MODERN LIMINALITY OF THE COMIC SUBLIME

IN BERNARD SHAW'S DRAMA

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MODERN LIMINALITY OF THE COMIC SUBLIME IN BERNARD SHAW'S DRAMA

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

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ABSTRACT

Modern Liminality of the Comic Sublime in Bernard Shaw's Drama

Bernard Shaw's critical and rhetorical comedies represent an intellectual turning point in the analysis of the continuities and discontinuities between the conventions of the nineteenth-century theatre and modern drama. The critical reception of his controversial dramatization of modernity's social and individual conflicts in comic terms has been a blend of sympathy and underestimation. This study conceives his understanding and use of comedy as a reaction to the artificialities of dramatic performance as well as the mechanization of life with respect to the moral program of his vitalist philosophy. By appealing to the anthropological theory of liminality in rites of passage as a tool for literary criticism, the thesis aims to discuss Shaw's aesthetic concrescence of the comic and the sublime with a demonstration of the socialization and individuation processes of the liminal characters in his three major critical comedies which deal with the transformations brought about by modernity: *Heartbreak House*, *Major Barbara* and *John Bull's Other Island*.

ÖZET

Bernard Shaw'un Tiyatrosunda Komik Yücenin Modern Eşikteliği

Bernard Shaw'un eleştirel ve retorik komedileri on dokuzuncu yüzyıl tiyatrosunun gelenekleriyle çağdaş drama arasındaki süreklilik ve kopuşların çözümlenmesinde entelektüel bir dönüm noktasını temsil eder. Shaw'un modernitenin toplumsal ve bireysel çelişkilerini gülünç açıdan tartışmalı bir şekilde dramatize etmesinin eleştirel alımlanması hem sempati hem de küçümsemeyle olmuştur. Bu çalışma, Shaw'un komedi anlayışı ve uygulamasını, dirimselci felsefesinin güttüğü ahlaki izlence kapsamında hem dramatik temsilin yapaylığına hem de yaşamın mekanikleşmesine bir tepki olarak ele alır. Antropolojinin erginlenme törenlerindeki eşiktelik teorisine bir edebiyat eleştirisi aracı olarak başvuran tez, Shaw'un modernitenin dönüşümlerini ele alan üç temel eleştirel komedisi olan *Kırgınlar Evi, Binbaşı Barbara ve John Bull'un Öteki Adası*'ndaki eşikteki karakterlerin toplumsallaşma ve bireyleşme süreçlerini örnekleyerek yazarın gülünçlük ve yücelik kavramlarını estetik olarak nasıl birleştirdiğini tartışmayı amaçlar.

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For Kuzey Çil,

our twinkling, little star…

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: NINETEENTH-CENTURY THEATRE AND SHAW'S DRAMATURGY OF THE COMIC SUBLIME

In the history of drama, the persona, the work and the critical reception of the comic dramatist George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) abound with controversies and issues which are characteristically fundamental to the course of development of dramatic art in modern times because few dramatists managed to become a member of the literary establishment by remaining an outsider figure like Shaw whose lifetime spun the last bend of the long nineteenth century as well as the two world wars and even beyond. Beginning his writing career in 1870s as a ghost-writer of musical columns and an unpromising novelist failing to find publishers, he developed himself as an essayist, public orator and political polemicist as a follower of socialist Fabian gradualism throughout the 1880s and finally entered the world of modern drama with the performance of *Widowers' Houses*, the first of his series of "unpleasant plays", at the Royal Theatre in 1892.

Shaw went on to write more than sixty plays, including romantic and domestic comedies, melodramas and romances, historical dramas and political "extravaganzas", all with a subtle sense of intellectual humour peculiar to the playwright, and finished his last and thematically expressionist play *Why She Would Not* on his deathbed. For the sake of convenience, he has usually been canonized as a proponent of the so-called problem play, discussion play, play of ideas or rhetorical drama. Yet, a close reading of his voluminous corpus reveals several divergent dramatic attempts at the employment of popular theatrical conventions to propagate unconventional ideas that appeal to expressionist, absurdist and sometimes simply

fantastic dramatic vehicles in order to give form to his intellectual challenges to the modern age. Despite the surface monochrome display of his comic dramaturgy fundamentally fuelled with outright lengthy discussions and expositional scenes – for which he was often criticized for writing philosophical excerpts instead of plays –, the underlying tones of his artistic approach depicted both the subtle and plain transformations of the modern age. That's why, following her well-known statement, "On or about December 1910, human character changed," Virginia Woolf (1924, p. 2) regarded Shaw's plays as records of the first signs of this historical discontinuity with the advance of modernism. On the one hand, Shaw's plays certainly demonstrate several mainstream elements of the nineteenth century's popular theatre as a mix of the period's well-made, realist and naturalist dramatic commonplaces – which Shaw usually exploited to challenge, ridicule and divert. On the other hand, Shaw's artistic agenda attempted to reconcile his serious social and philosophical vision with the general unrealities of the stage especially by resorting to the mechanisms of the comic which illuminates his connection to the modern mindset as a pioneer of new dramatic experiments and a restless commentator on social change.

This study aims to put forward Shaw's development and use of the comic sublime as his main dramatic vehicle to convey the modern sense of collective and individual liminality in his three major plays: *Heartbreak House* (1920), *Major Barbara* (1905), and *John Bull's Other Island* (1904). In this study of Shaw's critical comedies, his analysis of modern states and situations of liminality are examined with respect to an understanding of the comic sublime in connection with the effects of the changing material culture of his age on the moral processes of individuation and socialization. In this context, material culture is defined as the sum of all socio-economic signs and indicators including behaviours, habits, rituals, identities and

norms which are utilized and represented for moral as well as material survival in modern social relationships (Buchli, 2014, p. 241).

Shaw's rhetorical drama attempts at a level seriousness in the mirror of high comedy by transcending the age's theatrical pretentiousness with the sublimation of misguided passions into ideal, intellectual duties. What is observed in Shaw's approach to modernity as a liminal age in these plays about personal transformation is a call to awakening from false social consciousness in the Marxist sense to the historical authenticity of one's own individual existence. For Shaw, neither the traditional five-act blank verse tragedies nor the nineteenth century formulas of well-made plays were providing sufficient tools to seriously address the age's decadent conflicts as he viewed them with the eyes of a social reformer. Instead of organizing the literary mechanics of his plays to purge fear and pity as sublime emotions in cathartic climaxes in the vein of tragic realism so that he could normatively be taken as a serious playwright, Shaw took the risk of opting for comedy instead as a release from artificial dramatic systems of all kinds that suffocate human vitality.

