

The Earth as Hell : John Bull's Other Island

" Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscrib'd
In one self place; for where we are is hell
And where hell is, must we ever be. "

Marlowe, *Dr Faustus*

If we are to believe Shaw's public pronouncements on the play then *John Bull's Other Island* was written to remove mutual misunderstanding between the English and the Irish. Shaw had no doubt that it was an ambitious task and that he was equal to his aspirations :

Just consider my subject—the destiny of nations ! Consider my characters—personages who stalk on the stage incarnating millions of real, living, suffering men and women. Good heavens ! I have had to get all England and Ireland into three hours and a quarter. I have shown the Englishman to the Irishman and the Irishman to the Englishman, the Protestant to the Catholic and the Catholic to the Protestant.¹

Comedy traditionally deals with type characters, and Shaw claims that his characters typify historical forces, so his comedy is not about a fragmentary plot but is an attempt to capture the essence of history. Yet, since his subject is not merely a record of facts but the destiny of nations, he is not merely a historian but an oracle as well. It did not

occur to him that he was singularly unsuited to the role because the teacher, the disinterested historian and the orator stand outside their subject, at a certain distance from it, without which they would be deprived of the necessary perspective. Shaw, on the other hand, was himself one of the very Irishmen he wanted to "show" to the Englishman, he was an actor and a sufferer; his spatial detachment from the theatre of events was more than neutralised by his emotional proximity. His own bias and involvement would never allow him the detachment without which an ironic comedy is not possible.

The very contrast between the tone of confident detachment evident in the preface and the anguished partisanship revealed in the play could itself be a capital subject of irony. The public posture of amused superiority vis-à-vis the Englishman is perhaps one of the most fundamental Shavian characteristics. The most ubiquitous Shavian stereotype is the foolish Englishman, the most representative Englishman is the insanely chivalrous Nelson, the archetypal Irishman is the no-nonsense Duke of Wellington. The Irishman is necessarily an adult, the quintessential Englishman, like Peter Pan, for ever refuses to grow up : "I take care to live in England , and on the whole I think I like Englishmen better than Irishmen. But I recognize that an Irishman is a grown-up person ; I do not consider an Englishman that. I cannot."²

The Englishman's material success , too evident to be wished away, is explained as the result of his stupidity :

The stupidity peculiar to the Englishman , which prevents him from knowing what he is doing , is really a stroke of genius on his part....Cromwell said no man goes further than the man who doesn't know where he is going ; and in that you have the whole secret of English success.³

So assiduously did Shaw foist upon the public consciousness the picture of his funny bone being constantly tickled by the amiable idiot known to the rest of the world as the Englishman that few suspected the possibility of the existence of restless nervousness behind such elegant panache , few at any rate, were ready to have their attention diverted from the familiar refrain of his utterances to tell-tale occasional revelations that nearly gave the show away. On rare occasions Shaw would admit that he himself was the deluded victim of the myth perpetuated by himself. He would even confess that Irishmen were greater racists than Hitler , and while admitting that they suffered from delusions of racial grandeur he maintained : " I can only say that [such illusion] exists, and I share it inspite of reason and commonsense."⁴ In the same article he pooh-poohed the hope of England assimilating the Irish, asserting that culturally the Irish were invariably separatists. In an

article written in 1913 Shaw took a position that was very different from Larry Doyle's cosmopolitanism and revealed that the pain and shame arising out of national humiliation was the common inheritance of every Irishman :

The world seems to have made up its mind that self-consciousness is a very undesirable thing and Nationalism a very fine thing. This is not a very intelligent conclusion ; for obviously Nationalism is nothing but a mode of self-consciousness , and a very aggressive one at that. It is , I think altogether to Ireland's credit that she is extremely tired of the subject of herself. Even patriotism , which in England is drunken jollity when it is not a Jewish rhapsody, is in Ireland like the genius of Jeremiah, a burning fire shut up in the bones , a pain, a protest against shame and defeat, a morbid condition which a healthy man must shake off if he is to keep sane. If you want to bore an Irishman play him an Irish melody or introduce him to another Irishman. Abroad , however , it is a distinction to be an Irishman and accordingly the Irish in England flaunt their nationality.⁵

