction might become a reality through the evolutionary process:

I suggest that when a woman is found in complete revolt against maternity, the proper treatment for her apparent mania is not to revile her as a monster, but to explain to her that her instinctive antipathy is a creditable movement toward an end that will one day be reached, though it cannot relieve her from the necessity for making the best of the existing provisional arrangements. (“Woman Since 1860” 27)

Considering that Shaw published this article in a mainstream women’s magazine, his tone here is only comprehensible if he intended female *McCall’s* readers to encourage those of their friends and family who were “found in complete revolt against maternity” to soldier on in the knowledge that they are evolutionary pioneers. As a paternalistic plea to female readers themselves to continue reproducing despite the unequal responsibility placed on them for the bearing and rearing of children, it is woefully inadequate. In “As Far as Thought Can Reach,” however, Shaw is able to fantasize and theorize himself out of this

gap between reality and prophecy and temporarily put his audience in the futuristic world he predicts in this article. Instead of just asking the *McCall's* readers to take his word for it, he can show them in an evening what their descendants might have to look forward to.

Shaw achieves this reproductive utopian state through a combination of oviparity and recapitulation. Because they are oviparous (they lay eggs), women no longer need to bear the physical burden of carrying their progeny within their own bodies, and the advanced recapitulation that causes “children” to be born as fully-formed adults removes the burden of breastfeeding and child-rearing. Pygmalion, a “child” and a sculptor who has been working to artificially create a pair of human beings as an artistic endeavor, explains why his attempts to make “prehistoric” human beings proved impossible:

Well, it is difficult to explain if you have not studied prehistoric methods of reproduction. You see the only sort of men and women I could make were men and women just like us as far as their bodies were concerned. That was how I killed the poor beast of a man. I hadnt provided for his horrible prehistoric methods of feeding himself. Suppose the woman had reproduced in some prehistoric way instead of being oviparous as we are? She couldnt have done it with a modern female body. Besides, the experiment might have been painful. (217)

Not only are these evolutionarily advanced humans oviparous, but they have lost their reproductive organs and even their digestive systems have changed. It is not clear from the play how the future humans eat, but Pygmalion, in explaining the creation of one of his human prototypes, reveals that the people in 31,920 A.D. get their nutrition in a much

different way than did “prehistoric” humans: “I then perceived that I had produced a prehistoric man; for there are certain traces in our own bodies of arrangements which enabled the earlier forms of mankind to renew their bodies by swallowing flesh and grains and vegetables and all sorts of unnatural and hideous foods, and getting rid of what they could not digest” (216). Shaw, a strict vegetarian, was himself adverse to “unnatural and hideous foods” and seems to delight in imagining a future race of humans who no longer need to consume food, particularly “flesh.” We also find out early in the play that once these future humans have passed through their four years of childhood, they no longer need to sleep and view sleep as a “shameful thing” (194). Shaw never reveals the details of how humans lay eggs, but we do get one hint about the method when one of the children, a sculptor named Arjillax, defends the importance of his art against an accusation that “[a]rt is all illusion” by connecting it to reproduction: “That is false. The statues of today are the men and women of the next incubation. I hold up the marble figure before the mother and say ‘This is the model you must copy.’ We produce what we see. Let no man dare to create in art a thing that he would not have exist in life” (238). From this discussion, we can deduce that mothers (and it is interesting that it is still only mothers) now will their children into creation by meditating upon sculpted models. In some ways, this is a return to the Garden of Eden of the first play: humans have come full circle and now use the strength of their wills to reproduce, just as Lilith willed herself torn in two in order to create Adam and Eve. In fact, this reproductive system bears the most similarity to the Serpent, who wills her own offspring into being through an oviparous reproductive process. Shaw, therefore, has brought the

reproductive process back to its Lamarckian roots, allowing women to fashion the best possible offspring through the power of their individual wills, while also allowing them to forego most of the gender iniquity and burden inherent in “prehistoric” reproduction.

One side effect of eliminating sexual reproduction from the human species is that gender distinctions lose their importance and, the play implies, sexual intercourse is no longer practiced, especially in adulthood. Girls start to become “flat-chested” in their fourth year (193), and the She-Ancient in the play is described as almost completely indistinguishable from her male counterpart: “She is like the He-Ancient, equally bald, and equally without sexual charm, but intensely interesting and rather terrifying. Her sex is discoverable only by her voice, as her breasts are manly, and her figure otherwise not very different. She wears no clothes, but has draped herself rather perfunctorily with a ceremonial robe” (198). Shaw’s She-Ancient is like a futuristic version of Vivie Warren³⁹ and the New Woman in general, but instead of simply adopting the clothing and habits of men, the evolutionary process has disinherited her of every gender marker but her voice. We learn that the ancients quickly outgrow any interest in or even knowledge of gender. When the He-Ancient tells a maiden that her “looks do not interest” him, implying that he no longer experiences physical sexual attraction toward women, he is berated by a youth who says, “I believe you dont know the difference between a man and a woman” (191). The He-Ancient replies, “It has long ceased to interest me in the way it interests you. And when anything no longer interests us we no longer know it” (191). The He-Ancient also tells the maiden, who has almost reached the end of her childhood, that she is showing her age because she is “ceasing to pretend that these childish games—

this dancing and singing and mating—do not become tiresome and unsatisfying after a while” (191). Arjillax, who is also reaching the end of his childhood, declares that he has “grown out of cuddling,” the first step in becoming an ancient. Indeed, the ancients not only eschew physical contact once they have outgrown childhood, but they also no longer enjoy any type of human companionship, preferring instead to be alone with their own thoughts (234).

By eliminating the need for sexual intercourse and even culturally demoting sex and all physical affection to child’s play, Shaw perhaps reveals his own unease with sexuality.⁴⁰ More importantly for Shaw’s purposes in *Back to Methuselah*, however, eliminating sex means taking one step closer to eliminating the body altogether. It also means that the immense distraction caused by sexual attraction and the pursuit of attention from the opposite sex can be eliminated in favor of more time and focus on using the will for evolutionary purposes. Shaw’s intent in this final play seems to be to streamline the evolutionary process and to streamline the human experience in general, removing all obstacles and distractions that stand in the way of pure will and pure thought.

One such obstacle for both parent and child is the eighteen years between birth and adulthood when children are not yet capable of fully functioning on their own without careful attention, nurturing, and guidance. Shaw eliminates this obstacle through the process of recapitulation. Early in the play, we see a “Newly Born” female hatch from her enormous egg, and the She-Ancient, who is on hand to assist with the hatching process, explains to her what she has just been through in the egg:

[Y]ou have been growing for two years in the egg. You began by being several sorts of creatures that no longer exist, though we have fossils of them. Then you became human; and you passed in fifteen months through a development that once cost human beings twenty years of awkward stumbling immaturity after they were born. They had to spend fifty years more in the sort of childhood you will complete in four years. And then they died of decay. But you need not die until your accident comes. (201-202)

The fetal development process that the She-Ancient describes here begins with recapitulation as it was understood by Lamarckian evolutionary theorists during Shaw's time: the human embryo develops through all of its previous evolutionary stages before finally emerging from the womb as a human infant. In the future Shaw dramatizes here, that incubation period has been expanded to two years and has been moved from the womb to an egg, but the process is still the same. However, Shaw then expands on this idea in order to create his own modified recapitulation theory in which the first twenty years of human development have also been compressed into the embryonic development stage.

This is a radical revision of recapitulation theory because it calls into question the very concept of species. In recapitulation theory, the human species is the final stage of embryonic development, whereas in Shaw's modified version, the developmental stages of human life function as more primitive human evolutionary forms. Since Shaw has made longevity the sole measure of evolutionary progress in *Back to Methuselah*, using

the reasoning that the older a person is the more intelligent, productive, and useful to society he is, then it is desirable from his evolutionary perspective to eradicate the early years of life altogether. Thus, Shaw takes recapitulation from the Lamarckians and repurposes it in order to condense the first seventy years of human life to four. By doing this, he effectively eliminates all of the problems he sees in contemporary humans; they are now left with four years in which to engage in the silliness of art and love and sex until they quickly outgrow these banalities and move on to the serious intellectual and spiritual contemplation that will consume the remainder of their nearly eternal lives.

That Shaw, an artist himself, would so blithely eliminate art from human thought and activity for all but the youngest of children seems unthinkable. However, for Shaw, the art practiced by the children of the future, particularly those in their first two or three years, represents the art practiced by his contemporaries: it is imitative, contributes very little to human advancement, and does not transcend the human experience. In the preface to *Back to Methuselah*, he assures his readers that “the revival of religion on a scientific basis does not mean the death of art, but a glorious rebirth of it. Indeed art has never been great when it was not providing an iconography for a live religion. And it has never been quite contemptible except when imitating the iconography after the religion had become superstition” (lxviii-lxix). He goes on to give examples: Mozart and Beethoven are compared favorably to Handel, and “Hilton and Haydon” are “dull daubs” compared to Giotto (lxix). Ultimately, Shaw admires the artists he sees as prophetic: Michael Angelo anticipating the Superman “three hundred years before Nietzsche wrote Thus Spake Zoroaster” and Beethoven musically representing “whirling electrons” in his

Hammerklavier Sonata, Opus 106, long before physicists had discovered atomic particles (lxx). And, of course, he sees himself as one of these “Artist-Prophets” who is offering *Back to Methuselah* as an artistic, religious, and scientific text that he hopes will be “left behind as the religious pictures of the fifteenth century left behind the first attempts of the early Christians at iconography,” but will nonetheless prove prophetic (lxxiv).

If Shaw’s primary requirement for art is that it move beyond the mimetic and, like Lamarckian evolution itself, see ahead to and even attempt to bring about a higher human state, then it is important to look at the final play of *Back to Methuselah* to determine whether Shaw has really eliminated art or just reinvented it in a drastically new form. Even though “As Far as Thought Can Reach” is set 30,000 years in the future, the opening stage directions describe the setting and its inhabitants as reminiscent of a much earlier time in human history: “A dance of youths and maidens is in progress. The music is provided by a few fluteplayers seated together on the steps of the temple. [. . .] Their dress, like the architecture of the temple and the design of the altar and curved seats, resembles Grecian of the fourth century B.C., freely handled” (189). Like many of his modernist counterparts, Shaw looks to the ancient Greeks as inspiration for his reinvention of the human condition, but this nostalgia does not signal a desire in Shaw to return to a majestic period at the height of human achievement, nor does it indicate that Shaw wishes his future humans to mimic or even appropriate ancient art for modern purposes. Because Shaw sees human progress in fairly linear terms, his nod to ancient Greece here is a way to highlight the childishness of the future children’s artistic passions: their admiration for ancient architectural forms, their belief in the

transformative powers of this type of art, and their practice of painting and sculpture are all vestiges from their ancestors that are quickly outgrown. In fact, we can imagine that, just as their first seventeen years have been compressed into two years of incubation in the egg, this rudimentary love of art will soon become yet another human feature that is recapitulated during fetal development but completely eradicated in the mature hatched form.

In keeping with Shaw's theory of art as something that must seek truth rather than mimesis, as the children age, they become disillusioned with their earlier forms of art and strive for more and more truth in their artistic products. In one of the many discussions the children have about art, Martellus, a sculptor and one of the older children, helps Arjillax understand his own rejection of earlier art forms:

As your hand became more skilful and your chisel cut deeper, you strove to get nearer and nearer to truth and reality, discarding the fleeting fleshly lure, and making images of the mind that fascinates to the end. But how can so noble an inspiration be satisfied with any image, even an image of truth? In the end the intellectual conscience that tore you away from the fleeting in art to the eternal must tear you away from art altogether, because art is false and life alone is true. (209)

Martellus juxtaposes "fleshly lure" with "truth and reality" in order to demonstrate that while the former is initially attractive, particularly to children, it is "fleeting" and quickly outgrown in favor of the more permanent pursuit of the "eternal," which he aligns with "truth and reality." By designating the inferior art form "fleshly," Martellus demonstrates

that he is beginning to reject the body in favor of “images of the mind.” Thus, Martellus composes a theory of art that is very similar to Shaw’s own, as expressed in the preface to *Back to Methuselah*: art must move beyond corporeal representation and look to the future and to “truth” in order to have any meaning.

But Martellus takes this theory one step further than Shaw is willing to in the Preface. He predicts that as the children age, they will reject art completely “because art is false and life alone is true.” However, Martellus’ prediction is only accurate if the word “art” is interpreted narrowly. What Shaw demonstrates in this play, which takes his art theory into far more radical territory than he admits in the Preface, is that life itself is capable of being art if the human mind is developed enough to become the artistic medium. In order to demonstrate this, Shaw gives us the artistic perspective of the She-Ancient who was herself an artist as a child but, as an adult, began to use her own body as her canvas: “Here, and here alone, I could shape and create. When my arm was weak and I willed it to be strong, I could create a roll of muscle on it; and when I understood that, I understood that I could without any greater miracle give myself ten arms and three heads. [. . .] [F]or five more years I made myself into all sorts of fantastic monsters” (235). Although this was an early stage in the She-Ancient’s development into an ancient, it demonstrates that even though she had rejected art, as all children past the age of four do, she still retained an artistic drive that, combined with a Lamarckian will, led her to channel those energies into sculpting her own body using her mind as her chisel. However, she eventually outgrew this, too, and now longs to escape her body altogether so that she can operate solely on the intellectual plane. This artistic evolution parallels

the physical and cultural evolution that Shaw has established in *Back to Methuselah*: both lead to the same goal, a purely mental state of existence in which creativity combined with will can achieve evolutionary heights that are currently out of the reach of thought.

One way in which the longlivers have achieved the utopia we see in “As Far as Thought Can Reach” is by fully embracing negative eugenics. While the longlivers of the previous play debated about whether or not to conquer and, perhaps, exterminate the shortlivers in the world, that debate has apparently been settled in this play because shortlivers are no longer in existence. In the previous play, when a longliver gave birth to a child who “revert[ed] to the ancestral type” and was “born shortlived,” that child would usually die of discouragement, and the rare child who did not die would “emigrate” and become a prominent leader or “great man” in one of the shortlived societies (160-61). In this play, however, negative eugenics seems to be practiced with no moral discomfort, as demonstrated when the She-Ancient examines the Newly Born immediately after she has been hatched from her egg:

The She-Ancient looks at the Newly Born critically; feels her bumps like a phrenologist; grips her muscles and shakes her limbs; examines her teeth; looks into her eyes for a moment; and finally relinquishes her with an air of having finished her job.

THE SHE-ANCIENT. She will do. She may live.

THE NEWLY BORN [*indignant*] I may live! Suppose there had been anything wrong with me?

THE SHE-ANCIENT. Children with anything wrong do not live here, my child. Life is not cheap with us. But you would not have felt anything.

THE NEWLY BORN. You mean that you would have murdered me!

THE SHE-ANCIENT. That is one of the funny words the newly born bring with them out of the past. You will forget it tomorrow. (201)

The She-Ancient's language here suggests that unfit offspring in this futuristic world do not simply die of discouragement but, rather, are systematically (yet painlessly) killed if they do not meet certain requirements. The stage directions indicate that the She-Ancient's examination is more like a dog breeder's examination of a new litter of puppies than a doctor's examination of a newborn. What is starkly missing from this birth scene, in which the full-grown child is hatched, parentless, from an egg and then examined to determine whether or not she is fit to live, is the human element. There is no real joy, no real affection, no real love in this scene. Instead, the ancients make cold calculations about fitness and employ negative eugenics practices that have been made more palatable by ridding the language of the word "murder."

Shaw seems to have made a conscious tradeoff here and to have answered the moral question he posed in "The Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman": Is it acceptable to kill the evolutionarily stunted if it will mean incredible evolutionary advancements for the rest of the human race? He seems uneasy with this question in the previous play: though he leans toward answering "yes," he does everything in his power to make any eugenic or violent measures more palatable. And it seems as though he has come to a definitive answer in this play: painlessly kill any undesirables at birth (the longlivers use

calcination to instantly pulverize bodies) in order to maintain the purity of the race. However, it is my contention that Shaw's desire to get rid of the body altogether in this play is further evidence of his residual discomfort with negative eugenics. As long as we still have bodies, he can not see a way out of negative eugenics if he wants to accomplish the evolutionary goals he has in mind. However, this is, for Shaw, simply one more piece of evidence that the body itself is the problem. By writing his way out of the body, he writes his way out of the need for eugenics.

