Faux Personne [your name here]

Dr. Sparks

English 100W

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Research Proposal: A Capek-Shaw Conversation

I am investigating a “conversation” of literary works between Karel Capek and Bernard Shaw focused on their different ideas about utopia and social progress. My overall thesis question is how their ideas on this related to each other and how they might have influenced each other. This is for an audience interested in Shaw, though it would also interest those who study utopian thought. Both of these writers reworked stories and characters from Christian holy books to make their points about 20th-century social progress (or lack thereof). Based on my preliminary research, it looks like they originally came to write works about these ideas independently, but when they became more aware of each other’s relevant works, they started to respond to each other’s ideas more directly. I want to offer a context for their interchange of ideas, particularly for readers who are interested in these two writers and/or the question of whether human society is moving towards a better, more just world or towards self-destruction. The specific literary works I’ll focus on are these: *Back to Methuselah* and *Farfetched Fables* for Shaw’s side and *R.U.R., The Makroupolous Secret,* and *Adam the Creator* for Capek.

At this point my research questions include these:

* When did they become aware of each other’s relevant works?
* Did they actually contact each other, meet in person?
* What was Capek’s religious background? Did his religious ideas change?
* What were Capek’s political views? Did his ideas change while he was writing these works?
* Did Capek’s ideas/works influence Shaw? If so, how?

Annotated Bibliography

Capek, Karel. *Letters from England.* Translated by Paul Sever, Doubleday, 1928.

This **book** contains letters Capek wrote while visiting England in 1924, four years after his *RUR* debuted in New York and Shaw finished *Back to Methuselah*. This very personal account of Capek’s travels includes a description of his first meeting with Shaw, plus Capek’s wonderful hand drawings of Shaw (and of other people and sites). This book also gives Capek’s impressions of the English at home and his musings on some art exhibits he saw while there. There are also some passages about Capek’s ideas about human “progress” and our limited possibilities.Although the influence of a translator can’t be discounted, this book offers the most direct possible insights into Capek’s ideas about Shaw and Shaw’s ideas, particularly in relation to some of the utopian and anti-utopian works they had written so far: *RUR*  and *Back to Methuselah*. Because it is so subjective and personal, it gives the reader a clear sense of Capek’s personality.I can use this to assess Capek’s personal views on the idea of utopia and about Shaw and his works to date. Some passages about the inherent limits of human perfectibility are very quotable and relevant to the question of what formed the basis of his anti-utopian stance, even before his country fell under Hitler’s shadow.

**Your own annotated bibliography, of course, will have 4 more like this, all arranged alphabetically. Do NOT include the citations for the other 5 sources on your working bibliography.**

Notes:

1. **About the research proposal part**: Because I already knew a lot about Shaw, and because I was writing for Shaw scholars, most of my questions were about the less famous writer, Capek. Your research might be more balanced between the 2 or more writers in the conversation you are investigating.
2. **About the Annotated Bibliography part**: Because I wanted to know what these writers were thinking about each other, I needed to use some “primary sources”—those written by the writers I was researching but not the “main” primary sources, the plays each wrote as part of this “literary conversation.” Similarly, your annotated bibliography can contain primary sources of the first sort, but don’t annotate the main works you are investigating (as we discussed in class). The other sources are “secondary”: things written by scholars *about* the two writers in this study. If I had time, I’d write a sample of one of those, but I don’t. Sorry.