"The whole world is ruled by theatrical illusion," Shaw wrote (1896) and further claimed that the greatness of artists as social critics lies in penetrating and understanding the nature of this illusion. Therefore, inverting popular Victorian melodramas, realist interpretations of domestic situations, naturalist depictions of the environment on character and even Ibsenist cul-de-sac tragedies on the human condition into comic liminalities, Shaw aimed at the demystification of the illusions which haunt men in everyday social life. Like Ibsen, Shaw also saw the essential tragedy of the human situation in standing in a tight place where "he cannot go forwards or backwards" (as cited in Williams, 1973, p. 32), which is exactly the psychological situation of liminality in rites of passage. In his plays, Shaw portrayed

the comically sublime encounters of his characters with themselves and others. He often threw a curve at the audience with anticlimactic but practically transformative resolutions to their plights against customary expectations of socially correct unravelings or tragic, individual disintegration before the powers of fate. As such, Shaw's analysis of the change in human character caused by the crisis of modernity took the form of rites of passage or theatrical conversion rituals, for want of a better term, through exploring how the comic can expose a corrective effect on human errors amidst the tensions of liminal situations caused by modern conflicts.

Shaw's plays demonstrate several conscious continuities and discontinuities with the movements of modern drama ranging from the melodramatic remnants of romanticism in juxtaposition with naturalism to realism in juxtaposition with expressionism. Having the changing scientific conception of reality in the background, the break from the romantic notion of the self as an independent transcendence imposing heroic will onto the design and circumstances of the world was at the core of the theoretical discussions among the nineteenth century's key dramatists. In this context, Victorien Sardou and Eugéne Scribe's populism constituted one stance of the continental debate, while Henrik Ibsen's more didactic realism, together with August Strindberg, the other. The scientific breakthroughs brought about by Darwin, Marx, Comte and Freud in biology, economy, sociology and psychology had already began to find their literary counterparts in the outlooks and formal artistic expressions of writers like Balzac, Flaubert and Zola because the sensational literature and drama of strong emotions and moral sentiments about virtues and vices in the romantic manner of Victor Hugo, Goethe or Schiller no longer seemed to do justice to the modern verdicts of the new studies on human nature and society.

Popular drama for amusement had survived on the basis of the well-made formula developed by the school of Sardou and Scribe in the neoclassical revival of the plot construction patterns of Aristotelian tragedy with a contemporary mix of romanticism. Aiming at the satisfaction of the audience's impulses (instead of didacticism), this vein of theatrical approach is best described by Scribe himself in the reception speech he gave to the Académie Française as providing the audience with diversion and distraction from the everyday life towards the extraordinary and the romantic in the form fiction instead of instructing them on the truth (as cited in Carlson, 1984, p. 216). Despite its careful and tight techniques of plot and effect construction and withdrawal from elevated language, this was an offshoot of the romantic conception of drama. The realist and naturalist responses to this populism was to focus on the human being as a creature of the environment and heredity by treating the stage as a laboratory to study character with scientific determinism in order to reveal the authentic formation and interaction of the components of the self and social relations.

The image of truth and reality as perceived by the contemporary audience is of course never a unitary phenomenon but relative to the age, and it is difficult to compartmentalize the works from these different theatrical movements distinctively as they often borrowed techniques and themes freely from each other. Yet, when it comes to Shaw's reaction to these discussions of artificiality and authenticity, he was an open critic of "Sardoodledom", his own coinage, from a moral perspective. The moral attitude of his dramatic enterprise stemmed from the same impression Ibsen had of even the naturalist Zola when the former commented that "Zola descends into the sewer to bathe in it; I, to cleanse it" (as cited in Myer, 1971, p. 489). In this context, Shaw's very attempt to utilize comedy at the heart of his revolutionary

moral program and bring it back to the mainstream stage can be seen as a critique of the nineteenth-century theatre's endless attempts at creating new artificialities in the name of authenticity. Rubbing his characters, plots and settings with the bath gloves of the comic in the crosscurrents of these conflicting romantic, neoclassicist and naturalist movements, his critical comedies attempted to serve the moral purpose of awakening the audience from these newer and newer artificialities, illusions and ideals by detecting and portraying the mechanics of their production in dramaturgy as well as in life itself. Shaw points out that in his plays:

> You will not be vexed and bothered by happy endings, kindness, virtue, crime, the romantic, or any other nonsense of the sort. . . . The ordinary theatre-goer, surfeited with the romantic drama, has lost all sense of its unreality and insincerity. He mistakes human nature as he sees it staged for human nature as it truly is, whereas the former is in reality a bitter satire. The consequence is that when I present true human nature the audience thinks it is being made fun of. In reality, I am simply a very careful writer of natural history. (as cited in Hamon, 1915, p. 127)

In the middle of the dramaturgical disputes about appropriating the changing conceptions of reality for the stage, comedy suitably turned out to be the medium for Shaw to question what it means to be natural and what it takes to peel the stage off of artificialities, including the "artificiality of naturalism" in the phrase of Edward Gordon Craig (2008, p. 143). Shaw didn't consider himself either a representationist or realist in the strict sense as he was well aware that "the novelties of one generation are only the resuscitated fashions of the generation before last" (Shaw, 1901, p. xxiii). By ironically alluding to natural history, Shaw merely points out the urgency he felt for attaining an atemporal notion of truth as he tried to perceive human nature instead of attempting at newer examples of artificiality disguised as reality to comfort the audience for the suspension of disbelief. As he famously remarks in *John Bull's Other Island* (2004), Shaw's "way of joking is to tell the truth. It's the funniest joke in the world" (p. 50). To that end, he didn't refrain himself from endowing even

his stock characters as well as his protagonists with self-consciousness and power of expression in the classic sense to free them from theatrical inhibitions because he believed "the power to do this . . . differentiates me (or Shakespeare) from a gramophone and a camera" (Shaw, 1927, p. 1). The mix of modern and traditional dramatic methods in his plays with a genuine reappraisal of the comic as an expression of intellectual vitality allowed Shaw to overcome the danger of merely caricaturing and burlesquing the manner his contemporaries dealt with the issues of the age and drove him to a modern take on the philosophical notion of "the sublime" through the prism of dramatic laughter.

After a decade of trials and errors in seeking to make the shades of comedy mainstream on the English stage, the successive performances of *John Bull's Other Island* and *Major Barbara* respectively in 1904 and 1905 at the Royal Court Theatre in London are generally considered to be the decisive moments of being welcomed to the literary establishment in Shaw's playwriting career to the extent of launching "the age of Bernard Shaw" (Evans, 2013, p. 7). Rumours that King Edward VII broke his chair out of laughter in the command performance of *John Bull's Other Island* secured Shaw's reputation as the most popular and challenging playwright of the age whether critics reckoned with his force or not. Written after the devastation of the Great War, *Heartbreak House* marks the end of this era in Shaw's career as the culmination of his efforts to unite the comic and the sublime in the dramatization of modernity's conflicts with liminal characters.