Although the longlivers survive indefinitely now, for hundreds and "perhaps thousands" of years (194), none of them will live forever. This is because they have returned full-circle to the longevity problem with which Adam and Eve grappled in the first play: there is no biological cause of death, no disease and no "decay" (201), but the longer they live, the likelier their chances that they will experience a fatal accident. As the She-Ancient explains to the Newly Born, "Sooner or later you will fall and break your neck; or a tree will fall on you; or you will be struck by lightning. Something or other must make an end of you someday" (202). When the Newly born asks "why should any of these things happen to me?" the She-Ancient responds, "There is no why. They do. Everything happens to everybody sooner or later if there is time enough. And with us there is eternity" (202). Thus, despite their longevity, this future race of humans must constantly live with the knowledge that they might die from their fatal accident at any time, that they are trapped in bodies that will eventually succumb to chance death.

Shaw is drawing here on Weismann, his evolutionary arch-enemy, who distinguished between "natural death" and "accidental death" when discussing his theory

of aging (Kirkwood and Cremer 101). One of Weismann's arguments against immortality within a species was that the injuries that the body would inevitably incur would render that body useless and, thus, make replacing that decrepit body with a new, young, healthy body necessary to the survival and success of the species:

Suppose that an immortal individual could escape all fatal accidents, through infinite time,—a supposition which is of course hardly conceivable. The individual would nevertheless be unable to avoid, from time to time, slight injuries to one or other part of its body. The injured parts could not regain their former integrity, and thus the longer the individual lived, the more defective and crippled it would become, and the less perfectly would it fulfil the purpose of its species. Individuals are injured by the operation of external forces and for this reason alone it is necessary that new and perfect individuals should continually arise and take their place, and this necessity would remain even if the individuals possessed the power of living eternally. (qtd. in Kirkwood and Cremer 103)

Shaw seems to have taken this idea of the inevitability of a “fatal accident” directly from Weismann, and he can not find a way out of this predicament except through the eradication of the body altogether. He has, however, managed to solve the problem of injuries, though he does not explain the biological or evolutionary mechanism through which this has occurred. Although the ancients live much longer than contemporary humans, the members of Shaw's audience, there is a distinct similarity in their

predicaments: both feel immortal in their minds and souls, but are faced with the inescapable fact of the mortality of their bodies. Even though Shaw has made indefinite life a possibility in this play, he still must deal with the fragility of the body.

One way in which Shaw attempts to escape Weismann's predictions is by making all injuries to the body fatal. When Pygmalion creates two human creatures, "automata," who behave like contemporary humans, the female automaton bites Pygmalion in a fit of rage. This bite causes him to die immediately because, as Martellus explains, "She has bitten a piece out of his hand nearly as large as a finger nail: enough to kill ten men" (222). From this, we learn that even the slightest injury, the equivalent of a scratch, is enough to kill one of these future humans. Thus, Shaw has set up a futuristic scenario in which Weismann's concerns about the cumulative effects of a lifetime of injuries are no longer relevant: if even the slightest injury causes death, then those who live for thousands of years will have unblemished bodies and will never become "defective and crippled." This is evident in Shaw's first stage-direction description of the He-Ancient: "In physical hardihood and uprightness he seems to be in the prime of life; and his eyes and mouth shew no signs of age; but his face, though fully and firmly fleshed, bears a network of lines, varying from furrows to hairbreadth reticulations, as if Time had worked over every inch of it incessantly through whole geologic periods" (189-90). Though the He-Ancient's face bears the marks of wisdom and the effects of weather on the skin, the rest of his body is in "the prime of life," which further refutes Weismann's objections to longevity. However, despite all of the ways in which Shaw has tried to prove Weismann wrong by creating these immortal ancients, he still cannot escape

Weismann's logic in claiming that it is "hardly conceivable" that an "immortal individual could escape all fatal accidents, through infinite time." This final obstacle to immortality is what pushes Shaw to imagine a time further than "thought can reach," beyond the time of the final play, in which humans have rid themselves of bodies altogether.

The ancients, who have used their minds to stretch the limits of their bodies, eventually reach a point when they become tired of their bodies and begin to see them as impediments to their growth. The He-Ancient tells the children that the "trouble of the ancients" is that their bodies are merely the shells that contain their essential selves:

Look at me. This is my body, my blood, my brain; but it is not me. I am the eternal life, the perpetual resurrection; but [*striking his body*] this structure, this organism, this makeshift, can be made by a boy in a laboratory, and is held back from dissolution only by my use of it. Worse still, it can be broken by a slip of the boot, drowned by a cramp in the stomach, destroyed by a flash from the clouds. Sooner or later, its destruction is certain. (233-34)

The He-Ancient here complains about two problems with bodies: they are meaningless vessels that do not reflect the true essence contained in them, and they are vulnerable to fatal accidents. The body has, for the ancients, ceased to be useful: it is no longer used for nutrition, at least in ways we understand, it is no longer required for reproduction, and the slightest injury to it will result in death. Therefore, once children have become adults and outgrown their childish appreciation for pretty clothes, mimetic art, and the opposite sex, their bodies no longer serve any real purpose.

In fact, in a conversation between the He-Ancient and the She-Ancient, they reveal that they see their bodies as tyrants by which they have been enslaved. The She-Ancient explains that she realized one day, after spending years growing new heads and creating new monstrosities out of her own body, that “this monstrous machinery of heads and limbs was no more me than my statues had been me, and that it was only an automaton that I had enslaved” (236). However, not only was her body a slave but, as the He-Ancient explains, “when the master has come to do everything through the slave, the slave becomes his master, because his master cannot live without him” (236). Thus, the She-Ancient “perceived that [she] had made [her]self the slave of a slave” (236). The ancients find this to be an intolerable predicament, “For whilst we are tied to this tyrannous body we are subject to its death, and our destiny is not achieved” (236). Shaw cannot find a way out of mortality as long as bodies are in the way, so he invents a new destiny for humankind: “The day will come when there will be no people, only thought. [. . .] And that will be life eternal” (236-37). When pressed by the children about what they will be if they do not have bodies, because they “cant be nothing,” the ancients reply, “A vortex” (238):

THE NEWLY BORN. A what?

THE SHE-ANCIENT. A vortex. I began as a vortex: why should I not end as one?

ECRASIA. Oh! That is what you old people are! Vorticists!

ACIS. If life is thought, can you live without a head?

THE HE-ANCIENT. Not now perhaps. But prehistoric men thought they could not live without tails. I can live without a tail. Why should I not live without a head?

THE NEWLY BORN. What is a tail?

THE HE-ANCIENT. A habit of which your ancestors managed to cure themselves.

THE SHE-ANCIENT. None of us now believes that all this machinery of flesh and blood is necessary. It dies.

THE HE-ANCIENT. It imprisons us on this petty planet and forbids us to range through the stars.

The ancients use Lamarckian rhetoric to explain how they will evolve away from their bodies into a vortex of pure thought. When the He-Ancient uses the word “habit” to describe the tails that humans had in an earlier evolutionary stage, he suggests that tails were acquired at a stage in our evolutionary development when they were necessary and then ceased to exist when we stopped using them for long enough. He then applies the same argument to the body: it is no longer “necessary” and its primary drawbacks are that “[i]t dies” and “[i]t imprisons us on this petty planet.” Thus, through the Lamarckian evolutionary process, we could get rid of our bodies in the same way we got rid of our tails, through disuse.

This is a radical application of Lamarckian evolutionary theory, which normally applies to the evolution of the bodies of species, not evolution away from bodies altogether. In fact, what Shaw has done here is to combine religion and science in a way

that makes them almost completely inextricable from one another. If the Lamarckian language is removed from the ancients' discussions, then they could easily be talking about an afterlife and the release of the soul from the body in terms that would be recognizable to most members of Shaw's audiences. However, by making this process a scientific one akin to losing our tails, Shaw makes it clear that he really is talking about the evolution of the species away from the body rather than simply an afterlife.

And yet, the mystical nature of a "vortex," which Shaw makes clear from his "Vorticist" joke is much more than an aesthetic theory, seems to defy scientific explanation. When Acis comments that "even a vortex is a vortex in something. You cant have a whirlpool without water; and you cant have a vortex without gas, or molecules or atoms or ions or elections or something, not nothing," he is trying to pin the vortex down with scientific principles, to give it physical properties. In his mind, in order for the vortex to be something, it must be made of something tangible and measurable. However, the He-Ancient quickly disregards this argument: "No: the vortex is not the water nor the gas nor the atoms: it is a power over these things" (239). Even though the ancients insist that the vortex can be achieved through traditional (Lamarckian) evolutionary means, they simultaneously segregate the vortex from the realm of the physical, refusing to allow it to be defined as anything other than a vague and mystical "power." If Shaw means Creative Evolution to be a "metabiological" religion, then this is how he intends to resolve that seeming paradox, by taking a fundamental tenet of Christianity—the soul leaving the body—and demonstrating how it can occur through evolutionary and biological means, thus giving humans control over its occurrence.

The play ends with the appearance of the ghosts of Adam, Eve, Cain, the Serpent, and Lilith onto a black stage, each of whom reflects on the evolution of humankind since the Garden of Eden and asks the next ghost, “What do you make of it?” (243) The first four ghosts ponder the many changes that humans have undergone, and both Eve and the Serpent are satisfied with progress of humankind, while Adam remains confused by the very idea of progress (243). However, these ghosts quickly disappear, and their assessment clearly means very little. Lilith is the only ghost remaining, and she finishes the play with a long monologue in which she takes stock of her creations and decides whether or not to allow them to continue on their evolutionary path:

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. Their breasts are without milk: their bowels are gone: the very shapes of them are only ornaments for their children to admire and caress without understanding. Is this enough; or must I labor again? Shall I bring forth something that will sweep them away and make an end of them as they have swept away the beasts of the garden, and made an end of the crawling things and the flying things and of all them that refuse to live forever? (244)

Lilith reinforces what we have already observed about these future humans: their bodies are now virtually useless, mere “ornaments” for children. When Lilith asks, “Is this enough; or must I labor again?” she suggests that by rendering their bodies useless, the future humans may have achieved the evolutionary goal she envisioned upon their

creation. However, her next question indicates that these future humans are far from perfect; the ugly side of their utopia is that it has been created in part by destroying every other creature on earth.

Lilith goes on in her monologue to explain how she has had to be patient with them “for many ages” while they “tried [her] very sorely,” and she details the millennia of wars and violence, of “cruelty and hypocrisy” during which time she tried to decide whether to let humans follow their rocky path of evolutionary progress or whether to scrap her experiment as a failure and start fresh (244):

The pangs of another birth were already upon me when one man repented and lived three hundred years; and I waited to see what would come of that. And so much came of it that the horrors of that time seem now but an evil dream. They have redeemed themselves from their vileness, and turned away from their sins. Best of all, they are still not satisfied: the impulse I gave them in that day when I sundered 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 matter, to the whirlpool in pure intelligence that, when the world began, was a whirlpool in pure force. And though all that they have done seems but the first hour of the infinite work of creation, yet I will not supersede them until they have forded this last stream that lies between flesh and spirit, and disentangled their life from the matter that

has always mocked it. I can wait: waiting and patience mean nothing to the eternal. (244)

The best compliment Lilith can give her creations is that they are “still not satisfied,” a phrase that recalls the Lamarckian ethos of striving. If they are not satisfied, then there is never an end to their evolution and they will be continuously striving to improve upon the human species. Shaw wants his audiences to hear this message as well, because it applies to them as much as it applies to the humans 30,000 years in the future. Lilith sees the most promise in the longlivers’ newly formed “goal of redemption from the flesh, to the vortex freed from matter, to the whirlpool in pure intelligence,” because for Lilith and for Shaw, this is the evolutionary goal that will finally allow humans to attain eternal life. In the last two sentences of this passage, Lilith sounds like the Christian God, pondering the “the infinite work of creation” and deciding to bestow more time on humans to continue on their evolutionary path. Particularly, when she refers to humans “ford[ing] this last stream that lies between flesh and spirit,” it sounds as though she is referring to the division between body and soul, envisioning an afterlife for the souls that have “disentangled their life from the matter that has always mocked it.” Shaw, like Christianity, places higher value on the soul, the spirit, the essence, the Life Force, than on the body, but for Shaw, the idea that the body “has always mocked” the human essence, keeping humans from achieving their full evolutionary potential, is what makes the eradication of the body such an ideal solution to every evolutionary, social, cultural, and biological problem facing humankind. Set free from their bodies, humans will, as

Lilith predicts, “become one with me and supersede me, and Lilith will be only a legend and a lay that has lost its meaning” (245).

In Shaw’s “contribution to the modern Bible,” there is no mention of God, and Lilith is the closest he comes to dramatizing a divine creator in his Pentateuch. Thus, if freeing themselves from their bodies allows humans to become one with Lilith and to supersede her, then it will essentially allow them to become gods. Lilith’s final prophecy ends the play:

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 matter to
its uttermost confines. And for what may be beyond, the eyesight of Lilith
is too short. It is enough that there is a beyond. [*She vanishes.*] (245)

In a revelatory finale that bears similarities to the Biblical book of Revelation in its fantastical futurism, Lilith imagines that humans, free from their bodies, will populate the universe with eternal “Life.” This is as far as both Lilith and Shaw can see, and so we reach the end of the play cycle at the moment we reach the end of imagination. Lilith sees the future of humans as a colonial future in which they “fill” the “desert” of the universe and “master its matter,” demonstrating that even with the entire universe opening up before them, she still sees humans as the most promising species, capable of mastering that universe. Thus, while the idea of eradicating the body represents an escape for Shaw from all of the earthly problems and moral complexities facing humans, it also

represents the opportunity of rebirth, to recreate ourselves in a new environment and leave behind all of the vestiges of the past that linger in human bodies.

While Shaw seems to have left behind the Superman dreams of *Man and Superman* when he wrote *Back to Methuselah*, taken together, these two plays, along with Shaw's letters, essays, and lectures from the interim between the two plays, demonstrate the developmental trajectory of Shaw's theory of Creative Evolution. Although this theory began with an enthusiasm ignited by Samuel Butler, was nourished by Bergson's *L'Evolution Créatrice* and by the robust scientific debates between neo-Lamarckians and neo-Darwinians, and became a pseudo-religious text in its final incarnation, Shaw maintained several fundamental principles across all of his evolutionary work. He remained staunchly opposed to Darwinian, and particularly neo-Darwinian materialism; he consistently celebrated the Lamarckian will, even when he strayed far from Lamarckian theory; he sought to improve the human species as a way to solve the many social and cultural problems he saw around him; he viewed evolution as a simultaneously biological and mystical process; and he privileged pleasures of the mind over pleasures of the body.

While this final principle is clearly evident in *Back to Methuselah*, where Shaw ends by imagining a time when humans will have become pure thought and left their bodies behind, the seeds for this radical idea are in the "Don Juan in Hell" scene of *Man and Superman*. Juan explains to Ana that "hell is the home of the unreal and of the seekers of happiness," a place filled with music, art, and love, much like the children's

nursery in “As Far as Thought Can Reach” (142). However, heaven, where Juan wants to go, is “nothing [. . .] but contemplation” and the “work of helping Life in its struggle upward” (144). In other words, Juan chooses pure thought over the pleasures of the flesh, just as his descendants will 30,000 years in the future. Further, by setting this debate between Juan and the Devil in the afterlife, in the liminal space between heaven and hell, Shaw points to his later attempt to make a religion out of evolution and to make a “contribution to the modern Bible.”

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, while neo-Darwinians and neo-Lamarckians were still battling each other for supremacy in the evolution debates, Shaw created an attractive alternative for many by combining the most appealing elements of Lamarckism, particularly the emphasis on the power of the human will to effect change, with a mystical element that often looked enough like Christianity to make it palatable for popular audiences. While *Man and Superman* ultimately failed, by Shaw’s own admission, to convert audiences to Creative Evolution because he had dressed it up too nicely as a comedy (and, more importantly, because the third act was rarely performed with the rest of the play), and *Back to Methuselah* was too lengthy and costly to produce often enough to reach many audiences, both plays received a great amount of press coverage, and *Back to Methuselah* even led both Jewish and Christian religious leaders to give lectures and sermons inspired by the play. While Shaw most likely had no effect on the actual scientific debate occurring among evolutionary theorists, it is difficult to find any historical reference to these debates that do not mention Shaw, even if he is only portrayed as a buffoon who hung on to his Lamarckian ideas

longer than most. Because of this, and because of Shaw's considerable celebrity and influence on literature and culture, it seems clear that Shaw helped keep Lamarckian thought alive in the culture and letters of the first half of the twentieth century.

