

This dissertation has been
microfilmed exactly as received 67-10,668

KNEPPER, Bill Garton, 1922-
BACK TO METHUSELAH AND THE UTOPIAN
TRADITION.

The University of Nebraska, Ph.D., 1967
Language and Literature, modern

University Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan

BACK TO METHUSELAH AND THE UTOPIAN TRADITION

by

BILL GARTON KNEPPER

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of English

Under the Supervision of Professor Louis Crompton

Lincoln, Nebraska

January 11, 1967

TITLE

Back to Methuselah

And The Utopian Tradition

BY

Bill Garton Knepper

APPROVED

DATE

<u>Louis Crompton</u>	<u>Jan. 11, 1967</u>
<u>John W. Robinson</u>	<u>Jan. 11, 1967</u>
<u>C. E. Pulos</u>	<u>Jan. 11, 1967</u>
<u>Hugh Luke</u>	<u>Jan. 11, 1967</u>
<u>Robert Knoll</u>	<u>Jan. 11, 1967</u>
<u>Jasper B. Shannon</u>	<u>Jan. 11, 1967</u>
<u> </u>	<u> </u>

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE

GRADUATE COLLEGE

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

Errata

Page numbers 1, 2 and 3 omitted in pagination.

Chapter one begins on unnumbered page 4.

PREVIEW

An Acknowledgement

While I am deeply in debt to my adviser, Louis Crompton, for his steady influence, his severity as a mentor, and, withal, his constant encouragement, I am still more in his debt for a profusion of advice and ideas than can ever be fully recollected and recorded. In any case, I am specifically indebted to him for pointing out the analogy between Plato's imperfect societies and the imperfect societies in Back to Methuselah. Moreover, he directed my attention to the rich vein of Shaw's unpublished materials held by the British Museum. I also appreciate his generosity in permitting me to see the early drafts of several of the chapters of his forthcoming book, especially those on Man and Superman and Back to Methuselah, both for the new insights those chapters furnished and for their confirmation of some of my own conclusions.

CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTER I SHAW'S VIEW OF UTOPIANISM	4

- i. The Utopian purpose
Unjust social structure produces utopian writers; traditionally critical; may postulate social ideal; always provides standards for contemporary society.
- ii. The Utopian range
Classic, medieval, renaissance, and modern utopias; dramatic form, isolationist setting, serious and often religious tone; seeks "the good life in a just society."
- iii. Shaw's Utopianism
Back to Methuselah identified as a utopia; Shaw's interest selective; a political scheme, suitable human material and discipline required; Utopian Socialism rejected; Lassalle premature; romanticism weakens serious utopianism--Wells, Bellamy; Shaw accepts fantasy only in satiric utopias.
- iv. Evolutionary means and stages
Creative imagination tests unexperienced situations and schemes; line of social evolution neither single nor unbroken; moves from hedonistic anarchy to responsible anarchy; Shaw embraced relativism and ruthlessness; accommodation to vice and leadership of the able inevitable but temporary; will the key to Creative Evolution; Supermen the ultimate solution; socialism possible for modern man; hard work, hard thinking, and leisure the prime ingredients; gradualness inevitable; Back to Methuselah as final utopian stage--responsible anarchy, immortality, mind over matter, social duty instinctual.
- v. Shaw's critics
Jacques Barzun sees faith and power, making the good powerful, as Shaw's formula; misreads the Ancients as Struldbrugs; Dean

William Ralph Inge misinterprets Shaw; sees Ancients as end-products; ignores Shaw's premise that man may yet be replaced; St. John Ervine hostile; sees Back to Methuselah as a defense of planned economy; Edmund Wilson perceptive but distorts Shaw's philosophy; G. K. Chesterton understands Shaw's social orientation; the socialist and anarchist limits.