There are thematic continuities between Shaw's three major critical comedies, and a certain line of artistic development can be discerned towards more modernist forms of expression. Undoubtedly, Shaw's involvement with the politics of the day was responsible for the mostly political reception of these plays. On the

surface, *Heartbreak House* can be read as a disorderly reaction to the downfall of the European ideal of historical progress while *John Bull's Other Island* and *Major Barbara* can be considered as prosaic critiques of British imperialism in Ireland and the revelation of the religious hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie respectively. It can be difficult to render and distinguish the quality of the combination of artistic elements in Shaw's plays due to the heavy rhetorical devices he puts at the disposal of his characters to discuss many different themes and contemporary issues in a discursive manner. Serious discussions of poverty and business, religion and salvation, power and idealism from a sociological perspective are abundant in these three influential plays. This often leads the audience, the reader or the critic to overlook the fact that the plays are intended to be comedies in terms of characterization and setting beyond the portrayal of political solutions to these hard-hitting social issues of the period. In the context of the two early successive plays, the comic element can be described as the heroic challenge of liminal unselfing towards the conception of morally more sublime versions of oneself as perceived by both the other characters and society. To that end, *Heartbreak House* passes as a cumulative distillation of Shaw's original take on the comic in the age's decaying processes of conventional conceptions of individuation and socialization. When their motives are put on trial by the members of their organic communities, Shaw's characters are challenged to change the conception of their identities and their courses of action to the degree of a complete moral evaluation of social life. The gravity of these confrontations may be highlighted by subjection to comic situations but the result is always meant to be the dramatic portrayal of a sublime moral standing whether the characters accept or reject this liminal process of self-regeneration. Jung's (1974) description of

individuation as a psychological process that cannot be reduced to the satisfaction of the ego sheds light on how this liminal unselfing is structured in rites of passage:

> Individuation is confused with the coming of the ego into consciousness, and that the ego is in consequence identified with the self produces a hopeless conceptual muddle. Individuation is then nothing but ego-centeredness. … [It is] the process by which a person becomes a separate, indivisible unity. … Individuation does not shut one out from the world, but gathers the world to one's self. (p. 414)

A liminal entity defies the harmonious representation of individual identity in a state of confusion of status, action and linear character development. In Shaw's dramaturgy, what ignites the absorption of the self by social reality is the comic scrutiny, and the production of the dramatic effect of the sublime is aimed at with the completion (or failure) of individuation. In his study on the nature of humour, Koestler (1964) describes how such creative activity through the comic has a highly elusive quality of cognition as an operation of the mind (p. 31) and makes the crucial observation of how this is related to other, more exalted forms of creativity like the depiction of the sublime:

> We all know that there is only one step from the sublime to the ridiculous; the more surprising that Psychology has not considered the possible gains which could result from the reversal of that step. (p. 32)

Shaw's comic genius can be attributed to how he attempts at this psychological artistic program suggested by the reversal of the route from the sublime to the comic and vice versa. According to David. J. Gordon (1990), Shaw's wit "consists in the sudden, unexpected liberation of a 'repressed' idea, stimulating us imaginatively to the possibility of a nobler vision" (p. 3) which he conceives as the essence of the comic sublime. Cornered by opportunities and misfortunes in terms of social mobility, Shaw's protagonists as well as stock characters unself themselves by attempting at a redefinition of society's moral values. This psychic conflict is what gives possibility to the dramatic recognition of the sublime as a form of enlightened

self-interest which helps to overcome the moral challenge. Gordon (1990) further notes that "the effect of sublimity achieved by Shaw always depends on the creation of a palpable comic-ironic resistance" (p. 5) as his characters attempt to regain strength after the exposition of their weaknesses through comic encounters with others which ignite either change of behaviour or further self-assertion in the name of defence.

Greig's (1923) study of the psychology of laughter and comedy remarks that "in truth the subject of laughter is a battle-ground, strewn with the bodies of heroes and encumbered with the debris of many a brave system of philosophy" (p. 11). From the Greeks to modern psychologists, the phenomenon of laughter has been treated in different terms as an instinctive behaviour, a physiological reflex, a spiritual force, an enactment of social memory, a disturbance of emotions or a logical suggestibility. While Aristotle (2012) argues that "Comedy aims at representing men as worse" (p. 4) with the dramatic pleasure rising from poetic justice as the double construction of plot in terms of the change of fortune from bad to good or vice versa, Freud (2003) attributes the elusive nature of the comic to the operations of the unconscious in unfolding our repressed thoughts, weaknesses and deformities "before the gaze of external observation" (p. 2) to overcome inhibitions within an aesthetic, psychic economy of society. Eco (1986) distinguishes between the comic and humour in terms of the different faces of a carnivalesque moral laxity with the former being the perception of the opposites and the latter its feeling (p. 276); in the variation of the comic, rules are broken without the explicit demonstration of the "social or intertextual 'frame' or scenario already known to the audience" (p. 272) in discourse, and in humour, social codes of behaviour are first established explicitly and then broken. What intersects all these different interpretations of the comic is the

liminal confrontation of individual aspirations with societal norms. In one of the earliest, modern, definitive comments on the nature of laughter, Hobbes (as cited in Gruner, 1978) makes the following observation:

> Sudden glory is the passion which maketh those Grimaces called LAUGHTER (and is caused either by some sudden act of their own, that pleaseth them; or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves.) . . . And . . . much laughter at the defects of others, is a signe of Pusillanimity. . . . For of great minds, one of the proper workes is, to help and free others from scorn; compare themselves only with the most able. (p. 30)

In alignment with this scheme of contrast and comparison, Shaw brings together the elements of the comic and the sublime in his plays which depict the liminal episteme of the carnivalesque in terms of the relations between laughter, oppression and freedom. Challenging the constraints of social values, Bakhtin (1968) remarks how the carnivalesque celebrates "temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order" and marks "the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions" (p. 10). In his dramaturgy, Shaw does not indulge in a grotesque realism, which the idea of the carnivalesque body invites beyond securing moral codes via the comic, but he raises notions of incompleteness, disruption and transgression through the comic characterization of the elevated as down-to-earth and vice versa. The symbolic degradations the characters portray or are faced with point out to the sublime with a moral leap from the depiction of the grotesque. The Shavian heroes' liminal impression of abnormality, madness or social bluntness in attempting to be totally sane and reasonable thus become the main pillars of Shaw's modern algorithm of the comic sublime. In the preface to *Major Barbara*, Shaw (1959) notes the contrast between madness and sanity as the literary ground where the comic liberation meets the sublime frustration:

> Formerly, the contrast between madness and sanity was deemed comic. . . . I myself have had a village idiot exhibited to me as something irresistibly