Notes

¹ While Shaw saw himself and Bergson and kindred spirits, Bertrand Russell gives an anecdote that seems to contradict this view:

It used to be the custom among clever people to say that Shaw was not unusually vain, but only unusually candid. I came to think later on that this was a mistake. Two incidents at which I was present convinced me of this. The first was a luncheon in London in honor of Bergson, to which Shaw had been invited as an admirer, along with a number of professional philosophers whose attitude to Bergson was more critical. Shaw set to work to expound Bergson's philosophy in the style of the preface to *Methuselah*. In this version, the philosophy was hardly one to recommend itself to professionals, and Bergson mildly interjected, 'Ah, no-o! it is not qvite zat!' But Shaw was quite unabashed, and replied, 'Oh, my dear fellow, I understand your philosophy much better than you do.' Bergson clenched his fists and nearly exploded with rage; but, with a great effort, he controlled himself, and Shaw's expository monologue continued. (Russell 78).

² Shaw was critical of all organized religion, but he was not irreligious. He wrote prolifically on the difference between Christianity as practiced and preached by Christ and Christianity as corrupted and politicized by churches. He respected the former and despised the latter. For example, in *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism*, he writes, "Just as Parliament and the Courts are captured by the rich, so is the Church. The average person does not teach honesty and equality in the village school; he teaches deference to the merely rich, and calls that loyalty and religion. [. . .] The villagers, having no experience of any other sort of religion or law, soon lose all respect for both, and become merely cynical" (63).

³ In Shaw's 1944 collection of political essays *Everybody's Political What's What?* he explains why he still believes, 23 years after he wrote *Back to Methuselah*, that a merging of science and religion is acutely needed: "Both our science and our religion are gravely wrong; but they are not all wrong; and it is our urgent business to purge them of their errors and get them both as right as possible. If we could get them entirely right

the contradictions between them would disappear: we should have a religious science and a scientific religion in a single synthesis” (363).

⁴ Ibsen was a foundational influence for Shaw, and he wrote and lectured extensively about Ibsen’s plays, most notably in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891).

⁵ See the discussion in this dissertation’s introduction of Paul Kammerer, whose lecture to the Cambridge University Natural History Society was widely publicized and celebrated.

⁶ Georg Roppen, writing in 1956, attributes Shaw’s Creative Evolution to the influences of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Wagner, and Butler, by whom Shaw “was converted from the Darwinian heresy of his youth to a lasting faith in Evolution as a purposive, intelligent and voluntary process,” and he claims that Shaw creates from this amalgamation of thinkers “a new and disturbing pattern, vivid in colour, boldly impressionistic and subjective, and frankly theatrical, yet a composition alive with tremendous energy and complex human interest” (352-53). While Roppen is sympathetic to Shaw’s project, he finds it philosophical and artistic rather than scientific, beautiful rather than functional. Roppen’s emphasis here on the “pattern” and the “colour,” on the “theatrical” qualities of Shaw’s “composition” demonstrates that he views Shaw’s theory as a work of art rather than as a serious engagement with scientific debates. While Shaw’s presentation of his theory is certainly artistic, it is also rooted in scientific principles that Shaw sometimes misunderstands, often amends, and ultimately shapes into a Shavian-Lamarckian-Butlerian credo.

In “Outwitting Destiny: The Artist as Superman,” Sally Peters takes a biographical and psychological approach to explaining Shaw’s interest in evolution. She argues that his desire for humans to improve their minds through an evolutionary process, ultimately losing their bodies altogether in *Back to Methuselah*, can be attributed to Shaw’s “secret existential anxiety at having to accept the human condition” and the fact that he was “recoiling from the rank and subterranean world” and “obsessively [seeking] the ethereal world” (140). I find this approach problematic in that it assumes that rather than genuinely scientific, Shaw’s interest in evolution is pathological, a product of his “ambivalences toward his own body and his relations with women” and the fact that “emotionally and psychologically he felt threatened and revolted by female sexuality, a threat eased when he entered into an enduring but never-to-be consummated marriage at the age of forty-two” (144). This issue of Shaw’s sexuality, and the consummation of his marriage, is much debated. For instance, in “G.B.S. and the ‘Law of Change,’” A.M. Gibbs claims, “All the evidence indicates that Shaw himself had a strong heterosexual drive and that, after a rather late and uncertain beginning, he was an ardent and successful lover” (35).

In their article “The Ungendered Will and the Shavian Superman,” Monica Zabrowski and Robert Kirschmann examine the role of the will in Shaw’s Creative Evolution and, in particular, in his portrayal of female characters, yet they do not once

mention Lamarck, or even Bergson or Schoepenhauer, as the basis for Shaw's insistence on the importance of the human will. Instead, they seem to assume a Darwinian influence, demonstrating that, like many literary critics who address the issue of evolution in literary texts, they are unaware of the strong Lamarckian presence in evolutionary debates during this time period and do not take into account how fervently anti-Darwin (or at least anti-neo-Darwinian thought) Shaw was when he wrote the plays they discuss (*Man and Superman*, *Saint Joan*, *Major Barbara*, and *The Apple Cart*). Zabrowski and Kirschmann even defend Shaw's evolutionary theory as still relevant, claiming (I believe erroneously) that the will is now thought to have an important role in human evolution (80). And, even though they make a convincing argument about the role of will in Shaw's theory, they refer to Ann Whitefield's actions in *Man and Superman* as "Darwinian," even though she "epitomizes the 'willful woman' in the sense that she wills her chosen future into existence, just as a Superman wills progress for the Life Force" (88). In fact, as I will argue later in this chapter, Ann's persistence in her pursuit of John Tanner is Lamarckian in its theoretical underpinnings and in the language Shaw uses to describe Ann and her pursuit.

A.M. Gibbs' approach to Shaw's Creative Evolution in "G.B.S. and the 'Law of Change'" is an example of a common practice among critics who deal with the evolutionary aspects of Shaw's thought. Instead of contextualizing Shaw's theory historically, Gibbs is anxious to use Shaw as a way to comment on current debates about evolution and intelligent design: "I imagine he would have thought current arguments about intelligent design—which in my view seem a curious and unintelligent throwback to eighteenth-century deism—to be simply evasive and futile" (29). Stuart Baker makes the opposite argument in "Is the Holy Ghost a Scientific Fact? Why Shaw's Creative Evolution Might Become the Scientific Religion of the Twenty-First Century." Baker takes the "Holy Ghost" to be, in a modern and perhaps secular sense, the mind, or some "self" separate from the body. Essentially, he equates "Holy Ghost" with "Life Force" and distills it to "purpose" in order to be able to "scientifically" demonstrate its existence. While he is not exactly promoting intelligent design, Baker has a clear stake in trying to prove that Shaw was right about Creative Evolution and that mechanistic explanations of human evolution do not take into account spiritual aspects of the human mind.

In "Utopian Apocalypses: Shaw, War, and H.G. Wells," Christopher Innes argues that, while Wells "can be called a classic social Darwinian, relying on the gradual transformation of 'phyletic evolution and extending nineteenth-century ideas of progress," the version of Creative Evolution that Shaw presents in *Back to Methuselah* "derives from anti-Darwinian principles of spontaneous mutation, which could be seen as future-oriented in anticipating the much later concept of 'punctuated equilibria' developed by Eldridge and Gould" (45). While Innes takes Shaw's theory seriously as scientific, he is more interested in casting Shaw as a visionary who is "future-oriented" and capable of "anticipating" an addition to Darwinian evolutionary theory that came a half-century later. Instead of discussing the Lamarckian roots of Shaw's theory and its engagement with contemporary debates and discoveries, Innes wants to see Shaw as

Shaw saw himself—as a revolutionary thinker whose evolutionary theory has now finally been proven to have merit.

⁷ In his article “Eugenics and Class,” G.R. Searle defines these two terms and their importance: “Eugenists were concerned [. . .] to stimulate the fertility of the better stocks (‘positive eugenics’) and to take whatever steps were feasible and politically acceptable to slow down the rate of reproduction at the bottom end of the social scale (‘negative eugenics’)” (217).

⁸ See note 6 and also Elsie Adams, “Feminism and Female Stereotypes in Shaw”; Susan C. Stone, “Whatever Happened to Shaw’s Mother-Genius Portrait?”; Sally Peters Vogt, “Ann and Superman: Type and Archetype”; and Barbara Bellow Watson, *A Shavian Guide to the Intelligent Woman*.

⁹ It is interesting to note, however, that Innes makes no mention of *Back to Methuselah* in his article. He discusses several of Shaw’s plays and then ends his section on Shaw by claiming that “[n]one of Shaw’s other work moves as far from standard dramatic forms” as the ones he has discussed (148). As I will demonstrate later in the chapter, however, *Back to Methuselah* is by far Shaw’s most experimental and, I will argue, modernist play.

¹⁰ See, in particular, Elsie Adams, “Feminism and Female Stereotypes in Shaw”; Judith Evans, *The Politics and Plays of Bernard Shaw*; and Susan C. Stone, “Whatever Happened to Shaw’s Mother-Genius Portrait?”

¹¹ In *The Intelligent Woman’s Guide to Socialism and Capitalism*, Shaw sharply criticizes the marriage conventions that require people to wed someone from their own class, rather than choosing a partner on the basis of more important qualities, like vitality: “Nature my point out a woman’s mate to her by making her fall in love at first sight with the man who would be the best mate for her; but unless that man happens to have about the same income as her father, he is out of her class and out of her reach, whether above or below her. She finds she must marry, not the man she likes, but the man she can get; and he is often not the same man” (54-55).

¹² It is difficult to know how well an actress would be able to convey all of the qualities that Shaw describes here in a staged version of the play. This is one of many places where the reading experience differs greatly from the viewing experience. While the viewer will certainly come to understand these qualities in Ann as the play moves forward, only the reader is privy to them upon first meeting Ann; therefore, the reader’s initial perceptions of Ann as a eugenic specimen and a Lamarckian prodigy will color his/her interpretation of her character from the outset.

¹³ “Nature, red, in tooth and claw,” a line from Tennyson’s “In Memoriam,” was an important metaphor within the evolution debates.

¹⁴ “If the really impressive books and other art-works of the world were produced by ordinary men, they would express more fear of women’s pursuit than love of their illusory beauty. But ordinary men cannot produce really impressive art-works. Those who can are men of genius: that is, men selected by Nature to carry on the work of building up an intellectual consciousness of her own instinctive purpose. Accordingly, we observe in the man of genius all the unscrupulousness and all the ‘self-sacrifice’ (the two things are the same) of Woman. He will risk the stake and the cross; starve, when necessary, in a garret all his life; study women and live on their work and care as Darwin studied worms and lived upon sheep; work his nerves into rags without payment, a sublime altruist in his disregard of himself, an atrocious egotist in his disregard of others. Here Woman meets a purpose as impersonal, as irresistible as her own; and the clash is sometimes tragic. When it is complicated by the genius being a woman, then the game is one for a king of critics: your George Sand becomes a mother to gain experience for the novelist and to develop her, and gobbles up men of genius, Chopins, Mussets and the like, as mere hors d’oeuvres” (Shaw, *Man and Superman* xx-xxi).

¹⁵ Ann’s pet name for Ramsden.

¹⁶ Judith Evans dismisses Ann’s manipulation of Tanner and others as a stock comedic device that Shaw uses to win over audiences rather than as a serious contribution to our understanding of her intellect and motivation: “Though Ann’s wiles and subterfuges make good, conventional-style comedy, they add nothing to her personal dignity. She is certainly not everyone’s New Woman” (52). Clearly, I disagree with this assessment.

¹⁷ This sentence ends with “as stated in the Book of Common Prayer.” The marriage ceremony in the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* includes the following statement: “The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God’s will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord” (<http://www.bcponline.org/>). Shaw seems to be suggesting that those who would serve the Life Force and those who serve God share common goals.

¹⁸ Shaw biographer Eric Bentley argues that, indeed, Tanner is not Shaw because Shaw “deliberately makes him—among other things—an ineffectual chatterbox” with “an appearance which exactly corresponds to that of [Shaw’s] most redoubtable political antagonist H.M. Hyndman” (55). Instead, Bentley suggests that since “statesmen try out a dangerous idea by having one of their underlings advance it. . . . [m]ight not Tanner be such an underling of Shaw?” (56).

¹⁹ Indeed, Shaw develops the Superman (or, rather, an entire race of superpeople) much more completely in *Back to Methuselah*. Just as we can view Tanner as an early, underdeveloped version of the Superman, we can also view *Man and Superman* as an early, underdeveloped version of Shaw's theory of Creative Evolution, which he improves upon (at least by his own standards) in *Back to Methuselah*.

²⁰ In the preface to his 1933 play *On the Rocks*, Shaw writes, "Extermination must be put on a scientific basis if it is ever to be carried out humanely and apologetically as well as thoroughly . . . [I]f we desire a certain type of civilization and culture, we must exterminate the sort of people who do not fit in" ("Preface" 353-4). Galton advocated finding ways to eliminate "inferior" races, and imagined that Europeans might eventually displace Africans on the African continent (Tucker 49).

²¹ In his 1956 book *Evolution and Poetic Belief*, Georg Roppen downplays Shaw's advocacy of eugenics in *Man and Superman*:

If we ask how much of all this Shaw *means* literally—how serious his plea for Superman eugenics is in 'The Revolutionist's Handbook', the answer must clearly depend upon the fact that the pretended author, John Tanner, the Don Juan of the third act, is not only a mouthpiece but an intellectual clown, who makes it possible to keep the discussion all the time within 'the intellectual whirlpool' of the comedy. Shaw does not yet know the solution to the problem of how to improve the race, and so, through Tanner he avails himself of the clown's license to shock and outrage and pose the problem in a jocular tone. 'All very serious propositions', he wrote in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, 'begin as huge jokes.' Yet it is obvious that the Superman here, as a serious proposition, is no more than a moral challenge and an expression of the hope that something, perhaps eugenics, might be discovered as a radical and effective means of changing the human heart. (364-65)

²² "The body was the slave of the vortex; but the slave has become the master; and we must free ourselves from that tyranny" (She-Ancient, "As Far as Thought Can Reach," *Back to Methuselah* 239).

²³ In his 1911 biography *George Bernard Shaw: His Life and Works*, Archibald Henderson quotes "the manuscript of an unfinished work which Mr. Shaw once loaned to me" that demonstrates Shaw's view of Darwinism as "fatalistic": "In short we must make a religion of Socialism. We must fall back on our will to Socialism, and resort to our reason only to find out the ways and means. And this we can do only if we conceive the will as a creative energy, as Lamarck did; and totally renounce and abjure Darwinism, Marxism, and all fatalistic, penny-in-the-slot theories of evolution whatever" (Henderson 488).

²⁴ Shaw consistently uses the term “circumstantial selection” interchangeably with “natural selection.” His use of this term seems to be deliberate rather than ignorantly unscientific: he claims in the preface to *Back to Methuselah* that “pigeon fanciers, dog fanciers, gardeners, stock breeders, or stud grooms, can understand Circumstantial Selection, because it is their business to produce transformation by imposing on flowers and animals a Selection From Without. All that Darwin had to say to them was that the mere chapter of accidents is always doing on a huge scale what they themselves are doing on a very small scale. There is hardly a laborer attached to an English country house who has not taken a litter of kittens or puppies to the bucket, and drowned all of them except the one he thinks the most promising. Such a man [. . .] knows quite well [. . .] that this sort of selection occurs naturally (in Darwin’s sense) too: that, for instance, a hard winter will kill off a weakly child as the bucket kills off a weakly puppy” (xl-xli). Shaw’s purpose in this comparison is to prove that “Circumstantial Selection is easier to understand [. . .] than Lamarckian evolution,” which accounts for its popularity (xl). Essentially, Shaw wants to demonstrate that Darwin’s theory is pedestrian, and not much more than dog-breeding on a larger scale, whereas Lamarckian evolution (and therefore Creative Evolution) “can be apprehended only by a trained, apt, and comprehensive thinker” (xl). By using the term “circumstantial” rather than “natural” selection, Shaw is able to emphasize the inherent differences he sees between the two theories: for him, the process of natural selection is not “natural” any more than drowning kittens is “natural” but, rather, is a product of easily changeable (through a Lamarckian will-driven process) circumstances.

²⁵ See Bowler, *Evolution*. Bowler says that Weismann solidified anti-Darwinian sentiment because his “theory [of ‘hard’ heredity] symbolized the increasing dogmatism of neo-Darwinism” (239).