CHAPTER II THE REPUBLIC: PROTOTYPE AND POINT OF DEPARTURE

32

- i. Platonic and Shavian social justice
The Republic; social justice requires effort, discipline, wisdom, virtue, and the leadership of the able; Plato's utopian theory and machinery; Shaw's adaptations and adaptations.
- ii. The critics
Evaluations of the influence of Plato on Shaw keen but random; Eric Bentley; William Irvine; Jacques Barzun; C. E. M. Joad; H. D. Rankin; Margery Morgan.
- iii. The Republic epitomized
- iv. The problem of leadership
Need for philosopher-king; benefits of philosophy defined; love of truth; lessened desire for pleasure and wealth; reluctance of philosopher to rule; Shaw's early concern; Harold Goddard's views.
- v. The imperfect philosophers and rulers in Back to Methuselah
Series of failures culminates in success of the Ancients; Cain regressive, destructive, anti-man; Adam stagnates; divided line analogy; level of illusion not finally creative; longevity related to maturity; the warrior-politician; Franklyn

Barnabas as prototype philosopher; the Elderly Gentleman as the last of the flawed philosophers; Ozymandias's role; evolution indispensable; the ultimate society of Ancients.

- vi. The imperfect societies
Discussion of Louis Crompton's theory relating Plato's imperfect societies to Back to Methuselah; Shaw's societies evolved from primitive anarchy and tyranny to responsible anarchy; Socialism in Shaw's third play lacks Platonic cognate; fourth play approximates Plato's philosopher-ruler ideal.
- vii. The role of woman and the family
Shaw's major statements; the economic aspects; problems of sex, marriage, eugenics, and decorum; communal marriage; the woman guardian foreshadowed in the third play, achieved in the fourth; sex and family no longer a factor in adult affairs.
- viii. Education
Technical difficulties; the synthesis of Plato's educational theories with Shaw's evolutionary and hereditary ones; Shaw's contributions and refinements; rejects coercion of the child, isolation, censorship; postulates inherited knowledge and self-discipline.
- ix. Art
Paradoxically both lure and tool; as illusion; place on the divided line; as possible agent of evolution; a substitute for experience at best; Shaw's strictures severe; art ultimately to be outgrown and discarded; Ancients fall just short of perfection.

CHAPTER III SHAW AND MORE: TWO KINDS OF
PURITANISM

131

- i. More's Utopia
Communistic, equitable, moral; organized, disciplined but humanistic; closed society.
- ii. Utopia, the Republic, and Back to Methuselah
Impact of Utopia upon Back to Methuselah superficial; philosophies antagonistic; Republic overshadows Utopia; Platonic bias of Utopia overstated; references inconclusive; no true philosopher; essential Platonic ingredients missing.
- iii. Shaw and More's Utopia
Some common themes; socially unfit eliminated; colonization; Zapolite and short-lived people related; Holy Ghost and Life Force; no superman; crime analogies; private property is theft in Plato, Proudhon, Jesus; the family; puritanism, conformity and the pleasure principle.

CHAPTER IV JONATHAN SWIFT: YAHOO AND HOUYHNHNM 151

- i. Shaw's debt to Swift
Heavy, widely-noted, well documented; levels of meaning; social and political criticism.
- ii. Philosophical compatibility
Its extent; Swift's checks and balances; Shaw's political evolution; leveling anarchy; the humanistic impulse; anti-Whiggery; Radical-Toryism; disgust with class interest.

- iii. Ethical comparisons
Swift disgusted with human limitations, degeneracy; limited voluntarism; Shaw's voluntarism in contrast; the question of ethics vs personal ambitions.
- iv. The negative social criticisms
War; as crime and degeneration; Lilliputian pretense; Brobdingnag and Houyhnhnm, longlived and Ancient; the third play most Swiftian; World War I and the War of the Spanish Succession; law and justice; Shaw's interest; Swift's influence extensive; legal systems and justice; justice without emotion questioned; politics and politicians; problem of topical allegory; Swift's and Shaw's similarities; anti-Whiggism, criticism of mismanagement of war and peace; competing ministers; party burlesques; myth; technological novelties; stupid public servants; repeated examples of Yahooism in Back to Methuselah; Swiftian allegorical; Shaw deadly serious; the instinct to kill; Swift's error in seeing man as degenerate, not evolutionary.
- v. Struldbrug and Ancient
Common characteristics; immortality, mutations; atavism; oracular impulse; differences; Struldbrugian senility; Shavian evolution toward godhead; Shaw's conviction that flesh, not mind, ages.
- vi. Laputan and Ancient
Intellectual preoccupation; Swift treats as silly, Shaw as a sign of maturity; comparisons and contrasts.
- vii. Postive elements
Characteristic utopianism; Morgan's identification expanded; Houyhnhnms' essential classlessness paralleled; limitations of classlessness; marriage, domestic and eugenic; Shavian equivalents and dissent; anti-romantic; custom the enemy of progress and evolution; Shaw completes the "withering away" of marriage; Houyhnhnm family only slightly more disciplined, more struc-

tured, than the longlived; love expands beyond family to species; the Lilliputian parallels and reservations thereon; education; rejects Shaw's and Plato's search for sophisticated knowledge.