> funny. On the stage the madman was once a regular comic figure; that was how Hamlet got his opportunity before Shakespear touched him. The originality of Shakespear's version lay in his taking the lunatic sympathetically and seriously. . . . The particular sort of madman they represented, the romantic makebeliever, lay outside the pale of sympathy in literature: he was pitilessly despised and ridiculed. . . . When Cervantes relented over Don Quixote, and Dickens relented over Pickwick, they did not become impartial: they simply changed sides, and became friends and apologists where they had formerly been mockers. (p. 10-11)

Similarly, the essential comic effect in Shaw's drama is produced by countless means of taking sides with the different aspects of rationality and irrationality in characterization rather than incidental humour. In the three plays studied in this thesis, Shaw's characters reverse roles, imply double meanings, act out of character, speak out of turn, abide by the rules docilely, show human frailties which they carry with pride, rub salt in each other's wounds, exaggerate their own morals, fall prey to romantic illusions foolishly, come to their senses with alarming self-consciousness, clash or swap ideas with antagonistic characters, make sincere confessions, unmask others, follow irrational prejudices to their own doom, destroy idols, recognize and target egotism in each other, rationally challenge conventional authority, and so forth. When extended to the entirety of a play, these schemes of behaviours are actually genre-defining templates which are not easy to reduce to any singular explanation on the nature of the comic.

The historical development of comedy as a theatrical genre from its Greek origins as an opposite dramatic form of tragedy to its Elizabethan conception of plays with happy endings exhibits such a vast spectrum of samples from comic literature that it is difficult to approach Shaw's practice of the concept with a unifying theory. However, Henri Bergson's modern study on the subject published in 1900, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, helps to approach Shaw's utilization of the comic sublime as an expression of modern liminality. Humour is one of the most

philosophically neglected subjects in the canons of notable Western philosophers, and up until Shaw's time, Bergson was one of the few well-known, influential philosophers to treat the subject of human laughter as an aesthetic question in a distinct monograph.

Bergson and Shaw were contemporaries of the technological revolution that brought about the clash of men and machinery. For example, it was a tragicomic aspect of the age to see the Luddites organize themselves into a secret organization to destroy textile machinery against the pressure of unemployment. The inevitable mechanization of social relations was literally threatening people's material survival as well as the psychological conception of their social roles and individual identities. It is no coincidence that Bergson wrote his analysis of the comic as "the mechanical encrusted upon the living" (2005, p. 24) amidst the tensions of this rigid social transformations enforced upon men as modernity reached its liminal apex and that the socialist Shaw turned his back on the mechanical theatrical principles of his age in light of comedy simultaneously.

Alfred North Whitehead (1942) is most illuminating about this historical aspect in the appeal of satire which also lies at the core of Shaw's attempt to unite the comic and the sublime in terms of modern liminality as what unites them:

> Satire is the last flicker of originality in a passing epoch as it faces the onroad of staleness and boredom. Freshness has gone: bitterness remains. The prolongation of outworn forms of life means a slow decadence in which there is repetition without any fruit in the reaping of value. There may be high survival power. For decadence, undisturbed by originality or by external forces, is a slow process. But the values of life are slowly ebbing. There remains the show of civilization, without any of its realities. (p. 277)

Shaw's dramatic alienation of his characters from each other while at the same time creating satirical affinity between them on the basis of their pragmatic plights serves the same purpose of laying bare the survival mode of the bourgeoisie as a "show of

civilization, without any of its realities". It is a historical oxymoron which is brought about the enforcement of material changes upon social consciousness in different classes which cause Shaw's characters to unself and redress themselves. Therefore, this study will appeal to Bergson's contemporary analysis of laughter in terms of his philosophy of vitalism as a major influence on the dramatic premises of Shavian dramaturgy in examining the cognition modes of the comic sublime which illuminates the clash between internal and external authority as the main characteristic of liminality in the mechanizing social relations of the modern times.

Following the introductory chapter on the basic theoretical tenets of the nineteenth-century theatre and how Shaw aimed to divert its conventions with his modern practice of the comic sublime as a critique of artificiality in drama, the second chapter discusses the theoretical intersections of the comic and the sublime in aesthetic terms and puts forward the stage of liminality in rites of passage as the unifying ground for the dramatic extrapolations of these concepts. Revealing the origins of Gordon's (1990) coinage of the concept of the comic sublime (pp. 5-7), Bergson's emphasis on the social character of the comic exposes the liminal unity of the concept with the sublime experience. This chapter aims to provide the theoretical background and key terminology in approaching Shaw as a critical dramatist with a moral program. The depiction of the sublime in the comic dramaturgical phenomenon stems from this moral evocation in Shaw's plays. The common cognitive operations in the comic and the sublime allow considering both concepts in terms of the psychological states of liminality Shaw's characters are subjected to in the three plays analysed in the thesis.

The third chapter on *Heartbreak House* deals with how the comic sublime in modern liminality is almost dystopically demonstrated by Shaw with a portrayal of

the rescission of the fetishism of "community" in the mechanisms of false consciousness experienced and utilized by the characters due to the commodification of identities and marketization of decaying social relations. *Heartbreak House* puts forwards the comic sublime as the inevitable acceptance of double morality and scepticism at the possibility of any singular visionary restoration of either social order or the self against the threats of decadence. The elusive image of a disintegrating society is the comic spectacle in the play, and the ache of heartbreak in delusional social relations takes the form of a sublime experience that cripples the characters' wills and schemes of individuation.

The fourth chapter on *Major Barbara* analyses the experience of liminal unselfing. The comic structure of Shaw's aggregative projection of modern liminality is studied with the conversion of the protagonists to more realistic social causes as they wake up to the hollowness and hypocrisy of their ungrounded romantic morality out of joint with the times. *Major Barbara*'s dramatic structure manifests the comic sublime through a harsh subjection of the characters to different perspectives of morality which create personal dilemmas in their lives and call for new and uncommon deals between them. Shaw questions the prioritization of social reform against individual reform and vice versa. His dramatic vehicle of unselfing his characters with the transfiguration of the commonplace social dilemmas into matters of personal salvation aims at a moral psychology of the transcendence of the ego.

The fifth chapter on *John Bull's Other Island* is an exposition of Shaw's comedy of the clashes between heroic and unheroic wills. Shaw's pessimistic projection of modern liminality sublimely experienced by vital outsider and artificial insider figures is analysed in terms of the confrontation of authentic moral vocations with illusive social roles against the alienating background of changing class

relations. In *John Bull's Other Island*, the demonstration of the comic sublime is exhibited by the dramatic characterization of the moral and performative affirmation or negation of heroic will in accepting or rejecting conventional social roles. The comic social magnification of the insider figure in the play stands in contrast to the sublime psychological alienation the outsider figure endures, giving the play its dramatic tension that navigates the existential spectrum between the comic and the sublime.