In the passage quoted above one can find the clue to the character of the man who, at the age of twenty , had had enough of his country : " Thus when I left Dublin I left (a few private friendships apart) no society that did not disgust me."⁶ He was reluctant to pay another visit to it

and yet remained fiercely Irish outside Ireland. He had to leave his country to retain his regard for it. Irishness for Shaw was not a feeling of affection for Ireland, it was a means of retaining his separateness in England, and of gratifying his illusions and fantasies. It satisfied his need for the feeling of superiority and deflected the feeling of mistrust and hostility that he felt in an uncongenial world. Thus the trial and imprisonment of Oscar Wilde, a paradigmatic example of the conflict between extreme individualism and conformist social order became transformed in Shaw's eyes into the conflict between a tyrannical England and an oppressed Ireland: "Wilde shouldered every disgrace and every torment with which England burdened him...From the grave Wilde still makes fools of them, these enemies of his country and of his originality."⁷

During the First World War, in a letter to the Freeman's Journal, Dublin, Shaw urged Irishmen to support the War as friends of France, not of England. He mentioned "the old injuries we have suffered from England" and hoped that the Home Rule Act would liberate Irishmen from the "political tyranny" of England:

It is France that is holding the West against Potsdam and all that Potsdam means to Western liberty; and it is French soil, on which so many famous Irishmen found refuge from British tyranny, that is being drenched in

French blood in our defence.⁸

In an unsigned review of Robert Oliver's *Unnoticed Analogies : a Talk on the Irish Question* Shaw ruled out as early as in 1888 the possibility of the kind of internationalism that Larry Doyle ostensibly represents in *John Bull's Other Island*. He ridiculed the idea of internationalism without prior national independence. In Shaw's play Doyle tells Broadbent that metallurgical chemistry and civil engineering are nothing if not international and that he believes that national flags and national frontiers are a nuisance.⁹ Shaw knows that Doyle is evasive : nationalism is not a national solution , it may cause more harm than good, but it is the dogmatic faith of every self-respecting man that to be a free proletarian is better than to be a comfortable slave. For Shaw nationalism is the necessary rung of the ladder of international federation :

[Man] knows by instinct that if his foot missed that one rung of the ladder , he would not reach the higher rung , but would rather be precipitated into the abyss....And as the slave destroyed great hierarchies in his fight for freedom , so the conquered subject races will destroy great empires when their time comes, if the empires persist in opposing them.¹⁰

All too predictably then , Roger Casement, prosecuted and

hanged as a traitor for working for the defeat of Great Britain in the First World War , became a rebel instead of a traitor in the eyes of Shaw. In a letter that the *Times* refused to publish Shaw observed :

The word traitor as applied to the rebel has always been a mere vituperation from the days of Wallace to those of Edward Carson and Sir Fredrick Smith....Certainly no one outside Great Britain will have any desire to apply it , even for vituperative purpose to Casement.¹¹

Once the surface is scratched , the seemingly immutable plaster colossus gives away the secret that he has, not only human flesh and human blood but also human bones ——— bones that have a burning fire shut up in them.

It is extremely important to indicate the nature of the relationship between Shaw and the world he creates in *John Bull's other Island*. The play is the work of a man whose attempt to study the relationship between the two countries as the interaction between a blundering baby in the guise of an adult and an impish adult ever willing to supply an extra yard to the sanguine fool's long rope is sternly rebuffed by the genius of Jeremiah, by the burning fire shut up in the bones; by the "feeling of pain, shame and defeat." The play is something which almost all critical observation has failed to notice— it is the work of a man who feels

defeated and tries hard not to recognize the defeat. The prospect of a comedy by Jeremiah is a bold imaginative feat, bolder even than what the Shavian imagination would permit. Consequently the writer of the preface professing strong affection for John Bull¹² and the Jeremiah in Shaw refuse to recognise each other. This pathetic dissociation of sensibility is fully reflected in Thomas Broadbent, who becomes the symbol of the conquering Englishman.