²⁶ He ends the preface by saying, “I am not, I hope, under more illusion than is humanly inevitable as to my contribution to the scriptures of Creative Evolution. It is my hope that a hundred parables by younger hands will soon leave mine as far behind as the religious pictures of the fifteenth century left behind the first attempts of the early Christians at iconography. In that hope I withdraw and ring up the curtain.” (lxxiv) By using the term “scriptures” in reference to his play cycle and Creative Evolution, as well as by imagining that this is only the beginning of a religion that will continue to grow and develop, Shaw demonstrates how thoroughly he has intertwined science and religion and how seriously he takes his role as prophet of a world-changing religious movement.

²⁷ The relevant portion of the 18 Nov. 1907 letter follows: “I was sorry to miss you. I wanted to see you to ask you for a nice Greek word. You know my theory of the inheritance of acquired habits, which neo-Darwinians deny. First I say that since breathing, circulating the blood, and digesting food are beyond all question acquired habits—and rather late acquisitions at that—the fact that they are inherited settles for ever the position of the neo-Darwinians as hopeless idiots. But every man who has

acquired the habit of bicycling knows that he relapses between each lesson & finally acquires the faculty in an instant, miraculously, as a fulfilled aspiration which has *created* the means of fulfilling it. Now, that relapse between the lessons is repeated in a still larger relapse between father & son; so that your son will not be born a bicyclist, but only an infinitesimal fraction of one; and many generations must elapse before little Murrays are born not only able to ride, but furnished with extensions of the skeleton into complete bicycles. Give me a good word for this phenomenon of relapse—something that will sound Weismannic, like panmixia. . . .” (*Collected Letters 1898-1910* 728-29, ellipses in original).

²⁸ “Panmixia” was the term Weismann used to describe what happens when traits that are no longer useful to an organism cease to be subject to natural selection. He claimed that organisms with and without the useless trait would be equally reproductively successful; this resulted in “panmixia,” or the blending of a variety of manifestations of the same trait (Kirkwood and Cremer 104).

²⁹ As I pointed out earlier, this is how Shaw sees evolutionary theory in general: not as an explanation, but a promise.

³⁰ As I discuss in the dissertation’s introduction, Paul Kammerer’s Lamarckian experiments resulted in sensationalized headlines in the *London Daily Express* and the *New York Times* in 1923. In addition, Peter Bowler writes about J. Arthur Thomson, who wrote books about science for a popular audience in the 1920s. While Thomson was not strictly affiliated with the neo-Lamarckians, he was a “passionate advocate of neo-vitalist physiology and a teleological evolutionism which treated the higher qualities of humankind as the intended outcome of universal progress” (“From Science” 242-43). Bowler uses Thomson as an example of a larger question within the history of science about how and whether the research done in the lab reaches the general public: “Thomson’s career may help us to understand the complex relationship between science as it is done in the laboratory and as it is perceived by the outside world. It drives another nail in the coffin of what has been called the ‘dominant view’ of popularisation, the assumption that popularisation is a derivative process in which technical knowledge generated by research scientists is simplified for presentation to a passive audience among the general public. [. . .] [T]he dominant model assumes that there is an uncontested version of scientific knowledge accepted by the professional community and available for dissemination to the public. When there are debates within science itself, that is clearly not the case, and Thomson’s career as a populariser shows how a scientist can use his popular writing to promote a view of science which would not be accepted by all or even a majority of his colleagues. Some of his writing may have been aimed at persuading other scientists that his views should still be taken seriously. But more often they were intended to persuade outsiders that a particular position was still active—even when in fact it was being abandoned by a majority of younger researchers. This was

popularisation used as a weapon in an ideological battle, both inside and outside the scientific community” (232).

³¹ In the postscript to the World’s Classics edition of *Back to Methuselah*, Shaw writes that when he was working on the play cycle, “I threw over all economic considerations, and faced the apparent impossibility of a performance during my lifetime” (251). However, he was saved by producer Barry Jackson, who privately funded the first English production at his Birmingham Repertory Theatre (the first performance was actually in New York), incurring a loss of £2500, and later produced the play in London, for which he made £20 (251-52). Understandably, when Jackson first approached Shaw to offer to produce the play cycle, Shaw asked him “whether he had no regard for his wife and family” (251). The first English performance took place over four consecutive days, with parts III and IV performed on the same day as matinee and evening performances. Needless to say, *Back to Methuselah* has since been performed very infrequently because it is an incredibly difficult undertaking for any theatre group.

³² Multiple articles anticipating and later reviewing the publication and performances of *Back to Methuselah* were published in both London and New York newspapers. One representative example, from the *New York Times* by way of “Special Cable” from London, catches the attention of readers with the headline “Shaw Wants Man to Live 1,000 Years,” followed by the subheadings, “New Religion of Creative Evolution Enshrined in His Gospel of Longevity,” “Oviparous Humans in 3192” (the article gets the date wrong), and “Youngling to Step From Egg at Age of 17, Leaving all Childhood’s Ills Behind” (June 23, 1921). When *Back to Methuselah* was performed in New York, it inspired at least two public sermons, which were advertised in the *New York Times*. The first, delivered in July of 1921 by a Mr. Holmes at the Community Church of New York, was entitled “The Religion of Bernard Shaw: ‘Back to Methuselah’” (“Church Services Tomorrow”). The second, delivered in December of the same year at the Central Synagogue by Dr. Krass, was entitled “Back to Methuselah: Would you like to live 300 years?”

³³ Shaw, who considered himself a feminist, creates an interesting modern twist on the Biblical story of Eden: in this version, it is Adam, not Eve, who is responsible for the Fall.

³⁴ The Serpent does explain more traditional Lamarckian evolution to Eve, using the example of the muscles she has gained from trying over and over again to climb the tree until she finally was able to. Eve calls this “practice” and the Serpent says, “Things wear out by practice: they do not grow by it,” using the example of Eve’s hair streaming in the wind—it does not grow longer from this practice because Eve is not willing it to. What Lilith did, though, was a Lamarckian act of creation: “When Lilith told me what she had imagined in our silent language [. . .] I bade her desire it and will it; and then, to

our great wonder, the thing she had desired and willed created itself in her under the urgency of her will” (8).

³⁵ The Scopes “Monkey Trial” took place in Dayton, Tennessee just four years after the publication of *Back to Methuselah*, in 1925.

³⁶ Of course Shaw, the vegetarian, lumps meat-eating in with murder and war as evidence of the fall of man.

³⁷ We find out from Daddy about the history of the English and Irish races that has transpired in the last 830 years: before the “thing” happened, the “English race had lost intellectual credit to such an extent that they habitually spoke of one another as fatheads” but now England is “a sacred grove to which statesmen from all over the earth come to consult English sages who speak with the experience of two and a half centuries of life” and England now “exports nothing but wisdom” (144). The Irish, on the other hand, were so obsessed with nationalism that, when the British Empire moved its seat to Mesopotamia and finally left the Irish alone, the Irish didn’t know what to do with themselves, so they dispersed to other countries that were fighting nationalist causes to help them in their battles (144). Once those had been won, the Irish suddenly seemed useless and “[t]he very countries they had helped to set free boycotted them as intolerable bores” (145). So the Irish returned to Ireland, but the young Irish thought Ireland was too rocky and so they went to England and stopped admitting their Irishness, and as a result, no Irish exist today (145). The Jews also dispersed and stopped claiming their Jewish identity “lest they should be sent back to Palestine,” so there are no longer any Jews, either (145). This seems like a clear attempt by Shaw to show humanity moving in the direction of eradicating all boundaries between people—class, race, nationality, etc. Age is the only demarcation left (the longlivers wear hats indicating their centuries).

³⁸ Little is said about the longlivers’ physical superiority in this play, except for two important traits: they no longer need sleep, especially later in their lives (138), and they appear young for much longer. Zoo, who is 56, looks “no older than Savvy Barnabas [. . .]. Younger, if anything” (138).

³⁹ Vivie Warren is a character in Shaw’s 1894 play *Mrs. Warren’s Profession*, and she is Shaw’s prototypical New Woman.

⁴⁰ Sally Peters writes extensively about Shaw’s sexuality, claiming, “Intellectually and politically, Shaw always supported women, but emotionally and psychologically he felt threatened and revolted by female sexuality, a threat eased when he entered into an enduring but never-to-be consummated marriage at the age of forty-two” (144). I am less inclined to psychoanalyze Shaw to determine his literary motives than is Peters, but his many platonic love affairs with women are well-documented, and scholars and biographers have long been speculating about whether or not he consummated his marriage with Charlotte Payne Townshend.

CHAPTER IV

EUGENIC POETICS: DEGENERATION, AESTHETIC EDUCATION,
AND LAMARCKIAN EVOLUTION IN THE POETRY
AND PROSE OF W.B. YEATS

In Yeats's essay "Private Thoughts," published in his 1939 collection *On the Boiler*, he begins with a clear statement about his intellectual interests: "I am philosophical, not scientific, which means that observed facts do not mean much until I can make them part of my experience" (21-22). This assertion is supported by the evidence of the writing Yeats did and the interests he pursued throughout his life. He did not exhibit a lively curiosity about the sciences, as Schreiner and Shaw did, choosing instead to focus his nonliterary attentions on philosophy, politics, and occultism. As Richard Ellmann explains, occultism was attractive to "young men" who "refused to accept the universe that their scientific, materialist, rationalist, and often hypocritically religious elders tried to hand to them," and this rejection of science in favor of occultism was partially due to the fact that "Darwin had husked the world of meaning, and few could share Bernard Shaw's confidence in Lamarck's contention that the giraffe had secured its long neck by willing it" (58). Ellmann uses this intellectual and cultural

history to frame his discussion of the popularity of Madame Blavatsky's theosophy, and particularly Yeats's attraction to this movement. Certainly, Yeats found occultism and theosophy much more appealing areas of study than the hard sciences, but Ellmann's use of Darwin and Lamarck here as props to demonstrate why many "young men" had rejected modern science oversimplifies the impact of the evolution debates on nineteenth and twentieth-century culture. Ellmann dismisses Lamarck's influence on the basis of the famous giraffe example that Lamarck used to explain the inheritance of acquired characters, but he ignores the more subtle ways in which Lamarckian and neo-Lamarckian ideas had crept into popular discourse. It was not necessary to take Lamarck literally to see evolution in vaguely Lamarckian terms that gave the individual more agency than popular interpretations of Darwinism did.¹ While Yeats was familiar with both Darwin and Lamarck,² he did not frequently discuss their theories; he seems to have accepted Darwinism, and was by no means a vocal supporter of neo-Lamarckism. However, two of his primary lifelong concerns were the relationships between the members of the stratified socioeconomic classes in Ireland and the transcendent powers of art, both of which he tied to evolutionary ideas about progress and degeneration, which later manifested as a fascination with eugenics. Therefore, even if Yeats did not explicitly engage in the evolution debates, his polemical rhetoric and his poetic tropes reflect the permeation of cultural and intellectual discourse by Lamarckian evolutionary science.

Perhaps because of his professed lack of interest in science, when Yeats became interested in eugenics later in his life, and particularly when he decided to expound upon

his eugenic ideas in *On the Boiler*, he turned to two prominent psychologists, both of whom advocated eugenic measures, in order to provide scientific support for his arguments. In his notes on his essay “To-morrow’s Revolution” in *On the Boiler*, Yeats cites Lewis M. Terman’s “The Measurement of Intelligence” (1916) and Raymond B. Cattell’s “Psychology and Social Progress” (1933) and “Fight for Our National Intelligence” (1937) in order to provide credibility for his exhortations “to the young men” reading his text, whom he hoped to persuade that “the principal European nations are degenerating in body and in mind” (*On the Boiler* 15, 16). Terman had revised and modernized Alfred Binet’s intelligence test in 1916 and renamed it the Stanford-Binet test, which is still in use today. Cattell was appointed as a Darwin Fellow with the British Eugenics Society early in his career, moved to America in 1937, and went on to become one of the most influential psychologists in the subfields of “personality, human intelligence, and multivariate methodology” (Tucker, *The Cattell Controversy* 9, 1). Both of these psychologists supported eugenics, and their work was steeped in the controversies between neo-Darwinian, neo-Lamarckian, and, later, Mendelian theories of evolution, and yet their writing frequently blurred the lines between these theories and therefore contributed to popular confusion about the mechanism of heredity, particularly as it applied to traits such as intelligence that were of special interest to eugenicists.³

While the eugenics movement is most commonly portrayed as consisting solely of hereditarians, both Darwinian and Mendelian (before the Modern Synthesis), many eugenicists allowed for environmental factors in their understanding of the inheritance of desirable and undesirable traits. Peter Bowler argues that “[i]n the debate over nature and

nurture, eugenicists were definitely on the side of nature, that is, heredity” and uses the example of eugenicists who “argued that the poor could not benefit from improved conditions because their inferiority was genetically determined” (*Evolution* 277). Bowler suggests here that Lamarckian evolution did not fit well with the eugenics movement because many eugenicists ruled out any possibility of changes in environment affecting the inheritance of traits. However, Bowler also uses the case of Irish biologist E.W. MacBride, who was a Lamarckian eugenicist, to show that “there are no intrinsic links between scientific theories and social views” (“E.W. MacBride’s” 245). MacBride was able to manipulate both Lamarckism and eugenics, two ideas in which he believed strongly, so that they would be compatible with one another. Bowler suggests that this may have been able to occur because eugenics “was compatible with a whole range of mutually hostile theories, each of which could be modified to provide an apparent justification for controlling the reproduction of the lower classes” (“E.W. MacBride’s” 247).

Indeed, in *Modernism and Eugenics*, Donald Childs points out that the *Eugenics Review* published MacBride’s “Study of Heredity” as a four-part series in 1916-17, thereby lending implicit approval to this Lamarckian eugenic perspective, as well as potentially confusing subscribers who were not scientists (5). In 1918, T.S. Eliot reviewed MacBride’s *Eugenics Review* series for the *International Journal of Ethics* and summarizes MacBride’s “two conclusions of social importance,” both of which demonstrate how evolution and eugenics are intertwined:

1. That in former times the struggle for existence was enough to keep down the defective element in the population; but under present conditions these people are protected and multiply. He advocates therefore segregation and sterilization for the benefit of society. 2. The transmissibility of acquired characters makes the problem of education of the highest importance: we must adopt such a system of education that 'the next generation may start at a very slightly higher level of capacity than their fathers.' ("Recent British Periodical" 274).

As Eliot's summary of MacBride's series demonstrates, it was not difficult to reconcile Lamarckism and eugenics. In fact, it was possible to apply "hard" heredity to the most eugenically undesirable members of society while simultaneously arguing that the inheritance of acquired characters might still apply to the rest of society. As a result, MacBride could argue for both sterilization and education; presumably he believed that the most unfit members of society were beyond all hope and must be sterilized, while education could ensure at least a slow progress for everyone else. Further, the fact that T.S. Eliot was so interested in MacBride's articles, calling them of "exceptional importance" and taking no issue with MacBride's Lamarckism, demonstrates how attractive Lamarckian ideas were to nonscientists (270). This was especially true when Lamarckism was used to support a program with which a person already agreed, in this case eugenics. The case of Eliot helps to demonstrate how Yeats might have come to employ Lamarckian rhetoric in his eugenics proposals as well as his poetry without consciously identifying as a supporter of Lamarckism.

It is certainly true that many, if not most, eugenicists promoted a strictly biological rather than environmental view of the inheritance of traits, particularly later in the movement when Lamarckism was losing popularity.⁴ However, Lamarck was not so easily excised from the imaginations of these eugenicists, which is demonstrated by the language they use to explain inheritance, “mother-wit,” and racial differences. In his article on the influence of Lamarckism on the social sciences in America, George Stocking argues that during the early decades of the formation and professionalization of the behavioral sciences, these fields were still “swaddled in theoretical clothing borrowed in part from the science of biology” and this biology was seen as primarily Darwinian in nature (239). However, as Stocking demonstrates, a careful examination of the language used by these psychologists and social scientists reveals that “in the intellectual milieu of declining Social Darwinism one of the last theoretical links between biological and social theory was the Lamarckian doctrine of the inheritance of acquired characteristics” (239). Stocking demonstrates that Spencer’s Social Darwinism was really Lamarckism, as I have done in this dissertation’s introduction, and Stocking even goes so far as to call him the “father of Neo-Lamarckian biology” (241). If Spencer, from whom many of the social and behavioral scientists were taking their ideas about evolution and heredity, was actually a Lamarckian, then it is not surprising that their own rhetoric became infused with Lamarckian ideas, even if they were not aware of this legacy. Further, as Stocking points out, many of the early social and behavioral scientists vocally supported neo-Lamarckian theories of evolution and wrote explicitly about the inheritance of acquired characters (244). Even if their students, who were working in the field after Lamarckism

had officially been defeated, rejected the Lamarckism of their mentors, their early training and the foundational documents of the disciplines in which they worked would have left them with at least a vague Lamarckian sensibility that influenced the ways in which they thought about evolution and heredity.