The study's final chapter conclusively highlights Shaw's employment of the liminal characteristics of the comic sublime as a plea for dramatic morality in terms of an answer to modernity's social conflicts. Given the facts that *Major Barbara* and *John Bull's Other Island* were almost simultaneously written by Shaw at the apex of Victorian optimism, and *Heartbreak House* marks Shaw's response to the end of the Victorian Age, these three plays reflect and represent the playwright's own different liminal reactions to modernity's conflicts of socialization and individuation, capitalism and altruism, libertarianism and moral discipline, sensuality and intelligence, romance and realism. The conceptual framework of the comic sublime helps to locate the artistic reasoning behind their surface optimism or concluding pessimism with epiphanic moments of truth throughout the development of several kinds of inner, psychological drama put on the stage in the spectrum of the comic and the sublime.

CHAPTER 2

LIMINAL UNITY OF THE COMIC AND THE SUBLIME

Bergson's analysis of laughter simply begins by stating the obvious generalization that the comic is strictly a human phenomenon outside the natural realm and interaction of things; a landscape or any phenomenon in nature can look sublime or ugly but it can never be laughable outside and without any resemblance to the human context (2005, p. 2). The comic occurs in the human mind for the human mind about the human mind. This is one of the reasons why in Shaw's comedies the mental action and inner drama of characters are also always in the foreground instead of the intricacies of plot development. What goes within the characters become more striking than what eventually happens between them, and humour is created at such moments of self-reflection when the inner direction of the characters contradict the dictates of conventional plots as required by socially pre-established codes of behaviour. This imaginative capacity of the human mind to detect behavioural mechanisms and take liberty to diverge from automatism or at least recognize it is also the source of Bergson's (2005) most original identification of the mental labyrinth of the comic:

> The comic is that side of a person which reveals his likeness to a thing, that aspect of human events which, through its peculiar inelasticity, conveys the impression of pure mechanism, of automatism, of movement without life. Consequently it expresses an individual or collective imperfection which calls for an immediate corrective. This corrective is laughter, a social gesture that singles out and represses a special kind of absentmindedness in men and in events. (p. 43)

In Bergson, the comic has a social nature in terms of the rigid mechanization of one's character. What raises laughter is the recognition of this absentminded impression of lack of vitality and will in being levelled down to the mere category of being a thing

of the social environment, which is the proposition taken for granted in naturalist drama. The comic combination of events reflects the repetitive emotional mechanisms in life. It is essential to take into consideration the emergence of drama out of religious festivals and rituals in this context. “Mankind became artists in ritual,” remarks Whitehead (1953): “Emotion waits upon ritual; and then ritual is repeated and elaborated for the sake of its attendant emotions” (p. 74). The social function of artistic theatrical imitation has been the revelation of automatism or patterns of emotion creeping into the person for the good or the bad since its origins.

Anthropologically speaking, dramatic imitation on stage is still very much of a cohesive social act of worship, a ritualistic repetition of codes of behaviour and understanding. The social depiction of automatism Bergson attributes to the comic is the foundation of all theatricality as prolonged exhibitions of human sentimentality. In this sense, comedy can be conceived as a further form of cognitive detachment from emotional automatism than tragedy which soaks the beholder in passions with empathetic feelings of pity and fear whereas “comedy can only begin at the point where our neighbour’s personality ceases to affect us” (Bergson, 2005- p. 66). That’s why Bergson considers emotion as the greatest enemy of the comic which requires “a momentary anaesthesia of the heart” (p. 3) to produce its whole effect by appealing to intelligence and awareness. As a cultural sign, the comic has an intrinsic social significance as an intelligent corrective to the absentmindedness in the automatic emotional responses people characteristically give to interpersonal events which socially condition them.

As such, Shaw’s comedies can be viewed as a critique of the mechanization of life and personality with the advance of industrial modernity. Together with the assumedly scientific dramatic determinism of his contemporary playwrights, the

optimistic world of certainties which the Victorians took for granted is targeted in his plays by a demonstration of its rational shortcomings with the aid of his subcutaneous sense of humour against the challenges of the new world on the horizon. Kant (2015) describes laughter as "an affection arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing" (§25). Atropyhing the social and personal expectations of his age with wit was also the most fundamental technique of Shaw's humour. Shaw took the most commonplace sets of social actions and personal relations of his age as the subject matter of his plays but by turning them upside down in emotional distance with the basic dramaturgy of the comic and studying their repetitive mechanisms to no avail against the unruly chaos of modernity, he showcased the systematic social absentmindedness that lead people (and his characters) to deceive themselves by sticking to their automatic roles in society or choose to take action to renew themselves. In the end, both dramatic possibilities end up in the corrective laughter as "it is comic to fall into a ready-made category" as well as "wander out of one's own self" (Bergson, 2005, p. 73).

The notion of the comic sublime arises out of this recognition of the emotional incongruity of human expectation with social reality as the vitality of the subject's intentionality is baffled by social automatism. Bergson's emphasis on the detachment of the comic from sympathy with indifference to the feelings of others in a superior vantage point merges the distressing element in the aesthetic conception of the sublime with the mechanisms of humour. The humiliation of human will embedded in the dramatic butchering of expectations in the projection of the comic is a form of domestication of the distress one encounters in facing social reality with an understanding of the vanity of man's counter efforts. Comedy does not transfigure automatic expectations into positive retributions but makes them redundant. The

comic sublime illuminates the rigidity of social life by playing upon or against the mechanic templates of human expectations, transforming them into nothing. Therefore, Bergson (2005) conceives the expression of laughter as a cultural sign which "promises nothing more than it gives" (p. 12). The sublime involves a similar subjection to obscurity and insignificance. In the sublime experience, the faculty of reason becomes paralyzed by the uncertainty of the object of its perception:

> The passion caused by the great and sublime . . . is astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other. (Burke, 1844, p. 72)

Burke puts forward the entertainment of this horror turning into the delight of astonishment as the most genuine test of the sublime. The Bergsonian comic excites the idea of threat in delight just like the sublime as the subject's intentional course of action is perplexed by automatism with the suspension of all the motions or affections of the soul. What is laughed at it is the uncertainty of thought against the crystallization of the whole moral life of a person into the "materiality of a simple action" with "automatism, inelasticity, habit that has been contracted and maintained" (Bergson, 2005, pp. 12-13). The absorption of personality by simple mechanical action is the elusive quality of the sublime in the comic as the depiction of deep-seated, natural causal processes in human actions. The suspension of automatism and thereby its recognition as absentmindedness are the causes of astonishment both in the comic and the sublime. In the experience of the comic, the mind also becomes fully absorbed in the automatic schemes of things and can entertain nothing else other than its very depiction of causality in negation of the human will. The comic sublime cancels perceived purposiveness in human nature and replaces it with absentmindedness. Burke (1844) acknowledges the same quality in the sublime by stating that "[i]t is our ignorance of things that causes all our

admiration, and chiefly excites our passions" (p. 78). What inspires sublimity is the potentially threatening power of the sudden revelation of this ignorance, of obscurity when human vitality is broken by a form of inescapable rigidity. The realization of forms of mental conditioning on the basis of the causal materiality in automatic actions reveals an ignorance of the moral ends of social processes and established codes of behaviour which displays a lack of self-awareness and weakness of understanding as the source of the comic effect.