How reluctant Shaw was to probe his own mind becomes evident from a remark in the preface that the combination of Broadbent and Doyle has been very fruitful : "I should say, myself, that the combination was probably much more effective than either of the partners would have been alone ".¹³

Shaw wants his readers to believe that a happy end can be attained when Ireland and England understand each other:left to himself Broadbent is bound to waste his vitality and energy, left to themselves the Irish farmers with all their intelligence and wit cannot prevent themselves from being swallowed up by the Syndicate. In the Epistle Dedicatory of *Man and Superman* Shaw argues that the efficiency of John Bull is far from absolute:

...there is no future for men, however brimming with crude vitality, who are neither intelligent nor politically educated enough to be Socialists. So do not misunderstand me in the other direction either : if I

appreciate the vital qualities of the Englishman as I appreciate the vital qualities of the bee, I do not guarantee the Englishman against being, like the bee (or the Cananite) smoked out and unloaded of his honey by a being inferior to himself in simple acquisitiveness, combativeness, and fecundity, but superior to him in imagination and cunning.¹⁴

In *John Bull's other Island* Shaw supposedly shows three patterns : the pattern of the bee-like efficiency of Broadbent, the pattern of futile imagination and cunning in people like Barney Doran and Tim Haffigan, and the pattern of successful interaction in the combination of Doyle and Broadbent. Peter Keegan as the *raisonneur* cuts across the divisions, but even he, the embodiment of the genius of Ireland, underscores the pathetic isolation of vision without power. The reading of the play as a Shavian comedy rests on the validity of such patterns, and inevitably Shaw pressed for their acceptance when he trumpeted the effectiveness of the Broadbent-Doyle combination as a union of complementary forces.

Perhaps Shaw's own attempt to rise above the sense of national defeat with the aid of national stereotypes is mainly responsible for the disruption of the pattern. He attempted to superimpose another pattern over the one just mentioned. In the new scheme Broadbent and Doyle are to represent Nelson and the Duke of Wellington respectively—

the archetypal Englishman and the archetypal Irishman in the eyes of Shaw. ¹⁵

The important thing about Broadbent and Doyle is that they do not complement each other ; in possessing certain qualities they overlap, as to the rest they diverge completely. Broadbent and Doyle are both modernisers as civil engineers, and capitalists as share-holders of the Syndicate. They do not contrast in efficiency of action, but like Nelson and Wellington (in Shaw's version) are temperamentally poles apart : one is deliriously sentimental, the other is unperturbably sane. The polarisation of efficiency and intelligence cannot be said to have constituted the *leitmotif* of *John Bull's Other Island* because in that case the encounter between the Syndicate of Broadbent and Doyle on the one hand and the people of Rosscullen on the other would run counter to the pattern revealed through the encounter of Broadbent with Rosscullen.

As a successful civil engineer and member of the Syndicate, Doyle epitomises, like Broadbent, the strength of modernism and capitalism, yet the play leaves us in no doubt that Doyle must be included in the list of men thwarted and defeated by Broadbent. If that is true then critics such as McDowell and Wisenthal,¹⁶ who have discovered in the play not only comic technique but also a comic denouement in the synthesis of the so-called English and Irish qualities are

mistaken because for the play to be a comedy in this sense the alliance between Broadbent and Doyle must be able to demonstrate its fruitfulness.

When Shaw speaks of Doyle's loyalty to and affection for Broadbent and when Doyle mentions that as civil engineers their business "is to join countries not to separate them,"¹⁷ Shaw and Doyle hope that the Syndicate is the bridge that Broadbent and Doyle have built across St. George's channel. Doyle thinks that metallurgical chemistry, civil engineering and the Syndicate — modern technology and modern organisation— have brought the world on their doorstep. It is inevitable therefore that the small world of Rosscullen — the world of the eighteenth century — will lose out to their world and be swallowed by it. In this sense the defeat of Rosscullen is the victory of the dream of integration and progress : the twentieth century is an advance on the eighteenth. A process which is the vehicle of this progress must bode well inspite of the sundry pin-pricks and sighs.

It is probable that this is how Shaw consciously viewed the play in which he claimed to have packed the history of England and Ireland, for the ground plan, the prefatory remarks, and even the exposition of the play point to that direction, but the fire in the bones of Jeremiah consumed the pattern and threw up, as the play progressed, a different vision in which Doyle had to bear, like the other

Irishmen in the play, the burden of pain and defeat. Viewed through the eyes of Jeremiah the union of Broadbent and Doyle — the union of England and Ireland — is merely the annexation of the latter by the former.