For instance, Lewis Terman, whose work Yeats cites in *On the Boiler*, studied under Granville Stanley Hall, a prominent early American psychologist who was a committed neo-Lamarckian for most of his career (Stocking 244). In particular, Hall believed that the neo-Lamarckian idea of embryonic recapitulation could be applied to mental development as well as physical development: “[J]ust as the development of the human embryo recapitulated the physical evolutionary history of its phylogenetic ancestors, so did the developing individual human mind retrace in its major outlines the mental history of the race” (Stocking 243-44). As Stocking recounts, Hall took the theory of embryonic recapitulation, which was closely associated with neo-Lamarckism, and applied it to the race-memory carried over from generation to generation in the human brain. This Lamarckian understanding of the mind allowed for the propagation of numerous theories and generalizations about the evolution of races and cultural groups as monolithic units, which fueled racist ideologies that prioritized group membership over individual achievement. Hall in particular believed, as Stocking puts it, that “the mind of modern man was a mass of instincts, the Lamarckian acquisition of primate and savage forebears” (244). Work such as Hall’s led to common use of the terms “race instincts” and “race habits,” even by behavioral scientists who believed themselves to be solidly Darwinian in their evolutionary worldviews (Stocking 246). As Stocking notes, “the idea

that *habits might become organized as instincts* [. . .] was fairly widespread in early XXth-century social scientific writing, although frequently expressed in nominally Darwinian terms” (246, emphasis in original). Thus, even when Darwinian vocabulary such as “natural selection” was used to describe an observed behavioral or cognitive phenomenon, terms like “race habits” that were coded Lamarckian still inflected not just the language of the discourse but the way the phenomenon was understood.

Because many of these social and behavioral scientists were also eugenicists, and because Yeats looked to some of them for evidence to support his claims in *On the Boiler*, it is important to demonstrate that even eugenicists who rejected environmental factors in heredity had a difficult time completely excising Lamarck from their ideas and their rhetoric. The work of Caleb Williams Saleeby, a British eugenicist and one of the founding members of the Eugenics Education Society, serves as a compelling example of the ways in which Lamarckian ideas became intertwined with an otherwise strict hereditarianism. In his 1909 book *Parenthood and Race Culture: An Outline of Eugenics*, Saleeby denies that the inheritance of acquired characters plays a role in the degeneration or progress of the race because overwhelming evidence has shown that humans “make a fresh start every generation” rather than starting where their parents left off (300). However, he concedes that “[i]t is exceedingly difficult to dispossess the popular mind of the Lamarckian idea” and that “the advocates of race-culture have to recognize that, so long as the Lamarckian idea obtains, their crusade will fail to find a hearing” (154-55). Saleeby recognizes that Lamarckism has so permeated the cultural understanding of the evolutionary mechanism that it is a Herculean task to reeducate the

public, especially because the “Lamarckian idea seems to provide a method for the improvement of a species which cannot be surpassed for simplicity, rapidity and certainty” (155). Just as Shaw accounted for Darwinism’s popularity by saying that Darwin’s theory was simple enough for the average person to understand it, Saleeby claims that Lamarckism is virtually impossible to wrest from the public mind because of its “simplicity” and its promises of rapid progress.

And yet, despite Saleeby’s insistence that Lamarckism has been disproven and has no place in eugenics, he goes on to make one exception to this rule:

Certain apparent, though not real, exceptions exist to the denial of the Lamarckian theory of the transmission of acquired characters. These exceptions are furnished by what I here call *racial poisons*. Alcohol, for instance is a substance, certainly poisonous in all but very small doses, if not in them, which is carried by the blood to every part of the body and may and does injure *its racial* elements. Thus a true racial degeneration may be caused by its means: and the possibility of this is not to be ignored. Other poisons, such as those of certain diseases, act similarly. (300, emphasis in original)

Although humans do not pass on their habits, their physical abilities, or their acquired personality traits from one generation to the next, they can, according to Saleeby, pass on any biological damage done by alcohol or “certain diseases,” which he later identifies as tuberculosis and malaria in particular. Although he insists that these are not “real” exceptions to his rejection of Lamarckism, they clearly are.

It is not a coincidence that Saleeby singled out alcoholism and disease for special consideration: in the United States in 1922, a “Model Eugenic Sterilization Law” was published, which had guidelines for states that wanted to implement sterilization laws. Included in its list of “socially inadequate classes” that should be sterilized “regardless of etiology or prognosis” were the “Inebriate (including drug-habitues)” and the “Diseased (including the tuberculous, the syphilitic, the leprous, and others with chronic, infectious and legally segregable diseases)” (Laughlin 446-47). That Saleeby categorized these two defects in particular as “racial poisons” that operated in a unique way in the body and could therefore be transmitted through a Lamarckian mechanism demonstrates how little was understood about both disease and heredity, but it also indicates a willingness on the part of eugenicists to revert to a Lamarckian explanation in order to make their case for the sterilization or segregation of a wide range of undesirable populations. It is important here that Saleeby is not referring to alcoholics, which, using the science available in 1909, he could have explained in a strictly hereditarian way; instead, he argues that alcohol itself, along with contagious diseases, neither of which could be argued are transmitted through Darwinian or Mendelian mechanisms, were “poisons” that contaminated the “blood” and caused harm to “racial elements” in the body, presumably to the reproductive organs or to the germ plasm. In resorting to this explanation, Saleeby contributes to the problem he points out earlier in his book: he makes it even more “difficult to dispossess the popular mind of the Lamarckian idea.”

If prominent psychologists, social scientists, and eugenicists blurred the distinctions between Lamarckian, Darwinian, and Mendelian evolutionary mechanisms,

using Lamarckian language even when they thought they were speaking in strictly Darwinian or hereditarian terms, then Lamarckism had clearly permeated public discourse to such an extent that it would be easy for someone like Yeats, who had professed himself “not scientific,” to slip into Lamarckian rhetoric himself. In fact, Lamarckism would have been particularly attractive to Yeats, even if he did not call it by that name, because he believed in the potential of art and education to facilitate human improvement. He also wanted to prevent some people from reproducing, and Lamarckism allowed him the perfect balance between these two seemingly contradictory goals: to improve those worthy of improving while leaving the rest behind. As Bowler points out, while the cultural incarnation of Lamarckism was characterized by its “philosophy of hope for the future” through will-driven human progress, “most Lamarckians refused to extend their optimism to the nonwhite races; indeed, their theory was the chief foundation of the belief that the races can be ranked into an evolutionary hierarchy” (*Evolution* 279).

While Yeats’s primary concern was class rather than race, this neo-Lamarckian attitude toward nonwhite races could easily apply to the Irish, particularly the peasantry, who had long been perceived as a discreet race and were particularly constructed as such by the scientific racism that began during the Victorian period. Eugenicians generally agreed that the Irish were lower on the evolutionary scale than the English, making the “Irish question” an important one in eugenic discourse. Galton noted that those Irish who had survived the potato famine “were more generally of a low and coarse organization,” implying that the better Irish stock had died out (qtd. in Tucker, *Science and Politics* 47).

Comparisons were also made between African-Americans and the Irish, allowing the British to empathize with the Americans. In 1881, Oxford professor Edward A. Freeman remarked that “the best remedy for whatever is amiss in America would be if every Irishman would kill a negro and be hanged for it,” and he claimed that those offended by this comment were only concerned because “if there were no Irish and no Negroes, they would not be able to get any domestic servants” (qtd. in Tucker, *Science and Politics* 34). As Freeman’s shocking statement demonstrates, the Irish were viewed by many as a nonwhite race and thus, using Bowler’s understanding of Lamarckian exclusionism, would have been considered exempt from the “philosophy of hope” represented by Lamarckism.

In *On the Boiler*, Yeats singles out lower classes in Ireland as the root cause of the problem of degeneration he is anxious to correct. In “To-morrow’s Revolution,” he cites “American intelligence tests” that “put the Irish immigrant lowest in the scale” of intelligence, while the “English, the German and the Swede” are the “highest” (*On the Boiler* 20). He uses this information to support his claim that, although “[i]n the opinion of most sociologists the level of mother-wit in all West-European countries is still much the same,” it has declined significantly in Ireland (20). Evidence of this, he claims, can be seen in the fact that Ireland has “almost twice as many madmen as England for every hundred thousand” (20). The solution he proposes sets up a tension between the “unintelligent classes” and the “intelligent classes” in which the former must be eradicated in order to benefit the latter:

Sooner or later we must limit the families of the unintelligent classes, and if our government cannot send them doctor and clinic it must, till it get tired of it, send monk and confession box. We cannot go back as some dreamers would have us, to the old way of big families everywhere, even if the intelligent classes would consent, because the old way worked through lack of science and consequent great mortality among the children of those least fitted for modern civilisation. (20)

Here, Yeats associates the “unintelligent classes” with Catholicism in his reference to the “monk and confession box,” thereby indicating that the “unintelligent classes” are really the middle and lower classes in Ireland, who were predominantly Catholic and tended to have “big families.” When Yeats claims, rather cryptically, that “monk and confession box” can, for the time being, substitute for “doctor and clinic” as a means of birth control, he seems to be implying that much of the reproduction of the lower classes is occurring out of wedlock, a circumstance that the guilt brought by “monk and confession-box” could possibly remedy. Yeats’s focus here on the “unintelligent” Catholic classes demonstrates that, by 1938, he had begun to lump two distinct Irish classes, the peasantry and the middle class, into one problematic group. As I will demonstrate later in this chapter, Yeats’s ideas about class were usually much more complex than this, but it is telling that he paints them with broad strokes at the end of his life.

Although the eugenic arguments Yeats presents in *On the Boiler* are primarily hereditarian, his discussions of education and aesthetics in the same text demonstrate the influence of Lamarckian evolutionary ideas. This can be partially explained by the fact

that in *On the Boiler*, Yeats uses direct scientific evidence—from Terman and Cattell—for his position on eugenics for the first time, and, as a result, accepts their largely hereditarian arguments unquestioningly. However, his ideas about both degeneration and aesthetic education had been developing for decades by the time he wrote *On the Boiler* and, in their earlier incarnations, the rhetoric he employs and the tropes he uses to portray these two issues are frequently Lamarckian. Even in *On the Boiler*, the discrepancy between Yeats’s understanding of heredity when discussing eugenics and his understanding of heredity when discussing aesthetic education can be better understood when put in comparison with MacBride: just as MacBride applies “hard” heredity to the undesirable classes while simultaneously using the inheritance of acquired characters to show how the rest of society might improve, so too does Yeats differentiate between different models of heredity for different groups of people. He believed that aesthetic education was essential for the “intelligent classes” in order to aid in their evolutionary progress, but he also advocated withholding education from the “unintelligent classes” and working to eradicate this group altogether.⁵

Although Yeats loved Ireland and was firmly committed to its improvement, he also found it a stifling environment for those among the “intelligent classes” who risk becoming “pedant[s]” from being forced to speak to “ignorant, or still worse, half-ignorant men” (*Estrangement* 18). Yeats argues in a 1909 diary entry that “[a] young man in Ireland meets only crude, impersonal things, things that make him like others. One cannot discuss his ideas or ideals for he has none. He has not the beginning of aesthetic culture” (*Estrangement* 18). Raised entirely in Ireland, promising young men

cannot reach their full eugenic potential, the combination of intellect, education, and refinement that will help them choose the right mate with whom to pass on these traits.

As a corrective, Yeats proposes that upper-class Irishmen leave Ireland in order to acquire traits that they will have no chance of acquiring at home:

I can only wish that a young Irish man of talent and culture may spend his life, from eighteen to twenty five, outside Ireland. Can one prescribe duties to a developed soul—and, I suppose him to grow conscious of himself in those years—if one can, I would wish him to return. I will then describe the idea of modern culture as I see it in some young Oxford man: to have perfect taste; to have felt all the finest emotions that art can give. [. . .] Culture of this kind produces the most perfect flowers in a few high-bred women. It gives to its sons an exquisite delicacy. (18-19)

“All the finest emotions that art can give” not only describes Yeats’s aesthetic, his belief about what art should accomplish, but also lays out Yeats’s requirement for the type of person who should lead nations and have children. Although heredity is an essential component of the eugenic equation for Yeats, education and refinement of taste are equally important. Thus, unlike most of his eugenicist contemporaries, Yeats places these “finest emotions” on the same tier of importance as physical strength, beauty, and intellect. Those who are born with the genetic capability to produce strong, healthy children must also undergo an aesthetic education, which for Yeats means, among other things, exposure to the right kind of poetry, which presumably includes his own. This Lamarckian belief in the heritability of acquired characteristics obtained through

education is also directly linked to class, since only those born into economic and eugenic privilege have the intellect to make an aesthetic education worthwhile. In *On the Boiler*, Yeats claims that “it seems probable that many men in Irish public life should not have been taught to read and write, and would not have been in any country before the middle of the nineteenth century” (11). Yeats’s poetry, both early and late, demonstrates the importance of an aesthetic education for the right kind of person by making clear distinctions between the desirable and undesirable classes and by emphasizing the qualities that give a person eugenic potential.

The consensus among Yeats scholars has generally been that Yeats’s late-career espousal of eugenic arguments was simply an indication of his final obsession and does not reflect a lifelong interest in the subject. In *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism*, Elizabeth Butler Cullingford attempts to apologize for Yeats’s eugenics proposals by arguing that “eugenics in the thirties did not possess the sinister connotations now indelibly stamped upon it by Hitler’s policies, and Yeats’s version of eugenic theory owes little to ideas about breeding Aryan supermen, much to the Irish passion for breeding race-horses” (229). While it is true that “Hitler’s policies” were not, perhaps, widely known yet, Germany enacted the Nazi Eugenic Sterilization Law in 1933 (Childs 6), and England passed its own Mental Deficiency Bill in 1913, which, as Mathew Thomson notes, has generally been viewed by historians “as an event within the history of eugenics” (10). The Mental Deficiency Bill sought to separate from society anyone “in whose case it is desirable in the interests of the community that they should be deprived of the opportunity of procreating children” (qtd. in Thomson 39). The combination of these two

laws, of which Yeats was aware, makes it difficult to see his eugenics as merely a manifestation of the “Irish passion for breeding race-horses.” However, Cullingford is not alone in her apologetics. Paul Scott Stanfield claims that, although “the reputation of eugenics has never recovered from its association with the worst forms of state cruelty, particularly the genocidal policies of Nazi Germany,” Yeats is excused from this association because “[a]t the time eugenics attracted Yeats’s interest [. . .] its scientific basis appeared firm, and it numbered among its English promoters not only many eminent biologists and doctors, but also such reputable non-scientists as Dean William Inge, Havelock Ellis, Harold Laski, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson and John Maynard Keynes” (158). Apologies such as these reflect the larger critical anxiety about Yeats, as well as about other politically questionable modernist writers. Because of this, it is important to reexamine Yeats as both a poet and a polemicist without, as the critical habit has been, ignoring *On the Boiler*, apologizing for its existence, or condemning Yeats entirely.

While Yeats does not overtly advocate a Lamarckian position in his poetry or prose, his brand of eugenics, his early and late poetry, and *On the Boiler* are all evidence that Lamarckian ideas had influenced the way he viewed human progress. Yeats advocates a combination of aesthetic education (for the eugenically superior) and negative eugenics (for the eugenically inferior) as a means of solving the problem of degeneration. While he does not focus explicitly on human evolution, his work serves as evidence of the many subtle ways that Lamarckian thought permeated literary and

cultural discourse in the twentieth century, even as Lamarckian evolutionary theory was losing support among scientists.

One important way to understand Yeats's views on heredity, eugenics, and aesthetics is to examine how his complicated perspectives on class developed over the course of his career, particularly his attitudes toward the peasantry and the Catholic middle classes. Although Yeats's late-career essays in *On the Boiler* demonstrate an eagerness for information about the differences in "mother-wit" between "slum children" and wealthy children in order to support his eugenic agenda concerning the "unintelligent classes" of Irish, he was also very interested, especially earlier in his career, in the mythical and mystical qualities of the peasantry that stemmed from their Celtic origins (17). He saw them as "a vessel through which ancient traditions gave birth to new literary artifacts," and he believed that this "Celtic spirit" was directly related "to the poverty and harshness of Irish peasant life" (Howes 36).