Correspondingly, Schiller notes that the sublime occurs in the juxtaposition of objective power with subjective impotence which gives way to a moral understanding of the causes of this impotence (1993, p. 36). The corrective social function of laughter stems from securing a mechanic conception of this sublime power from a safe distance. The comic paves the way to the acceptance of the emotional violence of the mechanisms of life and transform them into moral understanding as the subject of the comic experience affirms, negates or simply realizes "the concept of brute force in regard to himself" (Schiller, 1993, p. 71) which Bergson calls rigidity. The capacity to bear this sublime rigidity can also provide a hint of autonomy against automatism. In portraying artificial misfortunes caused by the rigid mechanisms of social causality, comedy also imaginatively equips the audience with a certain autonomy which makes its practice as an art, just like tragedy, an "inoculation against unavoidable fate" (Schiller, 1993, p. 83) with a moderation of emotional responses and sublimation of conflicts. Just as the audience desires the tragic sublime although it is a terrifying feeling, the artistic effect of comedy also stems from the fact that the audience is at a safe distance from the comic character's potential pain. The relief of the comic sublime is the delight experienced in the detachment from emotion. Burke (1844) makes the same

comment on the sublime which Bergson attributes to the comic that people delight in the emotional convulsions of others when it does not directly affect them: “Terror is a passion which always produces delight when it does not press too close” (p. 59). The sublimation of the comic comes from disguising the violence people derive from the witnessing the frustrations of others. Alienation from others is part of the comic sublime, yet, the comic sublime also draws us towards the social gaze. The comic frames the gaze we observe the struggle of others with their emotions, and from this apathy derives the delight of the sublime. The comic buffer is a safe ground to absorb the sublime emotions we normally feel before natural calamities, social plights and personal flaws. It is a way of socially conquering what we fear in the challenges of life. We succumb to the comic sublime with the delight of confronting our weaknesses because somewhat paradoxically in the comic submission to the mechanisms of life, we are reminded also of the power of our moral selves in facing our flaws and defeats.

The exultation of the comic resides in being able to bear conflict in the possible sublimation of error into an idea. The experience of the comic sublime is in a way an agitation of overinterpretation. Kant (2012) describes sublime as something “in comparison with which everything else is small” (§25). The comic humiliation of errors and flaws in conduct and thinking also makes us aware of a moral conflict between external and internal authority, and the fall into a liminal low profile is the beginning of this agitation mechanism. It is the feeling of one’s existential insignificance in a strangely exalted way. According to Kant, this is a negative pleasure of the sublime in which “the mind is not merely attracted by the object, but is ever being alternately repelled” (§23). The comic makes us feel the same weakness before social phenomenon in the grand scheme of things. Yet, its cognition also

reveals a transcendence as long as we are not victimized by these mechanical forces. Insofar as we are in a position to comprehend the comic in a way, we become independent of these mechanisms. The comic sublime is the paradoxical state of feeling trivial and weak in the grand scheme of things and the comfort of being the seat of this knowledge as well. It is in this sense that the comic is a sublime experience with "a feeling of the superiority of our own power of reason, as a supersensible faculty, over nature" (§28). This is Kant's version of the element of absentmindedness in the sublime as "the very inadequacy of our faculty for estimating the magnitude of the things in the sensible world" (§25) but which, via imagination, also awakens a feeling of supersensibility. The sublime is a "movement of the mind", "alternating repulsion from and attraction to one and the same object" (§27). Just like the comic, this dimension of sublimity "is not contained in anything in nature, but only in our mind" (§28). Reason and imagination are evoked simultaneously in the comic sublime. The comic sublime gives us a feeling of pleasure in the superiority of our imaginative capacity over phenomena but it also underlines the displeasure of the confrontation. The comic distress comes from the initial understanding of the inadequacy of our reasoning in falling prey to automatic illusions and expectations. That's why the comic is also a "pleasure which is possible only by means of a displeasure" (§27) and a "negative liking" (§29) like the sublime.

Schopenhauer also identifies the sublime in phenomena as what reminds a hostile or overwhelming effect on the human will which resists to contemplation. The higher the resistance of the forces, the higher the magnitude of the effect of sublime. The comic does the same in the mental realm. Schopenhauer attributes the aesthetic pleasure in this overwhelming feeling to the subject's acknowledgement of the vastness of resistance in consciously turning away from the confrontation and

"violently wrenching himself free from his will" (2011, p. 226). This inner action elevates the mind to a contemplation of the ideas expressed in the confrontation, resulting in the feeling of the sublime. This a liberation from the automatism of the will and its cares in exaltation of the subject's detachment from external pressures towards the realization of one's freedom in contrast to perceived moral vocations. This inner sublime resistance is also integral to an experience of the comic as an increase "in intellect beyond the ordinary measure" (Schopenhauer, 2011, p. 215). The moral border is inevitably drawn either in crossing it or merely realizing its existence. Schiller (1993) notices that the sublime effect occurs when:

> . . . our sensuous nature feels its limits, but our rational nature feels its superiority, its freedom from limits. Thus, we come up short against a sublime object physically, but we elevate ourselves above it morally, namely, through ideas. (p. 22)

The comic is the extraction or distillation of interpersonal emotions into moral ideas. Alongside the vitalist philosophy of Bergson, Shaw practices this notion of the comic as a transcendence of vitalism over mechanistic morality. Élan vital, the life force, is conceived as the essence of human consciousness which is more than a combination of the will and intellect. Vitality is creativity in the exchanges, encounters and reactions as opposed to automatic repetition of social behaviours. The comic occurs when this vital function is redundant in the individual and he starts to fall prey to the familiar emotional grooves like an automaton. Bergson considers matter as a dull set of mechanical affairs, and consciousness as the creative force that frees it from inhibitions. That's why his basic description of the comic as "the mechanical encrusted upon the living" (2005, p. 24) is a fundamental interpolation of the vitalist philosophy of life which Shaw also took by heart with his embrace of the concept of the Life Force, most explicitly detailed in the third act of *Man and Superman* which was performed a year before *John Bull's Other Island*.