viii. Miscellaneous likenesses

Most Houyhnhnm institutions have faded away; citizens aid each other; cooperation achieved by force of reason; communism; overwhelming effect of utopia on visitors; Gulliver and Elderly Gentleman not immune; Platonic tradition shared.

ix. Final Comparisons

Shaw's optimism and Swift's pessimism; limited nature of man juxtaposed with evolution.

CHAPTER V LYTTON: UTOPIA AND EVOLUTION

196

i. The Coming Race

Synopsis; combines science-fiction and serious social criticism.

ii. Shaw's relation to Lytton

Boyhood delight; early praise; relationship to Back to Methuselah; adverse criticism, Lytton's "romantic humbug"; late acknowledgement of source; Shaw's appreciation evaluated; Nethercot and Bentley; "vril" psychic and physical; parallels Ancients' powers; "vril" transmuted into "awe" and "discouragement"; imitation awe; Shaw the less flamboyant; automata and Ancients.

iii. Vril-ya and Ancients

Common characteristics; extermination of inferior races; Armageddon; evolutionary justification; Lytton fails to elaborate

his evolutionary theory; physical likenesses; Vril-ya and Utopia; anarchistic principles; two imperfect societies; the female principle; religion monotheistic; Platonic union through "vril"; not cognate with Shaw's Life Force; vegetarianism and anti-vivisectionism; Lytton's pleasure principle.

CHAPTER VI WILLIAM MORRIS: COMRADE AND MENTOR 218

i. Personal Relationships

Differences in character, age, and politics; Shaw's veneration; comradeship; similar anarchistic beginnings; gradualism substituted for cataclysmic revolution; Morris's reluctance; Shaw's discipleship; admiration for Morris's literature, mind, and career.

ii. News from Nowhere as anarchist model

Praised as masterpiece by Shaw; the anarchist tradition; pure anarchist utopias are rare; political basis Victorian, not medieval; all major anarchist points embodied; "the revolution"; possibly deliberate misinterpretation by Shaw; the influence of "Bloody Sunday," 1887; Morris's turn to gradualism; "the whiff of dynamite"; anarchy of The Coming Race and Back to Methuselah less pure doctrinally.

iii. Salient points of News from Nowhere

Unexpected approval by Shaw; Morris unconcerned with evolution, Shaw with handicraft; individual freedom an ultimate good; Morris's catastrophic revolution rejected; temperance approved; underlying premises contrasted; Morris's work-pleasure dictum; Shaw's short-term agreement; hale longevity a superficial likeness; the mentor-catechist technique; crime and punishment; retributive justice scorned; love and mar-

Page

riage; sexual equality, tyranny of the family; emancipation from sex a good; sexual instinct and racial preservation; evolutionary aspects; education informal, permissive, self-developing.

iv. Conclusions

News from Nowhere makes Shavian sense on the short-term; shares honors with Gulliver's Travels and The Coming Race as an influence on the fourth and fifth plays.

CHAPTER VII BUTLER, WELLS, AND AFTER

240

i. Butler's influence

Erewhon part of a larger influence; Claude Bissell's proposed "pervasive and continuous" influence; Shaw's general references to Butler; Shaw's direct references to Erewhon; coincides with writing of Back to Methuselah; parallels compelling; "Musical Banks" and Haslam's career; Ydgrunism and Shaw's attack on conventionalism; crime as disease; the "Book of the Machine" and Shaw's Vitalism; the Erewhonians' apparent and the Ancients' real Laodiceanism.