In an 1893 article for the *Speaker*, Yeats extols the virtues of folklore, claiming that the best literature is rooted in the folklore of its culture, and he links folklore to the artistic "imagination" in order to demonstrate that there must be a mystical element in literature in order for it to connect deeply with readers. In presenting his case, Yeats makes an anti-Darwinian argument and gestures toward a neo-Lamarckian belief in race-memory. In the beginning of the article, he argues, "Imagination is God in the world of art, and may well desire to have us come to an issue with the atheists who would make us naught but 'realists,' 'naturalists,' or the like" (*Uncollected Prose* 284). Yeats's

comment here about the “atheists” who privilege realist and naturalist literature is a direct reference to Darwinism, which was seen by many as the refuge of “atheists” and which was the inspiration for and philosophical foundation of these nineteenth-century literary genres. Yeats argues that artists must be humble enough to learn folk tales directly from the peasants and then hope that these stories might result in divine inspiration:

No conscious invention can take the place of tradition, for he who would write a folk tale, and thereby bring a new life into literature, must have the fatigue of the spade in his hands and the stupor of the fields in his heart. Let us listen humbly to the old people telling their stories, and perhaps God will send the primitive excellent imagination into the midst of us again. Why should we be either ‘naturalists’ or ‘realists’ alone?”

(Uncollected Prose 288)

Here, Yeats romanticizes the poverty of the peasantry and suggests that field labor is necessary for a true connection to the ancient myths and legends. The rest of us can only “listen humbly” to their stories and hope that “perhaps” we will be graced with our own connection to the “primitive” by proxy. While on the one hand this sentiment valorizes the peasantry and their “excellent imagination,” it also suggests that only the artists, those who are listening to the stories of the “old people,” are capable of bridging the gap between the primitive folk tale and modern art. The peasant, after all, has the “stupor of the fields in his heart” and is therefore incapable of fully understanding the artistic implications of these stories. Jacqueline Genet notes the criticism many Irish writers during the modernist period received for using “the same language as the British

imperialists talking of the savages in the jungle. Like them, the peasants are presented as naive, close to animals integrated to the landscape, out of history. In a way, the Renaissance has nationalized the colonial attitudes” (141). This perpetuation of British “colonial attitudes” was possible because the Irish Renaissance was very much an Ascendancy affair, with the portrait of the peasantry constructed largely by the Anglo-Irish. Thus, when Yeats simultaneously reveres the peasants for their connection to ancient myths and folklore and appropriates those myths from them because he believes them incapable of fully utilizing them, he is, in essence, recolonizing them.

As much as Yeats admired and idealized certain peasant qualities, he also made it clear that this did not mean that he saw the peasants as equals. In an 1897 letter, Yeats describes his aesthetic as rooted in the spirit and legends of a place, and he demonstrates once again his willingness to appropriate Celtic myths from the peasantry while simultaneously excluding them from the audience for his art:

My first principle in my work is that poetry must make the land in which we live a holy land as Homer made Greece, the Ancient Indians India & the Hebrew Prophets Judea, if it is to have its full vividness. I believe that the celtic literature which is now beginning will find it possible to do this, for the celtic races love the soil of their countries vehemently, & have as great a mass of legends about that soil as Homer had about his. [. . .] At the same time I am not a democrat in literature for I believe that a writer must get his point of view wholly from the few. (*Collected Letters* 130, sic)

This letter encapsulates Yeats' early view of the peasantry as well as prophesies his later assertions that democracy is not the appropriate form of government for Ireland, and that the poor masses need to be ruled by the aristocratic, artistic and educated few (*On the Boiler* 13).⁶ As is apparent in this letter, Yeats's political theory began as an artistic philosophy, a belief that literature should not be written for the appreciation of the masses, but for the aesthetic sensibilities of the elite.

While Yeats admires "celtic races" for their connection to the "soil" and their "mass of legends," he rejects their "point of view" when it comes to art. In a 1910 diary entry, Yeats uses distinctly Lamarckian language to explain why the Irish peasants are so deeply connected to their ancient myths:

One cannot have a national art in the Young Ireland sense, that is to say an art recognized at once by all as national because obviously an expression of what all believe and feel, [. . .] because no modern nation is an organism like a monastery by rule and discipline, by a definite table of values understood by all, or even, as the Western peasants are, by habit of feeling and thought. Am I not right; is there not an organism of habit—a race held together by folk tradition, let us say? And this is now impossible because thought old enough to be a habit cannot face the modern life and shape educated men, and an organism of discipline has hitherto proved impossible in the modern world because no nation can seclude itself.

(*Memoirs* 251)

In this passage, Yeats demonstrates his complex and often conflicted view of the role of the peasantry in helping to create a uniquely Irish national art. Yeats wrote this after visiting the monastery at Mont-Saint-Michel in France, where he had seen “a different art, a marvellous powerful living thing created by a community working for hundreds of years and allowing only a very little place for the individual” (250). While he finds this form of communal art to be “marvellous,” he laments the fact that “no modern nation” operates in this way, and therefore it is “impossible in the modern world” to reach these heights of artistic production.

Despite the fact that Yeats celebrates this artistic production that deemphasizes the “individual,” the language he uses to discuss the shift from communal art to modern art is decidedly Lamarckian. He appropriates the word “organism” from biology and uses it to describe a community rather than an individual. A “modern nation” is not an “organism” because it cannot “exclude itself” from the outside world in order to maintain cohesiveness. An organism is defined by its “order and discipline” and by all members working together toward a common goal. Yeats then narrows this definition to single out “an organism of habit.” The “habit” to which he refers here is “thought” that is “old enough” to have become ingrained within the community, one example of which is a “race held together by folk tradition.” The “Western peasants” represent one such “race” because they are a community whose “habit of feeling and thought” has helped them persist as a cohesive “race” with a distinctive “folk tradition.” By invoking the Lamarckian idea of “habit” in a discussion of “race,” Yeats reveals a neo-Lamarckian belief in “race habits” and race-memory, the idea that races remain distinct through the

recapitulation of their collective experiences. Yeats once again puts the peasantry in a double bind here: they are still capable of this communal art that Yeats so admires, long after “modern nation[s]” have lost their abilities to cohere artistically, and yet part of the reason they are able to maintain this anachronistic form of artistic production is because they are not “educated men” who are part of “the modern world.”

In his 1922 autobiography *The Trembling of the Veil*, Yeats expands on this distinction, emphasizing the differences between the “educated” and “uneducated classes” (167). Although he takes his stories and mythologies from the peasantry, he argues that, ultimately, the peasants are uneducated people with an inability to appreciate the importance of their own history. It is only when these myths are given to the educated that they become significant and have the potential for instilling a sense of national identity in the Irish people:

Have not all races had their first unity from a mythology that marries them to rock and hill? We have in Ireland imaginative stories, which the uneducated classes knew and even sang, and might we not make those stories current among the educated classes, rediscovering for the work’s sake what I have called ‘the applied arts of literature’, the association of literature, that is, with music, speech, and dance; and at last, it might be, so deepen the political passion of the nation that all, artist and poet, craftsman and daylabourer would accept a common design? (167)

Once again, Yeats invokes the concept of race-memory, suggesting that every race is tied to the land on which it originated—its “rock and hill”—through a shared

“mythology” that, presumably, they have inherited from generation to generation. Although he sees the peasantry’s body of myths and legends as a potential unifier for Ireland, Yeats’s ultimate goal was for the “educated classes” to improve their own “art” and “literature,” and thereby improve themselves, by appropriating these myths from the “uneducated classes” who cannot fully appreciate them. While Yeats admires the imagination of the peasant classes and believes that their Celtic heritage was essential for unifying Ireland, his entrenched views of class hierarchy cause him to view members of the Ascendancy class as the best possible interpreters of this legion of peasant myths.

While Yeats’s portrayal of the peasantry demonstrates a conflict between admiration for their connection to Celtic myths and folklore and scorn for their lack of education and intellect, his attitude toward the Catholic middle classes in Ireland was much less complex. In a 1905 letter to Florence Farr, Yeats distinguishes between the literary abilities of the upper “leisured” classes and the middle “Catholic” classes in Ireland:

I have noticed, by the way, that the writers of this country who come from the mass of the people,—or no, I should say who come from Catholic Ireland, have more reason than fantasy. It is the other way with those who come from the leisured classes. They stand above their subject and play with it, and their writing is, as it were, a victory as well as a creation. The others—Colum and Edward Martyn for instance, are dominated by their subject, with the result that their work as a whole lacks beauty of shape the organic quality. [. . .] I wonder if this is true everywhere of the man of the

people as contrasted with the man of traditional leisure. (*Florence Farr* 51, sic)

This “mass of people” who “come from Catholic Ireland” are those whom he elsewhere calls the “mob”⁷ and detests for their ignorance and their dogmatic religious beliefs. Yeats’s antipathy toward this “mob” was escalated when members of the Catholic middle classes incited the *Playboy* riots in 1907. Here, Yeats argues that the “mass of the people” are too literal and dogmatic to produce transcendent art. The “leisured classes,” on the other hand, are able to remove themselves from their “subject” and “play with it” in a way that results in more beautiful and “organic” literature. By asking at the end of this passage whether or not these differences in the artistic production of the classes are “true everywhere,” Yeats demonstrates his interest in discovering a systematic and, perhaps, scientific explanation for these class distinctions.

By the time he wrote *On the Boiler*, he had found some of the scientific support he was looking for. In “To-morrow’s Revolution,” he summarizes what he has learned from Cattell’s *Psychology and Social Progress*: “[I]f you arrange an ascending scale from the unemployed to skilled labour, from skilled labour to shopkeepers and clerks, from shopkeepers and clerks to professional men [. . .] [t]here is not only an increase of mother-wit but of the size of the body and its freedom from constitutional defects” (17). In his note on this passage, Yeats reports that he had written to a “well-known authority” who replied to a question Yeats had posed, “We have no statistics for the leisured classes, owing to the difficulty of getting them into groups for examination” (17). Yeats writes, “It is a pity, for I want to know what happens to the plant when it gets from under the

stone” (17). Clearly, Yeats was still interested in the question of whether or not there was scientific evidence to support his class prejudices. While he is happy to see that both “mother-wit” and physical prowess increase with class position, he is particularly keen to find evidence that this scale continues when the “leisure classes” are reached. Further, his use of the “plant” metaphor suggests that, while Cattell’s arguments are primarily based on a strict hereditarian approach to intelligence testing, Yeats still imagines human progress as environmentally influenced. The leisured “plant,” with no economic or cultural “stone” holding it back would, in Yeats’s worldview, flourish.

Despite Yeats’s conflicted relationship with the peasantry, his early poetry seems to demonstrate an appreciation for the peasant soul, admiring their “natural” ways and their connection with the land and with Irish/Celtic history. He adopts their superstitions about faeries, remnants of a Celtic paganism, and incorporates those aspects of their belief system into his poetry. However, he largely ignores the fact that the peasantry was predominantly Catholic and, despite their residual Pagan beliefs, led an existence of grueling agrarian poverty that left them little time for contemplating faeries and ancient myths. In other words, Yeats fails to acknowledge the Catholicism of the peasantry when it serves his interests, while at other times, he lumps them in with their fellow Catholics, the middle classes. In an 1898 letter to the editor of the *Outlook*, Yeats responds to an unnamed “paragraphist” (presumed to be Irish Parliamentarian Thomas Patrick Gill) who had written a critique of Yeats’s *Fortnightly Review* essay “The Broken Gates of Death” claiming that Yeats “has heard much fairy lore and has come to believe that Fairyland takes the place of Heaven in the general Irish peasant’s mind. [. . .] Nearly all this is the

dream of a poetical folk-lorist” (*Letters* 212-13). In response, Yeats quotes himself from “The Broken Gates of Death,” an essay in which he espouses his theory about peasant theology: “The most of the Irish country people believe that only people who die of old age go straight to some distant Hell or Heaven or Purgatory. All who are young enough for any use [. . .] are taken [. . .] by the fairies; and live, until they die a second time, in the green ‘forts’” (*Letters* 212). Yeats argues here that the peasants have thoroughly incorporated their paganism into their Catholicism and, in fact, privilege their “fairy lore” over their Catholic beliefs. After quoting himself as evidence that he has not, in fact, misrepresented the religious beliefs of the peasants, he personally attacks his reviewer: “And if your paragraphist, who is, perhaps, a Catholic, will wait until I have completed the series of essays [. . .] he will find that the Irish peasant has invented, or that somebody has invented for him, a vague, though not altogether unphilosophical, reconciliation between his Paganism and his Christianity” (*Letters* 213). By suggesting that the reviewer is himself Catholic, and even bordering on using “Catholic” as an insult in this context, Yeats is able to use the shorthand of class and religious prejudice to defend himself. The suggestion here is that, as a Catholic, the reviewer is personally invested in his own argument and, more importantly, that he is unable to see the complexities inherent in Yeats’s argument—he is, as a Catholic, a member of the ignorant “mob” who “buzz like a bee in a bottle” if you “show them a book” (*On the Boiler* 11).

Further, Yeats’ observation that the peasantry had assimilated Paganism into Christianity was only partly true. The fact remained that the Irish peasants were Catholic above all else, most often under the feared power of a parish priest, and it is quite

possible that Yeats exaggerated their propensity toward Pagan beliefs in order to strengthen their symbolic qualities for use in his literature and philosophy. In *Strange Country*, Seamus Deane seeks to explain Yeats' paganization of the Irish peasantry, describing it as a symptom of the Anglo-Irish sensibility:

The Anglo-Irish, having lost their land, rediscovered their territory—the territory of an art that had its roots in the soil of the peasantry. Nor did it matter that the peasantry had for the most part become tenant farmers or landless labourers. These people were still, in the most honorific sense Yeats could manage, peasants, atavars of a religion the whole world had lost and which they, because of their long history of exclusion from that world, had in fragmentary fashion preserved. (Deane 112)

As Deane demonstrates, the Anglo-Irish, including Yeats, saw the peasantry not as a social class with their own modern religion (Catholicism) but as the ancestors of an ancient race, who still held on to their pre-Christian belief systems. In this way, Yeats and other Ascendancy figures could exploit the peasantry in literature, under the guise of homage and moral and aesthetic instruction, in order to promote their nationalistic agenda; for, the best way to separate oneself from one's country of origin (in this case England) is to adopt a new identity and claim oneness with the history and culture of the land in which one now lives.

Yeats's distaste for the Catholic Irish is crystallized in a 1914 journal entry in which he attributes the creative "sterility" of fellow Irish Literary Theatre dramatists Edward Martyn and George Moore to their Catholic and peasant "blood" (*Memoirs* 271).

In this journal entry, he makes an argument about heredity and cross-breeding that applies different models of heredity to different Irish classes:

I have been told that the crudity common to all the Moores came from the mother's family, Mayo squireens, probably half-peasants in education and occupation, for his father was a man of education and power and old descent. His mother's blood seems to have affected him and his brother as the peasant strain has affected Edward Martyn. There has been a union of incompatibles and consequent sterility. [. . .] Both men are examples of the way Irish civilization is held back by the lack of education of Irish Catholic women. An Irish Catholic will not marry a Protestant, and hitherto the women have checked again and again the rise, into some world of refinement, of Catholic households. The whole system of Irish Catholicism pulls down the able and well-born if it pulls up the peasant, as I think it does. A long continuity of culture like that at Coole could not have arisen, and never has arisen, in a single Catholic family in Ireland since the Middle Ages. (270-71)

Yeats seems to believe that cross-breeding between a peasant mother and a wealthy, though Catholic, father resulted in a common "crudity" among the Moores. The reference here to Moore's "mother's blood" indicates that Yeats conceived of heredity in terms of class, just as many eugenicists insisted that certain innate characteristics were common to individual races. Martyn, too, has been affected by a "peasant strain," and Yeats's use of the word "strain" here suggests that he might have even seen the peasantry

as a distinct race. However, while intermarriage between a peasant and a middle-class or wealthy Catholic results in “crudity” and “sterility,” Yeats argues that if Irish Catholic women were to defy their religious and cultural customs and marry Protestants, Catholics might be able to “rise [. . .] into some world of refinement.” Just as Yeats advocated negative eugenics programs for those he saw as innately flawed while simultaneously advocating education for the more promising classes, here he applies two different standards of heredity to two different types of intermarriage. Further, when Yeats argues that “Irish civilization is held back by the lack of education of Irish Catholic women,” he implies that, at least indirectly, Irish degeneration might be slowed through the education of this important population, the women who must choose whether to pollute their blood with a “peasant strain” or improve their chances of bearing eugenically sound children by marrying a Protestant.