Comedy is the application of these principles to man's social life. The comic introduces the mind to the limbo between individuation and socialization. The occurrence of the comic is a social phenomenon in that it will:

> . . . come into being, it appears, whenever a group of men concentrate their attention on one of their number, imposing silence on their emotions and calling into play nothing but their intelligence. (Bergson, 2005, p. 65)

In this sense, it is a way of imposing order upon an unruly set of human characteristics and responses to this state of liminality. It is an open subjection to the extrapolations of the social gaze. That's why Bergson (2005) concludes that "any image . . . suggestive of the notion of a society disguising itself, or of a social masquerade, so to speak, will be laughable" (p. 89). The moment an individual attempts to make up his own mind or cannot make it up with or without being automatically troubled by the concerns of his social associates he becomes a comic figure in limbo. This absentmindedness is acknowledged in the corrective function of laughter whether his choices agree or disagree with the social gaze. It is where individuation takes place, and comedy functions as an art form which reminds people of their basic, undecided humanity in an age of mechanization.

The reason why Bergson conceived comedy as a corrective social instrument is that the rigidity of social morality forces an elasticity on part of the individual. Society cannot tolerate an individual who only partially adapts to its pressures "automatism of acquired habits" (Bergson, 2005, p. 46). Laughter identifies social repression and separatist tendencies at the moment they occur. The comic arises out of this tension of adaptation and unsociability beyond judgements of good and evil, hence providing a liminal zone where established collective morality at once reveals and disguises itself, making itself questionable for the individual ironically by

accounting him responsible for understanding or misunderstanding it. Jung (2017) remarks that:

> The further we go back into history, the more we see personality disappearing beneath the wrappings of collectivity. And if we go right back to primitive psychology, we find absolutely no trace of the concept of an individual. Instead of individuality we find only collective relationship or what Lévy-Bruhl calls *participation mystique*. The collective attitude hinders the recognition and evaluation of a psychology different from the subject's because the mind that is collectively oriented is quite incapable of thinking and feeling in any other way than by projection. (p. 9)

The comic can thus be conceived also as an example collective psychological projection. Collective ideology is similarly at work in the operations of the comic in society's projections to the individual. The symbolic moral operations inherent in it as a cultural gesture of moral participation is akin to the structure of liminality theorized as a phase of the rites of passage or transition by the anthropologists Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner.

The concept of liminality is etymologically derived from the Latin *limen*, which means threshold. This phase of social transition denotes the interim period characterized by obscurity, ambiguity and confusion when the subject of the rite is at the disorienting threshold of his previous identity in the community and his new social status which the rite aims to designate through the separation, liminality and aggregation stages of ritualistic socialization. Liminality is the stage where the ritual subject passes through cultural tests of understanding the social order. Turner (1969) highlights that "liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (p. 95). Such lifetime rebirths are communally ordained at intervals as a counterattack on the psychological entropy that consumes the energy of any social system. As they grow up, the life crises of community members are accentuated in

these transitional psychological exercises which are performed through the mediation of the social world, assigning the beginning and meaning of the subject's confrontation with the world of moral variance in opposition to personal desires. These liminal rites, which are communal enactments of emotions as collective strategies for social survival, provide a process of symbolic cohesion through the psychological machinery of condensation, displacement, unification and polarization plays to convert what is socially obligatory for a community in terms of morality into desirable actions with the domestication of the individual's identity by the norms of social ideology.

The liminal phase reorients the upset individual to the group's established codes of behaviour and averts the danger of nonconformity by restoring a moral sense of identity and redistributing social roles (Van Gennep, 1960, p. 8). This mode of external organizational inference towards morality is also intrinsic to the performative phases of the comic in the network of social relations as Bergson (2005) also notes that "unsociability in the performer and insensibility in the spectator" are its essential conditions (p. 89). Ruthlessly playing with the identity of the social initiate, liminality evokes and juxtaposes individual emotions with the harsh reality of group dynamics. The liminality of the comic sublime in drama similarly reveals different forms of such contradictory group dynamics which are situationally suppressed or expressed in the behavioural performance of the protagonists and cognition patterns of the audience as the social function of the corrective laughter is also "to convert rigidity into plasticity, to readapt the individual to the whole, in short, to round off the corners wherever they are met with" (Bergson, 2005. p. 86). The comic cushioning which corners the characters towards a confrontation with their possible alienation from or adaptation to their environment

embeds their generic transitional disturbances in life within the customary social routines of the status quo.

The liminal phase is characterized by sublime feelings of ambiguity, anonymity, inferiority and submission as opposed to the following structuralization of ideological norms that produces conformity in the ritual subject. Such rituals pose a question of identity with a reduction of the privileges of social status so as to make the individual understand the limits of his power and position in the social mechanisms. Turner (1969) points out that the ordeals and humiliations the subject goes through in liminality:

> . . . represent partly a tempering of their essence in order to prepare them to cope with their new responsibilities and restrain them in advance from abusing their new privileges. They have to be shown that in themselves they are clay or dust, mere matter, whose form is impressed upon them by society. (p. 103)

Turner conceives the experience of this bondless and modeless liminal phase of being subjected to a low profile as where human interrelatedness actually begins to take place. The death-like ritual limbo puts the subject in the position of an outsider in an established social network of insiders. The social appropriation of this 'positionlessness' through transition rituals illustrate how human interaction takes universal binary forms of open and closed moral mentalities across all societies, past and present. The stripping off of one's identity and status verifies the binary processing between the powerful and the weak, the high and the low, the moral and the discordant, the social and the selfish, the sagacious and the foolish, the cohesive and the autonomous. The sublime liminal reduction associated with weakness, frailty and marginality are thus accentuated for corrective purposes in the generation of social organization and cohesion which Bergson (2005) also observes in the organizational machinery of the comic:

> Laughter is, above all, a corrective. Being intended to humiliate, it must make a painful impression on the person against whom it is directed. By laughter, society avenges itself for the liberties taken with it. It would fail in its object if it bore the stamp of sympathy or kindness. (p. 51)

This lack of sympathy latent in the operations of the comic reveals human vulnerability and helplessness in an alienating world of liminality before society's powers. This is also what makes the comic's liminal experience sublime in the way Kant associates it with the feeling of respect in the recognition of moral laws (2015, §27). Bergson (2005) remarks that "a humorist is a moralist disguised as a scientist" (p. 63). What give shape and meaning to the comic are the larger moral mechanisms of the collective social gaze and the universal, established validity of moral feeling, guiding the conditions of cognition. According to Schiller (1993), the most powerful expression of the sublime occurs in subjection to suffering out of duty (p. 60). This power is also latent in understanding the comic sublime. With the mechanic rigidity of the moral law and social expectations always lurking subconsciously in our minds, the comic response to liminal conflicts with social and cultural norms is a form of mastering the automatism of emotions which is the source of the pleasure in laughter. The autonomous struggle against one's automatism turns into an exercise of free will in the experience of the comic sublime. The comic assault on automatism in its recognition can be conceived as "the condition for igniting that power of mind whose activity produces the pleasure" (Schiller, 1993, p. 5). The dramatization of the comic is therefore a plea for creativity as well.