ii. Wells's influence

Definition difficult; shared environment and ideas; often differed fundamentally; reluctant admiration mutual; A Modern Utopia as touchstone; reference to Wells in Back to Methuselah inconclusive; A Modern Utopia described; Wells posits evolving society, static, though improved, man; economic equality of the sexes; eugenic marriage; elimination of inferior individuals and races; individuality within a disciplined state is the ideal; elite leadership; anti-conventionality; Samurai are voluntary noblemen, ascetic, rulers,

breeders, mystics; differences in attitude weigh equally with similarities between the two authors.

iii. Utopias since Back to Methuselah

No new school arose; technology and totalitarianism threat too immediate; evolution overshadowed; sole hope in individual resistance, endurance; Aldous Huxley's Brave New World representative; Plato's Guardians become World Controllers; eugenics becomes a nightmare; universal conditioning of thoughts and reflexes; family disappears; the perfect narcotic, Soma; malcontents isolated on islands; traditional and scientific ingredients present but inverted; revolt, though futile, symbol of hope; mention of Shaw; resurgence of individualism problematic.

iv. Parting word

Back to Methuselah in the utopian mainstream; not an imitation of past models only; not a prototype for new models; in quieter times to come, its influence may wax again.

PREVIEW

Chapter I

Shaw's View of Utopianism

i

"Medieval society," wrote the ever trenchant Bernard Shaw, ". . . behaved very badly indeed in organizing itself so stupidly that a good life could be achieved by robbing and pilling."¹ In saying so, he not only epitomized his own belief that society is poorly and unjustly organized, but he also, unwittingly perhaps, exposed the root of the age-old impulse which has led men to write utopian literature.² Certainly, at least from Plato's time onward, sensitive and compassionate men have looked at the world and found stupid organization, cynicism, and social injustice everywhere. Reacting with sorrow and wrath, some set about to correct society by producing a picture of an ideal state, a vivid dramatization of what life could be like were it organized intelligently and humanely. Often enough a given utopia, thus produced, aimed to do nothing more than to satirize contemporary society and to shame men into abandoning those practices which made a social virtue of encouraging the strong to rob the weak.

¹Bernard Shaw, Major Barbara (London, 1947), p. 213.

²There are a number of good critical surveys of utopian literature. Lewis Mumford, The Story of Utopias (New York, 1922) and Marie Louise Berneri, Journey Through Utopia (Boston, 1951) are among the most useful. A more extensive listing is included in the bibliography.

More often, the tale was meant as an exemplum of the good life in a just society; as such it offered a blueprint for building a brave new world. In either case, the utopian scheme provided a scale against which to measure the shortcomings of a social organization whose institutions had developed haphazardly and whose outstanding characteristics were, all too often, callousness, brutality, ignorance, and injustice.

ii

Taking, then, "the good life in a just society" to be its sine qua non, fictional dramatization its usual vehicle, and comparison with contemporary society its method, the utopian tradition emerges as a recognizable genre in Western letters. Its range is quickly sketched. Plato's Republic, written early in the fourth century B. C., provides a reasonable starting point, although its very mass and finish argues that in itself it represents not only the extraordinary genius of its author but also the fruition of a well established tradition. Be that as it may, Republic is not the only example of utopianism among the classic writers; Plutarch, in the first century B. C., set down the Life of Lycurgus, the tale of a law-giver supposed to have lived some six hundred years earlier. Both works tend to resolve life into a stoically disciplined form. In the Middle Ages,

the tradition took on a specifically Christian ecclesiastical overtone which remained characteristic of the form well into modern times. Indeed, a high seriousness, religious in its fervor if not in its form, characterizes the bulk of the utopias up to the present time. The City of God (c. 412) of St. Augustine sets the style in the fifth century and it is continued in the most famous of the Renaissance utopian works, the one which gave the genre its name, the Utopia (1516) of Sir Thomas More. Though continuing the ecclesiastical tradition, albeit with some serious reservations, More's central concern was political, as the Greeks' had been. Utopia was followed by a number of carefully worked out enclave schemes, notable among them Campanella's City of the Sun (1623), Andreae's Christianopolis (1619), and Bacon's New Atlantis (1627). From Bacon onward, the genre flourished and scarcely more is needed here than to say that social concern tends increasingly to receive more emphasis than religion, and to append a catalogue of landmark works. Among the latter are: Winstanley's The Law of Freedom (1652), Harrington's Oceana (1656), de Foigny's A New Discovery of Terra Incognita Australis (1676), book four of Swift's Gulliver's Travels (1735), Cabet's Voyage to Icaria (1840), Lytton's The Coming Race (1871),