Perhaps the equation is best exemplified by the outcome of the Doyle-Nora-Broadbent relationship. The conquest of Nora Reilly by Broadbent is as paradigmatic as Matthew Haffigan's piece of land being swallowed up by him. The identical significance of the two acts is driven home by Doyle himself when, after losing Nora to Broadbent, he confesses to her : "Nora, dear, dont you understand that I'm an Irishmen and he's an Englishman. He wants you; and he grabs you. I want you ;and I quarrel with you and have to go on wanting you."¹⁸ Broadbent grabs Nora from Larry Doyle, just as he plans to grab Larry Doyle's father's land by lending him more money than he can repay.

That the relation between Broadbent and Doyle is not equal is evident in the resolution of matters regarding which the two differ — Doyle does not wish to foreclose the mortgage of Nick Lestrangle and drive the latter out of his hearth and home ; he does not want his father to fall into the debt trap of the Syndicate; when he cannot prevent the pauperisation of Matthew Haffigan, he wishes to find a situation for him in the Syndicate. In all these instances he is thwarted and in every case it is Broadbent who has things his own way.

The incidents in Rosscullen explain why Doyle was reluctant in the first place to return to Ireland : he was reluctant to leave the haven of illusion. In London, he could pretend to forget the pain of defeat since the partnership with Broadbent invested him with a false sense of victory. In London he could pretend that he and Broadbent belonged to the same world, a world that had passed Rosscullen by. He has such convulsive aversion to Rosscullen because it rubs salt into his wounded heart, it reminds him everything he would like to forget. His diatribe against Ireland is delivered "with fierce shivering self-contempt"¹⁹; when he calls the people of Ireland "poor slovenly useless devils" he drops "his voice like a man making some shameful confidence."²⁰ Like the people who fill him with shuddering disgust, he too cannot bear reality. Consequently he cannot bear Rosscullen, the geographical expression of that naked reality.

To discover an almost similar situation of a man running away from the painful memory of national defeat into a self-created world of illusory victory, one has to go to Doyle's creator, who has this to say about Dublin :

In 1876, I had had enough of Dublin. James Joyce in his Ulysses has described, with a fidelity so ruthless that the book is hardly bearable, the life that Dublin offers to its young men, or, if you prefer to put it the other way, that its young men offer to Dublin...

Thus when I left Dublin I left (a few private friendships apart) no society that did not disgust me. To this day my sentimental regard for Ireland does not include its capital.²¹

Doyle , like his creator, is disgusted by Ireland because in Ireland he is reminded that his place is with Doran and Haffigan, not with Broadbent. He reacts to Peter Keegan with the same violence, and for the same reasons. Keegan forces Doyle to face the truth. The outward difference between the two men and the fact that they reveal less than their best manners to each other obscures the fact that they come to the same conclusion about their motherland. Keegan calls it hell but his vision is prefigured by Doyle when he tells Broadbent in a confessional tone that an Irishman cannot be religious : "The inspired Churchman ... is sent away empty, while the poor village priest that gives him a miracle or a sentimental story of a saint has cathedrals built for him out of the pennies of the poor."²² Doyle knows that the envy, the cynical laughter and the faithlessness of the Irishmen brutalise them until they are left with nothing but drunken orgiastic laughter, which they use as an armour against reality and as an expression of universal hatred. All that Keegan adds to Doyle's findings is that he uses a religious term to describe Rosscullen, he calls it hell. .

I have said that under the strain of two sets of attitudes which were diametrically opposite, certain parts of Shaw's consciousness became dissociated from others. This split is most acutely reflected in Broadbent. I have also argued that the real nature of Broadbent's relationship with Ireland, of which his relationship with Doyle is an integral component, rules out the possibility of a comic resolution. This has to be explained because Broadbent is traditionally seen as a sanguine, bumptious nonsense-crammed romantic fool overflowing with friendliness towards all and sundry, from Tim Haffgan to Peter Keegan. For instance, Sengupta finds in Broadbent credulity and "cheerful bumptiousness",²³ McDowell finds his hypocrisy unintentional,²⁴ Valency sees him as a "likeable man of unusual obtuseness, a romantic idealist."²⁵ Even A.M. Gibbs, who is willing to take cognizance of his harmful activities, finds an appropriate metaphor for him in the pig accompanying him in the disastrous journey. To him Broadbent, in spite of his instinctive greed, is piggishly simple.²⁶ Shaw does not draw Broadbent, as he does Doyle or Keegan, by getting under his skin. But if his character is a broad caricature it is not sketched by blowing up just one overwhelming trait—— asininity. It is true that Doyle says that an ordinarily intelligent donkey is brighter than Broadbent,²⁷ and even in this Doyle is seconded by Keegan²⁸