This anti-Catholic and anti-peasantry sentiment is the result of Yeats’s gradual move over the course of his career from an idealization and romanticization of the peasantry to a rejection of the uneducated masses who threatened to overturn his construct of an Irish “race” with their degenerate mental deficiency and incapability of economic success. The very people whose mythology Yeats adopted to promote his sense of Irish nationalism (as well as to promote his own literature) were abandoned by the man who once lauded their unique connection to Irish origins and folklore.

Steeped in a Lamarckian understanding of human progress, several of Yeats’s poems demonstrate the importance of an aesthetic education for the right kind of person

by making clear distinctions between the desirable and undesirable classes and by emphasizing the qualities that give a person eugenic, and therefore evolutionary, potential. In Yeats's 1904 poem "Adam's Curse," the speaker claims that writing poetry "is to work harder" than manual laborers, and "yet / Be thought an idler by the noisy set / Of bankers, schoolmasters, and clergymen" (lines 11-13) because good poetry must "seem a moment's thought" (5). The "noisy set" of which the speaker complains prefigures the "mob" of the *Playboy* riots and the "men in Irish public life" from *On the Boiler*. These are the people who are incapable of an aesthetic education, who cannot see the eugenic potential of poetry. The female respondent in the poem also makes a proto-eugenic claim that relies on a Lamarckian trope when she compares the art and craft of poetry to women's "labour" for physical beauty: "'To be born woman is to know— / Although they do not talk of it at school— / That we must labour to be beautiful'" (18-20). Here, the woman's first words, "To be born a woman is to know," anticipate the "mother-wit" that Yeats later defines in *On the Boiler* as "co-ordination or a capacity for sustained purpose," an "innate intelligence" that "can be measured, in children especially, with great accuracy" (17). For the woman speaking (and thus conjecturally for all women) one must be born with an innate knowledge of her capacity for beauty before she can "labour to be beautiful." The woman's suggestion here that a combination of heredity and aesthetic education, which one cannot receive "at school," is necessary for the improvement of the race demonstrates the influence of Lamarckian evolutionary theory on Yeats's thought. Given the instinctual nature of this knowledge, the final line of the stanza can be read in at least three ways. On the surface, and in keeping with the

primary theme of the poem, the woman compares the feminine art and “labour” of making oneself beautiful to the work of poetry. However, “labour” can also be read as childbirth, suggesting that beauty, both physical beauty and the beauty of intellect and creativity, is heritable. Finally, there is an echo of “striving” in Yeats’s use of the word “labour” here, suggesting that the beauty for which the woman labors is an acquired characteristic that she will be able to pass on to her children. The poem’s title supports this multivalent reading by invoking the curse that God placed on Adam and Eve in *Genesis*. Eve was cursed to endure painful childbirth, the “labour” about which the woman speaks. The fact that “they do not talk of [this labor] at school” further emphasizes that the types of knowledge and labor to which the woman refers are instinctual rather than learned, developed over the entire span of human history through a Lamarckian process of acquiring “race instincts.” Thus for Yeats, women know that all three types of labor are necessary on an instinctual level, but still must compliment heredity with work, while male artists are born with natural aptitude but still must work to create poetry.

In the section of *On the Boiler* entitled “Private Thoughts,” Yeats makes a similar argument about love and instinct:

When a man loves a girl it should be because her face and character offer what he lacks; the more profound his nature the more should he realise his lack and the greater be the difference. It is as though he wanted to take his own death into his arms and beget a stronger life upon that death. We should count men and women who pick, as it were, the dam or sire of a

Derby winner from between the shafts of a cab, among persons of genius,
for this genius makes all other kinds possible. (22-23)

This innate “genius” that Yeats discusses in terms of eugenic pairing is also what “[t]o be born woman is to know” and what gives a person potential as a poet. Because this type of “genius makes all other kinds possible,” those who have the eugenic potential to breed better children can begin a process of race improvement by which a combination of strong inherited traits and a sound aesthetic education will create a new and better breed of humankind. “Labour[ing] to be beautiful,” then, is not just a metaphor for writing good poetry, but also indicates that the future of humankind relies on the instinct and will of a certain type of woman.

“Old Memory,” also published in 1904, reveals a Lamarckian understanding of cultural inheritance by invoking the beauty of “queens that were imagined long ago” and combining this image with the “strength” of eugenic motherhood. In this poem, the speaker mourns a lost love (presumably Maud Gonne), but also laments the degeneration that has occurred in the time between “long ago” and the present. He depicts his former lover as a woman who “might” usher in a “new age” were it not for “children that have strayed”:

O thought, fly to her when the end of day
Awakens an old memory and say,
‘Your strength, that is so lofty and fierce and kind,
It might call up a new age, calling to mind
The queens that were imagined long ago,

Is but half yours: he kneaded in the dough
 Through the long years of youth, and who would have thought
 It all, and more than it all, would come to naught,
 And that dear words meant nothing? But enough,
 For when we have blamed the wind we can blame love;
 Or, if there needs be more, be nothing said
 That would be harsh for children that have strayed. (*Collected Poems* 78)

The woman's "strength" here is "lofty and fierce and kind," which suggests that she is both protective of her heredity and a nurturing mother because she possesses the eugenic combination of strength in character and instinctual mothering skills. This reading is strengthened by lines four and five, where her "strength" has the power to "call up a new age" that would bring "to mind / The queens that were imagined long ago." In this reading, the woman represents the future of Ireland, a future that was once "imagined" and can now be realized through proper breeding and education. This future will be free from the degeneration that plagues contemporary society, but also reminiscent of the idyllic Celtic period of "long ago" when Ireland itself was "lofty and fierce and kind."

This reading gains further support from Yeats's invocation of the eugenic image inherent in the line "he kneaded in the dough." Kneading dough, much like the more common and Biblical image of molding clay, suggests a kind of intentional shaping and creation of this "new age" from the queenly and strong eugenic mother. In the end, if "it all, and more than it all, would come to naught," then both "the wind" and "love" can be "blamed." Although the speaker here is literally mourning a lost love and demonstrating

the uselessness of blaming love itself for the rejection, his reference to “children who have strayed,” or offspring from this queenly love, invokes Yeats’s belief in aesthetic education. If the children of a woman who possesses such strong eugenic potential are not educated in art and refinement, then their heredity will “come to naught” and “dear words,” or poetry, will mean “nothing.” Therefore, if the eugenic experiment fails and mankind degenerates beyond hope of repair, then both natural and social forces (the wind and love) will be to blame and there will be no point in saying anything “harsh” to the children who cannot fulfill their eugenic potential and contribute to the human progress made possible by Lamarckian evolution.

Yeats’s “Crazy Jane” poems, published in *Words for Music Perhaps* (1932), reflect Yeats’s growing contempt for the Irish Catholic classes, deal subtly with eugenic issues, and are infused with Lamarckian imagery. While Yeats published his first seven “Crazy Jane” poems together in 1932, he later added one more, “Crazy Jane on the Mountain,” which he included in *On the Boiler*. This last poem is problematic for many readers of the “Crazy Jane” poems because of its seeming revision of the “free love” theme of the earlier poems. However, reading backward from “Crazy Jane on the Mountain” and the eugenic context of *On the Boiler* to the “Crazy Jane” poems in *Words for Music Perhaps* illuminates the tension these poems create between a rejection of the sexual mandates of Catholicism, especially concerning divorce, and Yeats’s inability to advocate wholeheartedly for unfettered sexual activity, especially among peasants and “degenerates.”

In “Crazy Jane and the Bishop,” the first of the poems in *Words for Music Perhaps*, Crazy Jane begins her tirade against the oppressive power of the Bishop and the Catholicism he represents. We learn that the Bishop’s “ban / Banished Jack the Journeyman,” who is now “dead” (8-9, 5). The banishment refers to the Bishop’s censure of the sexual relationship between Jane and Jack, which the Bishop, “an old book in his fist,” compared to “liv[ing] like beast and beast,” a comparison that reduces Jane and Jack to animals and also implies that any offspring from their coupling will be bestial. Jane also renders the Bishop impotent, demonstrating that he does not possess the power of sexual vitality, as she and Jack do, but has only the power of “an old book”:

The Bishop has a skin, God knows,

Wrinkled like the foot of a goose,

(All find safety in the tomb.)

Nor can he hide in holy black

The heron’s hunch upon his back,

But a birch-tree stood my Jack:

The solid man and the coxcomb. (15-21)

Here, the Bishop’s “skin” is “wrinkled,” implying that he is incapable of feeling the youthful passion experienced by Jack and Jane. However, the lines also refer to the Bishop’s foreskin, which is “wrinkled,” and thus old, and, as it is “like the foot of a goose,” is useless for sexual function. Further, the Bishop is “hunch[ed],” suggesting both age and degeneration, and he is compared in this manner to Jack, who is “a birch-tree,” straight, erect, young, and vital. This reading is consistent with the widely

accepted analysis of this poem as an indictment of the Catholic Church because it casts the Bishop as ineffectual in his attempt to curtail Jane and Jack's sexuality. In the final stanza, "Jack had [Jane's] virginity" and the Bishop is obliquely warned that, should he interfere, Jane will "spit" (22, 27), which demonstrates Yeats's concern that the aims of contemporary Irish politics will inevitably backfire.

However, as sexual as the poem is, the breaks in rhyme and the italicized and parenthetical textual eruptions reveal Yeats's concern that unfettered sexuality, perhaps the "irregular sexual relations" with which he was concerned in his 1925 Senate speech on the divorce debate,⁸ may have negative consequences for humanity. The repeated split refrain in the poem, "*(All find safety in the tomb.) / [. . .] / The solid man and the coxcomb,*" introduces the first slant rhyme in the poem (3-7). In this first stanza, lines one and two are perfect rhymes, as are lines four, five, and six. Thus, these lines, which rhyme "tomb" with "coxcomb," interrupt the stanza in terms of rhyme, italics, and parentheses, as well as disrupting Jane's narrative.⁹ This pairing is, in Marjorie Perloff's definition, a "weak-rhyme" because "one rhyming unit," in this case "tomb," "has primary stress while the other," in this case "coxcomb," "has weak stress" (32). This pattern sets a precedent for the following three stanzas, as each employs at least one slant rhyme other than the refrain. The second stanza begins by rhyming "ban" with "Journeyman," which employs a tension between the lexical pronunciation of "Journeyman" and both Jane's and the poem's promotion of the word as "Journeyman." The assonance of "ban," "banished," and "Jack" in lines eight and nine, as well as the trochaic meter that suggests a stress on "man," emphasize Jack's manliness. This is in

keeping with Jane's motive here to promote Jack as a man in comparison to the Bishop, who has "banned" such masculine sexuality. However, the word itself invokes Jack's working-class status, which, in eugenic terms, deems him unfit for reproduction. Here, we are given the first indication that the "dear Jack" of the first stanza may not be as much of a "man" as Jane makes him out to be, as suggested by the tension between "man" and "mən."

Yeats subverts Jane's narrative of Catholic persecution by suggesting that the critique she makes of the Bishop's sexuality may be turned upon Jack and, thus, on the wisdom of their sexual relationship. Jack may be "a birch-tree," but the social value of his masculinity is questionable. The pattern of perfect rhymes in lines four to six in the first stanza is not repeated in the second stanza, as "priest" is followed by "fist" and "beast," with "fist" disrupting the rhyme scheme (11-13). We are then left with an equation of "priest" and "beast," indicating that the Bishop's condemnation of Jane and Jack can also be applied to himself. The refrain itself, which is the most consistent pattern in the poem, makes little sense when read within Jane's narrative. However, the premise of these poems is that "Crazy Jane," or "Cracked Mary," is, in fact, crazy, and, therefore, it is possible to read her refrain backward: "*The solid man and the coxcomb / (All find safety in the tomb.)*" This reading is further supported by the repetition of these two lines throughout the poem, which places each part of the refrain both before and after the other as the poem moves between stanzas. It is ambiguous which man, Jack or the Bishop, is "the solid man" and which is "the coxcomb," for Yeats is conflating the lexicons of the poem throughout. However, if we assume that both men have both

characteristics, manliness and impotence, then Jane's assertion "All find safety in the tomb" suggests that, in this inversion, both men will lead her to a symbolic death, which will be the "safest" option for her because it will keep her from reproducing. The Bishop will prevent her from reproducing by curtailing her sexual activity, and Jack, whether manly or unmanly, is doomed by his working-class status to create eugenically undesirable children, bringing about the death of the human race.

The "Crazy Jane" poems that follow "Crazy Jane and the Bishop" become increasingly centered on Jane's sexuality and, concurrently, increasingly eugenic. In "Crazy Jane and Jack the Journeyman," Jane mourns Jack's death, but grief does not stop her from being sexually active:

I know, although when looks meet
 I tremble to the bone,
 The more I leave the door unlatched
 The sooner love is gone,
 For love is but a skein unwound
 Between the dark and dawn. (1-6)

For Jane, love is now "but," or merely, a "skein unwound / Between the dark and dawn," suggesting that, in the absence of Jack, she now only experiences the sexual side of love because love is now something that must only be experienced under the cover of darkness. However, she also recognizes that "[t]he more [she] leave[s] the door unlatched / [t]he sooner love is gone," indicating that her promiscuity has weakened her chances of ever finding love like Jack's again. Here, we can sense an indictment of the

Bishop even though he is not explicitly named, for we know that Jane and Jack would still be lovers were it not for the Bishop's interference. However, the ambiguous lexical choice of "tremble" in line two suggests both that Jane feels, "to the bone," a genuine passion for these lovers and that she is afraid of her lovers or afraid of the consequences of having multiple lovers. The first reading is consistent with a reproof of the Bishop's suggestion that her sexual behavior makes her a "beast" ("Crazy Jane and the Bishop" 13), but the other possibility, reading "tremble" as a negative, though instinctive, reaction, suggests that Jane's promiscuity runs counter to what she knows in "the bone" will have negative consequences for humanity.

The eye rhyme of "bone" and "gone" (2,4) in a poem that employs an ABCBDB rhyme scheme further supports this reading.¹⁰ In the grouping of "bone," "gone," and "dawn," "bone" is the word that troubles the rhyme scheme, suggesting that an intuitive knowledge of eugenic consequences disrupts Jane's defense of sexuality. The second stanza repeats this pattern, rhyming "come" with "tomb" and "womb":

A lonely ghost the ghost is
 That to God shall come;
 I—love's skein upon the ground,
 My body in the tomb—
 Shall leap into the light lost
 In my mother's womb. (7-12)

In this stanza, Jane establishes a tension between the physical and spiritual aspects of death. Although she will "leap into the light" that she "lost" when she left her "mother's

womb,” the light of God from which she was separated when she was conceived, this “leap” is a troubled one; she will be a “lonely ghost” when she meets God because she will have left “love’s skein upon the ground” and her “body in the tomb” and, as such, must meet God stripped of her sexual identity. Jane becomes, on one level, an imperfect and humanized Christ figure here, as the “skein” and the “body in the tomb” clearly refer to resurrection of Jesus. However, her “skein” is “love’s skein” and has been imbued with sexual connotations by the rest of the poem. This reading of “love’s skein” as Jane’s sexual identity suggests that she is uncomfortable with the prospect of separating her spirit from her body, which is perhaps another critique of the Bishop’s insistence that she pursue spiritual, rather than sexual, interests. However, the eugenic reading is also applicable here, this time in the words that do rhyme. The pairing of “tomb” with “womb” in this stanza suggests an association between death and reproduction for Jane. We know that she is “crazy” and, presumably, a peasant, which, in Yeats’s eugenic program, would make it undesirable for her to procreate. Death (or at least degeneration) of the human race would be the consequence of Jane’s sexuality if it were productive.

The third stanza of this poem provides a resolution, as the rhymes are finally exact in “bed,” “head,” and “dead” (14,16,18). Here, Jane fantasizes about remaining abstinent and faithful to her dead lover, Jack. In this scenario, the “skein” of love would not be “unwound” every night but, rather, would bind her “ghost,” her soul, strongly to Jack’s (15). However, rather than thinking metaphysically about her relationship with Jack, taking comfort in the idea of her “ghost” joining his in “the light,” Jane infuses her fantasy with physicality, thinking about the physical act of Jack turning his head and

about their earthly bed. Here again we see that the Bishop's meddling has separated Jane from her one true lover as she pines for him by imagining a different life. However, the fact that "bed" is rhymed perfectly with "head" and "dead" suggests once again that the sexual activity taking place in Jane's bed, especially if it leads to reproduction, will result in death, not merely for Jane, but for the human race.

"Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop" brings back the character of the Bishop from the first poem in this series, this time when Jane is an old woman who has not lived as the Bishop originally dictated. The Bishop notices that Jane's "breasts are flat and fallen now / Those veins must soon be dry" and urges her to "[I]ive in a heavenly mansion, / Not in some foul sty" (3-6). Thus, the Bishop, recognizing that Jane is old and no longer sexual, gives her another chance to repent in order to "[I]ive in a heavenly mansion." In keeping with her character, however, Jane once again rebuffs him, claiming in response to his observation that she lives in "some foul sty," "Fair and foul are near of kin, / And fair needs foul" (7-8). Here, Yeats employs a binary between "fair" and "foul" that Richard Ellmann reads as evidence that, "[I]ike Crazy Jane, [Yeats] refused to think in respectable terms merely because he was old, and wrote to [Olivia] Shakespear: 'I shall be a sinful man to the end, and think upon my death bead of all the nights I wasted in my youth'" (272). In this reading, Yeats himself is both "fair" and "foul," indicating that Crazy Jane "shares [Yeats's] theories about love, and sees it as a conflict of opposites but also as an escape from them to unity, wholeness, or, to use a word which she would not have used, to beatitude" (Ellmann 273). However, Ellmann also acknowledges that Yeats cannot completely embrace Jane's version of love because it is so steeped in a

sexuality that he cannot fully endorse: “Though she prides herself on her licence, she is tightly controlled by her creator, and, when her promiscuity begins to persecute his imagination and her language to ‘become unendurable’, he exorcises her from his verse” (273). This exorcism becomes apparent in the last stanza of this poem in which the identity of the speaker becomes ambiguous. We know that Jane is the speaker of the poem because it begins, “I met the Bishop on the road” (1) and because she quotes herself throughout the poem. However, the last stanza is also inflected with Yeats’s voice, as Jane claims, “‘A woman can be proud and stiff / When on love intent; / But Love has pitched his mansion in / The place of excrement” (13-16). Although Jane holds tightly to her notion of love, making her “proud and stiff,” she also concedes that, for her, love is inextricable from “excrement” and degradation, a position that makes it difficult not to hear Yeats’s indictment of Jane’s sexual practices as degenerate, as “sexually irregular” (*Senate Speeches* 102).

“Crazy Jane on the Mountain,” a poem whose title character is meant to invoke the earlier “Crazy Jane” poems, was published in 1938 in *On the Boiler*. In this poem and in this context, the critique of Catholicism has shifted from an indictment of the Bishop for his interference in Jane’s love life to an indictment of Jane herself for her unchecked sexuality as a peasant woman and as a “crazy” degenerate. The first marked difference between this poem and the other “Crazy Jane” poems is that the interjection of “(Said Crazy Jane)” twice in the poem (2,12) shifts the speaker from the first to the third person. While all but one of the earlier “Crazy Jane” poems employ Jane as the first-person speaker, this poem explicitly reports Jane’s words, allowing us to detach from

Jane and see her statements through the mediation of a third person. Further, the first use of the line “(Said Crazy Jane)” (2) serves to question Jane’s insistence that she is “tired of cursing the Bishop” (1) for, in lines three and four, Jane continues to curse him: “Nine books or nine hats / Would not make him a man.” Just as she did in “Crazy Jane and the Bishop,” Jane once again questions the Bishop’s manliness, making her assertion that she is finished cursing him ring false. Thus, this poem questions Jane’s word, as “Said Crazy Jane” sounds suspiciously like “or so she said.” This not only calls the remainder of Jane’s narrative in this poem into question, but it also serves as a retraction of the earlier Crazy Jane poems. In a 1932 letter to his wife, Yeats wrote, “I want to exorcise that slut Crazy Jane whose language has become unendurable,” demonstrating that if Yeats was enamored with Crazy Jane, his feelings for her had long since died; he was no longer capable of seeing peasant sexuality in a positive light (qtd. in Ellmann, n. 324).

The second use of “(Said Crazy Jane)” follows “Last night I lay on the mountain” (11), a line that must be read suspiciously because the first use of “(Said Crazy Jane)” has established the need to question every line this refrain follows. Although it is difficult to find evidence in the rest of the poem that this line is deceptive, it is possible to read it counter to Jane’s intention, thus subverting her narrative. She claims that she “lay on the mountain” either asleep or in daydream, as what follows is her account of seeing mythical figures:

There in a two horsed carriage
 That on two wheels ran
 Great bladdered Emer sat,

Her violent man

Cuchulain, sat at her side[.] (13-17)

Here, Jane invokes the “mythological reference to Emer’s victorious feats of urination,” which is “an epithet typically physical in content and classically elaborate in manner” (Hardy 52-53). This physicality is also present in the reference to Cuchulain’s violence, which, when combined with Emer’s urination, creates a pair of images that invoke the most repulsive aspects of physicality.

It is in this context that Jane describes her own corporeal activities. The line that introduces this section, “Last night I lay on the mountain,” not only sets up her dream but also implies that Jane had sex on the mountain, a reading that is supported by the last five lines of the poem:

Thereupon,
 Propped upon my two knees,
 I kissed a stone;
 I lay stretched out in the dirt
 And I cried tears down. (18-22)

After seeing Emer and Cuchulain, Jane reports that she knelt and “kissed a stone”; however, the “kiss[ing]” here, in light of Jane’s sexual history, implies more than an act of contrition. Rather, by kissing a stone, Jane is forced to acknowledge that she is past her prime and is left with stones, rather than men, to kiss. Thus, after questioning the Bishop’s manliness throughout the Crazy Jane series and recalling the most destructive manifestations of physicality, she herself has finally been rendered impotent by Yeats,

whose eugenic beliefs will no longer allow Jane free sexuality and who, therefore, must “exorcise that slut.” In the final lines of the poem, Jane is left “in the dirt” to cry, a fitting punishment for her sexual transgressions.

In the poems Yeats wrote at the end of his life, published in the posthumous *Last Poems and Two Plays* (1939), the Lamarckian aesthetic Yeats has been developing throughout his career is finally transformed into a more blatant eugenic rhetoric, in part because of his discovery of *The Fight for Our National Intelligence*, Cattell’s controversial book on eugenics. In “Under Ben Bulbin,” the speaker asserts once again that artists, in this case “poet and sculptor,” must determine the fate of future generations. By reading poetry, those who descend from good stock can achieve the aesthetic education they need in order to pass this knowledge and refinement on to their offspring:

Poet and sculptor do the work
 Nor let the modish painter shirk
 What his great forefathers did,
 Bring the soul of man to God,
 Make him fill the cradles right. (37-41)

Artists must, through their art, provide an aesthetic education for those fit to receive it, which will bring the human race, the “soul of man,” closer to God, and, thus, closer to perfection. Those who have undergone this education will then be fit to “fill the cradles” with the “right” kind of children. However, creating art that promotes the “soul of man” is not enough; poets must also celebrate the eugenically fit in their poetry:

Irish poets learn your trade

Sing whatever is well made,
 Scorn the sort now growing up
 All out of shape from toe to top,
 Their unremembering hearts and heads
 Base-born products of base beds. (68-73)

The “sort now growing up” here are, the poem later makes clear, not the “peasantry” or the “hard-riding country gentlemen” (74-75) but the masses that Yeats laments throughout his career, especially after the Playboy riots. They should be “scorn[ed]” by “Irish poets” not only because they are physically “out of shape,” but also because they have “unremembering hearts and heads” that have forgotten the heroic figures from their Irish past, those whose bodies and minds were “well made.” It is the responsibility of Irish poets to immortalize these heroes in their poems in order educate their readers about their well-made ancestors and to stop the trend of degeneration in Ireland that has created “base-born products of base beds.”

Published in the same collection as “Under Ben Bulbin,” “A Bronze Head” recalls the female character in “Old Memory” in its portrayal of the complicated figure of Maud Gonne, but retains little hope that the combination of heredity and aesthetic education will be able to save humankind. The bronze head, presumably a bust of Gonne, with “her form all full / As though with magnanimity of light / Yet a most gentle woman’s” (8-10) is all that is left to remind the speaker of greatness, since “[e]verything else [is] withered and mummy-dead” (3). This desolation causes “terror” and “[h]ysterica-passio” for the speaker because his eugenic hopes have been dashed. When

looking at the figure, it is difficult for the speaker to “tell / Which of her forms has shown her substance right” (10-11). Her beauty, taken here as “substance” and, thus, encompassing both external and internal attributes, shifts depending on the speaker’s perspective. She is at once a literal bronze bust and “human, super-human, a bird’s round eye” (2). The trick, then, is for the speaker to discern which of these visions accurately depicts the living woman in body, mind, and spirit, or whether, as “Profound McTaggart” would argue, “substance can be a composite” (13, 12). The composite argument here can be read as a case for poetic depictions of beauty because poetry captures beauty in composite form, which is the realm of the symbolic for Yeats. The symbol crystallizes the experience, the moment, the image and holds in its meaning a myriad of substance. Through this crystallized composite, the figure of the bronze head, Yeats reveals his eugenic vision:

Or else I thought her supernatural;
 As though a sterner eye looked through her eye
 On this foul world in its decline and fall,
 On gangling stocks grown great, great stocks run dry,
 Ancestral pearls all pitched into a sty,
 Heroic reverie mocked by clown and knave
 And wondered what was left for massacre to save. (22-28)

Set against the wisdom and beauty of the bronze bust of Maud Gonne and seen through her “sterner eye,” the world becomes “foul [. . .] in its decline and fall” and the “bronze head” sees the dysgenic problem that makes this world so foul: the worst of human kind,

the “gangling stocks,” have increased in number, while the best people, the “great stocks,” have failed to reproduce and, thus, thrown their “ancestral pearls” away.

These lines echo Yeats’s concern in *On the Boiler*, in which he claims: “Since about 1900 the better stocks have not been replacing their numbers, while the stupider and less healthy have been more than replacing theirs. Unless there is a change in the public mind every rank above the lowest must degenerate, and, as inferior men push up into its gaps, degenerate more and more quickly” (18). The problem here is not simply that Ireland will become overrun with men and women with degenerate bodies and minds, but also that these “gangling stocks” will “mock” “heroic reverie,” and, we can infer, poetry, beauty, and creative genius. Since “[e]verything else [is] withered and mummy-dead,” we can assume that those with eugenic potential who would benefit from aesthetic education have been pushed out of existence by the “gangling stocks,” leaving no hope for the future. The final line of the poem is the most chilling, as the Maud Gonne figure wonders, looking out upon this “foul,” degenerated world, “what was left for massacre to save,” echoing “The Second Coming” and *A Vision* in its insistence upon violent upheaval to usher in a new era and renew the “stocks.” If there are no “great stocks” left to save, if all the beauty has been “mocked” out of existence by “clown and knave,” then violence no longer has a function and humankind no longer has a chance at greatness.

Although the eugenics movement is generally associated with sterilization of the mentally ill, the mentally disabled, criminals, and homosexuals, it is important to remember that it was also a movement deeply attached to ideas of beauty. For instance,

Galton created a “Beauty-Map of the British Isles,” which, he claimed, “classif[ied] the girls I passed in streets or elsewhere as attractive, indifferent or repellent” (qtd. in Parrinder 10). Although important on its own, physical beauty was also used as an indication of physical strength, mental acuity, and morality. In his “Presidential Address” to the International Congress of Hygiene and Demography (1891), Galton discussed the importance of these attributes in eugenic selection:

Taken altogether, on any responsible principle, are the natural gifts of the most productive class, bodily, intellectually and moral, above or below the line of national mediocrity? If above that line, then the existing conditions are favourable to the improvement of the race. If they are below that line, they must work towards its degradation. (qtd. in Mazumdar 40)

These “natural gifts” help to define eugenic beauty for Yeats. The Lamarckian aesthetic under which Yeats operated, however, added one more factor: the heritability of both innate and acquired creativity and, more specifically, poetic ability.

Although not everyone can be a poet, the poems and prose examined here provide evidence that it was important to Yeats that the next generation should at least have the ability to appreciate poetry and other art forms. Over the course of his career, Yeats came to see the masses as ignorant and unappreciative of art, and his vision of an Irish literary renaissance “mocked by clown and knave.” In the final days of his life, this fusion of eugenic ideals with poetic aesthetics became even tighter, as evidenced by a note dictated to his wife George, presumably for another essay for *On the Boiler*: “Discoveries in eugenics will compel reversal of old politics. What must disappear?

What changes in literature. Must strengthen conviction that nothing matters except poetry” (qtd. in Foster 649). This late career espousal of eugenics is not surprising, given the contents of *On the Boiler*. However, the link he makes here between eugenics and poetry, with its suggestion that poetry can improve the human race, gives us a key to understanding what drew the great poet of Ireland to a sociopolitical movement that now seems so objectionable.

Notes

¹ I have focused here on demonstrating how diffuse Lamarckian modes of thought and discourse were in nineteenth and twentieth-century culture and have omitted any discussion of the similar impact of Darwinism because the latter influence has been well-documented by many literary and cultural historians.

² In *A Vision* (1937), Yeats invokes both Lamarck and Darwin in describing the differences between Phase 21 and Phase 22 on the Great Wheel: “A man of Phase 22 will commonly not only systematise, to the exhaustion of his will, but discover this exhaustion of will in all that he studies. If Lamarck, as is probable, was of Phase 21, Darwin was probably a man of Phase 22, for his theory of development by the survival of fortunate accidental varieties seems to express this exhaustion. The man himself is never weak, never vague or fluctuating in his thought, for if he brings all to silence, it is a silence that results from tension, and till the moment of balance, nothing interests him that is not wrought up to the greatest effort of which it is capable” (159-60). In this construction, Yeats seems to clearly favor Darwin, placing him as he does in Phase 22, which is the most advanced and the most balanced phase. However, the “will” that permeates *A Vision* has Lamarckian overtones, which I will discuss later in the chapter.

³ While neither Terman nor Cattell believed in the inheritance of acquired characters, and both are clear in their position that intelligence is innate and can not be changed by environment, both occasionally use language that confuses the issue and would have contributed to the blurring of lines between Lamarckism and Darwinism. See, for example, Terman’s discussion of the correlation between intelligence and criminality in *The Measurement of Intelligence* (7-12) and Cattell’s explicit support for Shaw’s version of eugenics as presented in *Man and Superman (The Fight for Our National Intelligence* 104).

⁴ Although MacBride, as an explicitly Lamarckian eugenicist, was not the sole exception to this rule, he was an outlier.

⁵ Yeats developed a special interest in education when he was appointed by the Irish government to a committee that was examining the nation's schools (Foster 319). He personally visited several schools and gave Senate speeches on education that "were practical, stressing the need for renovation of school buildings, larger classrooms, organized school meals, and hygienic conditions" (Foster 320). However, in *On the Boiler*, the education reforms he proposes are much more radical and suggest that education is only for the best and brightest (27-29).

⁶ In his essay "Preliminaries" in *On the Boiler*, Yeats cautions, "If ever Ireland again seems molten wax, reverse the process of revolution. Do not try to pour Ireland into any political system. Think first how many able men with public minds the country has, how many it can hope to have in the near future, and mould your system upon those men. It does not matter how you get them, but get them. Republics, Kingdoms, Soviets, Corporate States, Parliaments, are trash, as Hugo said of something else 'not worth one blade of grass that God gives for the nest of the linnet.' These men, whether six or six thousand, are the core of Ireland, are Ireland itself" (13).

⁷ In his discussion of George Moore, for instance, Yeats writes that Moore "shares the mob's materialism and the mob's hatred of any privilege which is an incommunicable gift" (*Memoirs* 270).

⁸ Yeats's 1925 Senate speech on divorce is often cited as evidence that the Crazy Jane poems are explicit responses to the increasing political power of the Catholic Church. The Senate was considering a bill to make divorce illegal, and Yeats was concerned, among other objections, that the bill's provision that separation was permitted but that divorce and remarriage were not, would "invite men and women in the prime of life to accept for the rest of their existence the law of the cloisters. [. . .] A great English judge, speaking out of the immensity of his experience, said that there is no cause of irregular sexual relations so potent as separation without the possibility of remarriage" (*Senate Speeches* 97).

⁹ It is difficult to be certain how Yeats would have pronounced "coxcomb," though there is a good deal of evidence for a reading of "coxc mb." The OED supports this pronunciation, as does Anne Fogarty (U.C. Dublin). A recording of Yeats reading this poem would be the best evidence, but I do not believe that one exists. However, the meter supports my claim that, even if Yeats would have rhymed "coxcomb" with "tomb," the stress would still make it a "weak-rhyme."

¹⁰ Sheila Manahan's recording of this poem (Oxford UP, 1966) indicates that, in an Irish accent, "bone" and "gone" do not rhyme (and are pronounced "b ne" and "g ne"). Anne Fogarty (U.C. Dublin) also supports this reading.

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