Butler's Erewhon (1872), Bellamy's Looking Backward (1888), Hertzka's Freeland (1890), Morris's News from Nowhere (1891), Wells's Modern Utopia (1905), Huxley's Brave New World (1932) and Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451 (1953).

iii

In 1921 Shaw contributed his play cycle, Back to Methuselah, to the venerable utopian tradition. He did so consciously, and he looked upon his contribution not merely as being in the tradition, but, for reasons which will be discussed at some length later, as bringing new validity to the genre.¹ For all that, Shaw nevertheless appears to have been acquainted with, or at least interested in, only limited portions of the tradition, past and contemporary. Of those utopias which he knew, some he rejected, some he ignored, and from the rest he borrowed shamelessly as befits a man of genius.

The following chapters will examine specific utopian writings whose relationship to Back to Methuselah can be definitely established, plus a few which were known to Shaw, but which he rejected. It remains in this chapter to trace Shaw's general attitude toward utopianism and to sample contemporary criticism of his con-

¹Bernard Shaw, Everybody's Political What's What? (London, 1950), p. 286.

tribution.

Shaw wrote very little about the utopian literature before he wrote Back to Methuselah, and that little tended to be scornful. Shaw held that a successful socialistic scheme had to have certain qualities, among them a workable political mechanism and suitable human raw material conditioned by rigorous discipline. Social and political schemes which lacked these elements he habitually attacked pejoratively as "utopian." Thus, in an essay entitled "The Climate and Soil for a Labor Party," Shaw condemned pre-Fabian Socialism as "utopian" precisely because it lacked a "political and bureaucratic environment."¹ In the same essay he emphasized his view that no freedom is to be gained without first embracing a period of regimentation. Again, in an unpublished essay, "Technical Socialism," Shaw congratulated the best of the meliorist thinkers, who sought social evolution as distinct from revolution, for recognizing the need for conscious cooperation, but damned them as "Utopian Socialists" for failing to

¹Bernard Shaw, "The Climate and Soil for a Labor Party," British Museum Additional MS 50667, f. 307. Internal evidence establishes the date of this unpublished essay as 1918, most conclusively through a reference to Bertrand Russell's imprisonment at the time for his anti-militaristic activities.

recognize that precious few men are capable of conscious cooperation, and he dismissed them, therefore, as ineffectual dreamers in both their theory and practice.¹ Nor were the meliorists alone in their failure to provide socially disciplined people. Shaw observed that the socialistic colonies, for instance, provided the political and social environment which he demanded, but failed signally to provide suitable human materials. In the course of an address entitled "Socialism and Human Nature" which he delivered at a Fabian Society meeting in Bloomsbury Hall, he remarked, regarding Owen's New Harmony settlement, "if one and all the thousand persons assembled there had possessed the qualities [Owen] wished them to possess, there would have been no necessity for his vain exertions to form a community; because there would of necessity have been brotherly love, peace, and plenty."² At first blush "brotherly love" seems far afield from "socialistic discipline." Perhaps so. Still, brotherly love, not self-

¹Bernard Shaw, "Technical Socialism," British Museum Additional MS 50665, ff. 9-11. Two essays bear this title, one in longhand, the other typed. The reference here is to the longhand manuscript. While neither is dated, contents and style suggest a dating of about 1890-1900.

²Bernard Shaw, British Museum Additional MS 50700, ff. 2-4. This unpublished speech is dated September 19, 1890.

centeredness, is the virtue from which voluntary discipline can be drawn. It is at once the basis and the goal of socialistic comradeship.