but both men clearly see the other side of his character : one likens him to the caterpillar ²⁹ and the other to the devil.³⁰ The difference lies not so much in their perceptions as in their idioms. Doyle, a friend of Broadbent, and prone to finding more indulgent metaphors, nevertheless finds his equivalent in a greedy parasitical insect. The jesting manner of Doyle and the grotesqueness of the simile tends to obscure the fact that this ugly creature is a killer insect. Doyle is fully alive to Broadbent's predatory nature :

Well the Englishman does what the caterpillar does. He instinctively makes himself look like a fool, and eats up all the real fools at his ease while his enemies let him alone and laugh at him for being a fool like the rest. Oh, nature is cunning ! cunning !³¹

Thus, according to the man who knows him better than any one else does, Broadbent is only superficially foolish, he is instinctively cunning.

When we remember that in Shaw's plays the instinctive or unconscious self of a character is the real self and not the conscious one — a truth revealed to Dick Dudgeon, to Anderson, to Lavinia, to Margaret Knox, to Blanco Posnet among others — it becomes clear that the superficial image of Broadbent hides his unprincipled rapacity as the superficial image of Julius Caesar as a middle-aged dandy hides his real greatness, or the ruffianly exterior of

Blanco Posnet hides his instinctive goodness.

The separation of the two layers of Broadbent's character is not carried through. By the time the play enters the last act, Broadbent is changed into a consciously cunning schemer. He proves far shrewder than Larry Doyle, who forbids him to drive through Rosscullen with Haffigan's pig, thinking that that would make Broadbent the laughing stock of all Rosscullen. He has not reckoned with the fact that the proposed drive is a conscious ploy. Broadbent can afford to reply that he will enjoy the joke more than anyone else because he is confident that he will have the last laugh while converting the laughter of Rosscullen into votes. He does not mind being a fool about Tim Haffigan's phoney brogue because he has nothing to lose from it, nor does he mind being bilked of five pounds in a show of generosity that finally works to his own advantage. But once the net closes in on his prey he shows no mercy, neither to Nick Lestrangle nor to Matthew Haffigan. When Doyle assures an agonized Keegan that Haffigan will be absorbed in the Syndicate in some capacity or other, Broadbent hurriedly intervenes to observe that nothing of that sort will happen because a man above forty is not worth keeping. He is content to let Haffigan migrate to America or to die. Of course he does not like the mention of death, though his fastidiousness reaches as far as the word, not the fact.

Shaw's reference to Cromwell's words ³² as the clue to

Broadbent's success is singularly inappropriate because Cromwell said that no man goes as far as the one who does not know where he is going whereas Broadbent carries the route map of his destination with him. He lends Matthew Haffigan and Cornelius Doyle large sums of money in a sinisterly calculative manner; worse still, he has a master plan of ruining the share-holders of the proposed hotel and transferring their shares to himself for a song. Broadbent is, therefore, far from an innocent bumpkin.

After comparing the Englishman's vitality to that of the bee in the Epistle Dedicatory of *Man and Superman*, Shaw says in his habitually superior tone that he does not "guarantee the Englishman against being... smoked out and unloaded of his honey."³³ Yet the play which he has dedicated exclusively to the study of Anglo-Irish relations shows one Irishman after another being smoked out by the Englishman until he has the entire honeycomb— or Rosscullen— safely in his bag.