Shaw did not, however, put a blanket condemnation on all unsuccessful theorists and movements. A case in point is that of Ferdinand Lassalle and the Revolution of 1848 in Germany. In his unpublished "Lassalle Notebooks" (1891-1895) Shaw quoted Graham Wallas as saying that this revolution was a "half Republican, half Utopian movement."¹ Although the revolution proved abortive, Shaw defended Lassalle's role stoutly. Lassalle had proposed to establish a socialistically advanced state based, like Hertzka's Freeland a half century later, upon freely organized productive associations of laborers which would, with capital furnished by the state, compete with private industry. As the state's capital was to be derived from the taxation of private industries, the levelling tendency of the scheme is immediately apparent. Shaw commented, with acid approval for Lassalle and scorn for the dilettante, that "many persons are quite ready to assent to the theory [of

¹Bernard Shaw, "Lassalle Notebooks," British Museum Additional MS 50705, f. 332.

classless society] without accepting any of the implications which were obvious to [Lassalle]."¹ Lassalle thus, according to Shaw, did not fall into the misapprehension, on the one hand, that the classless state would be a "thoroughly business-like commercial Utopia" of the middle-classes, nor, on the other, that it would degenerate into a sensual and luxurious orgy.

Closely allied to, sometimes indistinguishable from, the utopian socialism which Shaw found to be so visionary and contemptible is the romantic utopia. Shaw reserved a particularly hot corner in hell for the romanticist, though he himself did not fail to employ the techniques of romanticism when they suited his purposes. One thinks of The Devil's Disciple and Captain Brassbound's Conversion, for instance. In the preface to Plays Unpleasant Shaw described romance "as the great heresy to be swept off from art and life--as the food of modern pessimism and the bane of modern self-respect."² His attitude led him to declare, in an article published in 1897 in The Saturday Review, that "the present transition from romantic to sincerely hu-

¹Ibid., f. 518.

²Bernard Shaw, Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant (London, 1931), p. xiii.

man drama is a revolutionary one."¹ Romance, then, was to be scotched wherever it reared its inane head and its invasion of serious works was to be regretted and repelled. In the preface to Three Plays for Puritans, written in 1901, Shaw attacked "the fool's paradise of popular romance," and cited specific instances to illustrate his points. H. G. Wells's War of Two Worlds was held up as an example of a first-rate story on a "scientific plane" which had been ruined by the unnecessary addition of a romantic love story. Having demolished his fellow socialist and Englishman, Shaw turned his critical fire upon "an American novelist,² recently deceased, [who] made a hit some years ago by compiling a Bostonian Utopia from the prospectuses of little bands of devout communists who have from time to time, since the days of Fourier and Owen, tried to establish millennial colonies outside our commercial civilization." Shaw observed that "even in this economic Utopia we have the inevitable love affair. The hero, waking up in the distant future from a miraculous sleep meets a Boston

¹Bernard Shaw, "Romance in its Last Ditch," Our Theatre in the Nineties (London, 1932), III, 225.

²Most likely Edward Bellamy whose Looking Backward fits Shaw's description of a "Boston Utopia." Bellamy died in 1898, three years before Three Plays for Puritans was published.

young lady provided expressly for him to fall in love with."¹ In Back to Methuselah itself there is essentially none of this; such love affairs as there are are parodies and burlesques: Savvy and Haslam, Burge-Lubin and the Negress, Strephon and Chloe. Shaw was not adverse to romantic love, a theme which he could handle on occasion with great, if ironic, sensitivity. He enjoyed and exploited it so long as it could be treated as youthful infatuation or as an organic part of the play--say as a tool of the Life Force, as in Man and Superman, or as a part of a psychological study, as in Candida. He balked at the sentimental love affair when used for its own sake either as the major theme of a play or as a digressive, gratuitous secondary action.

While Shaw, in theory, approved of utopian schemes only if they were workable and were provided with a means of implementation, he nevertheless responded warmly to the wholly fantastic, but critically purposeful, satiric utopias. Thus his allusions to Butler's Erewhon,

¹Bernard Shaw, Three Plays for Puritans (London, 1931), p. xviii. It might well be noted that up to this point, Shaw was factually correct, but, his memory playing him false, he went on to introduce an episode quite apocryphal to Bellamy's novel. Shaw described the episode thus: "Women have by that time given up wearing skirts; but [the heroine], to spare [the narrator's] delicacy, gets one out of a museum of antiquities to wear in his presence until he is hardened to the customs of the new age."