It is clear that the superficial and the deeper layers of Shaw's consciousness both played their parts in the making of Broadbent but the reluctance of the two levels to recognize each other led to the strange incongruity in Broadbent's character. Shaw probably did not realize the ironical significance of Doyle's words when the latter expressed his impatience with the head of Broadbent "with all its ideas in watertight compartments, and all the compartments warranted impervious to anything it does not

suit you to understand."³⁴ He did not probably realize that the observation was as valid of himself as of Broadbent, for the imperviousness of Broadbent's compartments reflected that of his creator. It was the imperviousness of a man who, inspite of his instinctive knowledge that the genius of Jeremiah was not suited to comedy attempted to write a comedy of manners on Anglo-Irish relations on the untenable assumption that twenty-eight years of residence and a few years of fame in London could turn the Jeremiah in him into Punch.

III

Shaw considered the idea of including *Man and Superman*, *John Bull's Other Island* and *Major Barbara* in a single volume for the German edition under the title "Comedies of Religion and Science".³⁵ He probably saw the three plays as a trilogy when he spoke of "a group of three plays of exceptional weight and magnitude on which the reputation of the author as a serious dramatist was first established and still mainly rests."³⁶

Man and Superman gives an exposition of the religion of the Life Force, *Major Barbara* presents the gospel of St. Andrew Undershaft, but the prophet of the religion that can be discovered in *John Bull's other Island* is a very different kind of man from Shaw's Don Juan and Andrew Undershaft.

Don Juan uses words as a champion fencer uses his foil, he does not let the Devil draw blood even once; with a terrifying display of power Undershaft bulldozes through his opponents and installs his twin idols — blood and iron — in the sanctum sanctorum. Compared with them Keegan is a defeated man : he has been unfrocked and is pitied as a madman. Having none of the invincible qualities of the other two, he has walked the path of suffering in the course of his religious quest. Therefore the heaven and the hell that he discovers is significantly different from the picture of heaven and hell painted in *Man and Superman*. The heaven of *Man and Superman* is a state of mind and hence a purely subjective and closed world. Closed, that is, to men and women who cannot bear an eternity of contemplation, though a Plato or a Pascal or a Shaw can, when he is dissatisfied with the actual world, find comfortable refuge in that heaven. A necessary condition for residence permit in that heaven is that the applicant must be above appetites and yearnings. He must be free from the infection of love and beauty. If he satisfies these conditions he can always find open season there, for that heaven is not in the least dependent on the condition of other men.

Peter Keegan's heaven is very different. Unlike Don Juan's, which can be realized in isolation in the realm of the intellect , Keegan's heaven , existing in his dreams, is a country. The very fact that it has a geographical

dimension means that it can be realised only in communion with others :

In my dreams it is a country where the state is the Church and the Church the people : three in one and one in three. It is a commonwealth in which work is play and play is life: three in one and one in three. It is a temple in which the priest is the worshipper and the worshipper the worshipped : three in one and one in three. It is a godhead in whom all life is human and all humanity divine : three in one and one in three. It is, in short, the dream of a madman. ³⁷

Tanner and Juan would probably agree with Keegan that his heaven is the dream of a madman, because to anyone believing in the heaven of *Man and Superman*, Keegan's heaven would appear to be an impossible synthesis of Roman Catholic idolatry, Comtean sentimentality and woolly Brahmanic mysticism. To the worshipper of the Life Force the worship of life would seem ridiculous. And it is here that the uniqueness of Keegan as a *raisonneur* lies. Tanner and Juan belong to the mainstream of Shavian thought ; their religion has its origin in the novels and its most 'spectacular expression in *Back to Methuselah*. We hardly come across another Shavian protagonist of such immense importance who carries his bleeding wound about him and is so frankly a defeated man. The consciousness that he is living in hell

is the price he has to pay for unashamedly loving his country and its people.

There is one important similarity between the heaven of *Man and Superman* and that of *John Bull's Other Island* : both exist only in dreams. The disillusionment on waking up is greater in *John Bull's other Island*, for once the dream is broken the distance between earth and hell vanishes. The reality of hell is reinforced by the fact that both the Shavian personae in the play, Doyle and Keegan, have convergent views on the subject. It is Doyle who first sounds the note that Ireland is hell:

Oh, the dreaming ' the dreaming ' the torturing heart-scalding, never satisfying dreaming, dreaming, dreaming, dreaming ... An Irishman's imagination never lets him alone ... but it makes him that he cannot face reality nor deal with it, nor handle it nor conquer it : he can only sneer at them that do, and [bitterly, at Broadbent] be "agreeable to strangers," like a good-for-nothing woman on the streets... And all the while there goes on a horrible, mischievous laughter. When you are young, You exchange vile stories with them; and so youre too futile to be able to help or cheer them, you chaff and sneer and taunt for not doing the thing you darent do yourself. And all the time you laugh ! laugh ! laugh ! eternal derision, eternal envy, eternal folly, eternal fouling and staining and

Don Juan says in *Man and Superman* that "hell is the home of the unreal", the place where "there are no hard facts to contradict you."³⁹ The wall separating hell from earth, not very strong in *Man and Superman*, has caved in in *John Bull's other Island*, for there is no doubt that Doyle mentions hell without naming it and Keegan merely confirms his findings when, responding to the obscene mirth of the Irish peasants at the accident involving Broadbent and the pig, he remarks: "It is hell: it is hell. Nowhere else could such a scene be a burst of happiness for the people."⁴⁰ A little later he elaborates his point:

This world, Sir, is very clearly a place of torment and penance, a place where the fool flourishes and the good and wise are hated and persecuted, a place where men and women torture one another in the name of love ... Now, Sir, there is one place of horror and torment known to my religion; and that place is hell. Therefore it is plain to me that this earth of ours must be hell...⁴¹

The paradox of *John Bull's other Island* is that its hell is built on laughter. This is a paradox because Shaw is the modern St. George who uses laughter as his sword to slay the dragon of ignorance and stupidity. Trefusis, Bluntschli, Caesar and Undershaft use laughter to overcome their adversaries or to convert them. "My way of joking is to tell

the truth. It's the funniest joke in the world," says Keegan.⁴² But everyone else uses the joke to evade the truth. Barney Doran and company cannot bear truth and resort to laughter. Doyle knows that he cannot bear truth and seeks consolation in sarcasm. Even Shaw, the professed champion of unbeglamoured truth, laughs as a canny Irishman at the gullible Englishman in the preface though the play points to the opposite direction; Keegan is the only person who can bear the truth, and even he has to pretend to be a madman.

Broadbent, the *alazon*, the butt of everyone's ridicule, turns the tables on everyone, including his creator. It is he who makes the taste of every joke so sour. The laughter that makes the play so funny is the same laughter that makes its hell so vivid. Those who laugh at Broadbent, both inside the play as characters, and outside it as members of the audience, have no suspicion that he is the deadly caterpillar. Those who laugh insanely with Barney Doran and others at the accident do not realise that their laughter is the sign of their impotence, and the sign of their lack of moral discrimination: it is the sign of their damnation. Doyle knows that the laughter is of derision in the land of eternal derision, he knows it is foul and stained. The other man who does not laugh is Keegan, who knows that he is standing in hell.

IV

Doyle and Keegan are easily recognisable Shavian

personae, Barney Doran is a far more unlikely candidate. In the *Tallor* piece Shaw says : "I have shown the Irish saint shuddering at the humour of the Irish blackguard— only to find that the average critic thought the blackguard very funny and the saint very unpractical. "⁴³ This is a little disingenuous because the average critic did what he was intended by the dramatist to do , for as a dramatist Shaw manipulates the audience's laughter as a puppeteer manipulates his puppets. The incongruity between the preface and the heart of the play leads one to infer that Shaw probably never thought before writing the play, nor did he recognise the fact after writing it, that his imaginative journey to Ireland would take him to hell. Hell was particularly uncongenial to his temperament. In his earlier works he had been able to sidestep it the moment he had got wind of it. Having failed to prevent the vision of hell in *John Bull's other Island* he wanted to work off the shock of its recognition through the escapist laughter of Barney Doran. In this he achieved handsome success. The play went down as one of the funniest— possibly the funniest— of all his plays. He had to write a personal appeal to the audience not to hold up the performance of the play with uncontrolled laughter. ⁴⁴

Perhaps the most spectacular symbol of the play's success was the most irrefutable evidence that Keegan's bitterness was fully justified. King Edward VII and Arthur

Balfour, two of the most high-profile personages to embody the spirit of John Bull, represented in the play by Tom Broadbent, enjoyed the play immensely. Edward VII laughed so heartily that he broke a chair.⁴⁵

It was an incredible example of life not only imitating art but aping it :the laughter-choked king thought that Shaw was mad,⁴⁶ just as a laughter-choked Broadbent thinks that Keegan is mad. Both inside the play, and outside it, the triumph of Broadbent is made complete by the marginalization of Keegan's vision. In *Man and Superman* Don Juan tells Ana that those who are damned feel no pain in hell.⁴⁷ It is therefore quite in order that Keegan should be the only person to feel the pain.

Shaw once said that he was mad if the rest of the world was sane.⁴⁸ When he encouraged his audience to enjoy *John Bull's other Island* as a comedy, he seemed to have changed his mind and come round to the view, like the hero of Pirandello's *Henry IV*, that the pretence of madness is the only shelter from the agony of sanity. In a world governed by Broadbent, one must speak his language in order to be heard. Shaw was not only heard but also greeted with encores. The "comedy" was a success.

Chapter B : Notes and References

1. "George Bernard Shaw : a Conversation", *The Tatler* 177 (1904) : 204 , quoted in Fredrick P. W. McDowell, "Politics,Comedy,Character and Dialectic : The Shavian World of John Bull's Other Island", *PMLA* 82 (1967) : 545.
2. "Socialism and Ireland ", *Shaw on Ireland* , p. 215.
3. *Collected Letters*, vol. II, p. 394.
4. "Ireland Eternal and External", *Shaw on Ireland*, p.296.
5. " A Note on Aggressive Nationalism ", *Ibid.*, p. 81.
6. Preface to *Immaturity*, p. xxxiii.
7. " Oscar Wilde, " *Shaw on Ireland*, pp. 29-30
8. " Ireland and the First World War ",*Ibid.*, p. 87, p. 88.
9. CP II , p. 914.
10. " A Crib for Home Rulers", *Shaw on Ireland*, pp. 22-23.
11. " Roger Casement", *Ibid.*, p. 128
12. CP II , p. 809, p. 811.
13. CP II, p. 810. J.L.Wisenthal reveals at his own expense the danger of taking Shaw at his word when he argues that the play is intended to show each of the two nations its faults and the other's virtues. Wisenthal, *The Marriage of Contraries: Bernard Shaw's Middle plays*,p.88. Fredrick P. W. McDowell comes to a similar conclusion: " Shaw...proposed to use the efficiencies of Capitalism in the service of a new Socialism and a new religious awakening. This I believe is the direction of the play." McDowell, "Politics, Comedy, ~~Character and Dialectic: the Shavian world of John Bull's~~

Character and Dialectic: the Shavian world of John Bull's
Other Island." *PMLA* 82 (1967) : 553.

14. CP II, p. 505.
15. Ibid., p. 815.
16. Op. cit.
17. CP II, p. 914.
18. Ibid., p. 1008.
19. Ibid., p. 910.
20. Ibid.
21. Preface to *Immaturity* , p. xxxiii.
22. CP II , p. 910.
23. S.C. Sengupta, *The Art of Bernard Shaw*, p. 85.
24. McDowell, op.cit.
25. Maurice Valency, *The Cart and the Trumpet*. p. 259.
26. A.M. Gibbs, *The Art and Mind of Shaw*, p. 146.
27. CP II, p. 912.
28. Ibid., p. 1015.
29. Ibid., p. 916.
30. Ibid., p. 1015.
31. Ibid., p. 916-917.
32. See *supra*.
33. CP II, p. 505.
34. Ibid., p. 913.
35. Louis Crompton, *Shaw the Dramatist*, p. 237.
36. *Shaw on Theatre* ,p. 118.
37. CP II , p. 1021.

38. Ibid., pp. 909-10.
39. Ibid., pp. 103,104.
40. Ibid., p. 983.
41. Ibid., pp. 990-91.
42. Ibid., p. 930.
43. Op. cit., p. 242.
44. See CP II, pp. 1023-25.
45. Maurice Valeney, *The Cart and the Trumpet*, p. 238.
46. St. John Ervine, *Bernard Shaw ; His Life Work and Friends*, p. 110.
47. CP II , p. 90.
48. *Sixteen Self Sketches*, pp. 43-44.