CHAPTER 3

COMIC RESCISSION OF THE FETISHISM OF "COMMUNITY" IN *HEARTBREAK HOUSE*

As a dedicated socialist writer, Shaw's plays teem with Marxist themes and deliberations which call for ideological analysis on the basis of the effects of the production of material culture on the dramatic elements of characterization, setting and plot development. Marxist literary criticism analyses artistic creation in terms of social action theories which seek to expose it as a reflective byproduct of ideological oppression. The form, style and meanings in a work of art point out to social consciousness as the last resort of the changes in the economic existence of men, for material determinism is conceptualized as what shapes the course of historical action in Marxism. Marxist interpretation of art renders it as a form of sensational efflux, ideational shift and superficial projection of the empirical reality of economic substructures. Such an approach is conventionally criticized for dealing with literature as a superfluous variable and servant of ideology and a manipulative ritual of civilized life in the form of "phantoms formed in the human brain" (Marx & Engels, 1970, p. 47). However, certain ideological revelations of Marxist criticism on the nature of the production mode of social relations on top of commodities aren't as outdated, irrelevant or dysfunctional as it might be taken for granted in the age of post-human attitudes when it comes to analysing texts by writers like Shaw who organically have a foot in the Marxist political milieu at its outset.

An appropriation of the Marxist theory of commodity fetishism into the realm of the dramatic production of the comic sublime helps to study how Shaw played with conventional artistic tools and ideological apparatuses to counteract his age's

superstructural mechanisms in the name of social change or at least ideological disclosure of modern community relations. Literature can be treated even by historians as a source of knowledge about how the past was psychologically experienced and, most importantly, remembered in narrativity by its witnesses. Key Marxist concepts like false consciousness, alienation and commodity fetishism concern how social discourses are pragmatically moulded, manipulated and marketed on ideological grounds, and they also shed light on the analysis of the dramatic paradigm shift Shaw aimed at with the utilization of the comic in a historical and moral critique like *Heartbreak House*. In terms of Gordon's (1990) rendition of the forms of the comic sublime in Shaw's plays, the ironies in *Heartbreak House* fall into the category of the exposition of visionary scepticism in the comic spectrum with the conception of the sublime as a "totalising gesture of mind and language that masters a threat to the ego and thereby expands and fortifies it" (p. 7) and the consequential comic juxtaposition the magnification of the ego with the "radical incompletion of the self" (p. 8). The impossibility of social restoration and individual integrity against modern decadence in terms of morality induces elements of the sublime into the comic egotism and scepticism of all the characters in the play. With regard to Shaw's reference to Chekhov in subtitling the play as "A Fantasia in the Russian Manner on English Themes", Berst (1987) underlines how "the aesthetic direction in Shaw is away from a sad tone poem of nostalgia toward a cacophonous fantasia which forebodes apocalypse . . . with a toccata of doom" (p. 140) as Shaw's mode of expressionism. Shaw's employment of a wide range of dramatic techniques throughout the play suggests new artistic outlets from modernity's liminal conditions with the portrayal of the comic sublime. The attempt to read the utilization of the simultaneous dramatic production of the comic and the sublime in terms of a

ritualized form of ‘community’ fetishism provides much room for stimulating introspection to explicate how social meanings are issued in the machinery of human affairs.

As a tool of literary criticism, the Marxist notion of fetishism helps to reveal how situational suppression and expression work in group dynamics in terms of the dialectic between consciousness and performance conceived as the means of production of the social setting and interpersonal relations. The most basic Marxist premise with regard to fetishism of commodity is that the production and circulation of things are in fact disguised social relations. As such, Shaw’s *Heartbreak House*, published only one year and staged two years after the end of World War I, depicts how a group of cultured, leisured and superficially self-complacent Europeans who arrive at an eccentric household as dinner guests struggle with the cognitive dissonance of a sociological “transcendental homelessness”, to use Lukacs’ phrase (1971, p. 41). The play aims to portray “the complete destruction of the entire edifice of capitalism” (Hummert, 1973, p. 92) and is set against the background of the breakdown of class relations and conventions with the world’s first global war on the horizon. Inhabitants and invitees of the household transfigure into a dystopic, liminal community which shatters the nostalgically idyllic image of a peacefully functioning, self-subsistent English mansion in the countryside as the characters are satirically victimized as the deficit account and lunatic residue of modern history. In *Heartbreak House*, the motivational schemes of the characters’ social conduct are explicated in how they consciously attempt to address their subjection to changing bio-psychological needs and unconsciously redress the presentational image of their actions as objective virtues by confronting, manipulating and marketing their moral and economic constraints and expectations. The endless cycles of desperate

manipulation and comic revelation carry Shaw's dramaturgy to the edge of the sublime in the manifestation of vanity and insanity beneath the characters' social appearance of pedantry.

The seemingly loose dramatic structure of *Heartbreak House*'s portrayal of a single day of dinner and slumber party actually accords with the dialectic stages of rituals in each act and the play in its entirety: separation, transition and aggregation. The play starts with the abrupt and hectic arrival of the guests one by one whereupon their motives and lifestyles begin to be immediately questioned with dry humour as if they have landed on the Judgment Day. The characters cross examine each other's personal expectations based on the promises of their social status, scheme pragmatic plots for social mobility and negotiate their remaining possibilities with heartbreaking confessions and mutual criticism of their previous deeds. Social rituals seem to be dropped off in this alienated house as nobody welcomes Ellie Dunn, the play's leading young lady invited to Captain Shotover's house by his daughter Hesione Hushaby to discuss the prospects of Miss Dunn's marriage to the millionaire businessman Alfred Mangan. Miss Dunn's storyline could have easily made her the heroine of the play but although it helps to provide a center, it is only to shift the focus to other peripheral characters. The complex set of romantic, friendship and kinship relations between the characters fundamentally come down to material sustenance, and the way the characters attempt to disguise their self-interests with manipulations to no avail creates the comic ground of their liminal encounters. Miss Dunn, the millionaire Alfred Mangan and her father Alfred Mazzini, who saved his business with the money he borrowed from Mangan, come to the Captain's house as a guest of his daughter Mrs. Hushabye with the hope that she will help to match them up. Yet, the reverse happens as Miss Dunn confesses that she is actually in love with

someone else who happens to be Mrs. Hushabye's husband, Hector, whom actually deceived Miss Dunn with romantic lies and a false identity. Upon the revelation of this love triangle, Shaw further complicates the nonsensical romance plot with Mrs. Hushabye going after the millionaire Mangan herself with the permission of Miss Dunn while also allowing her own sister Lady Utterword, who arrives next with her brother-in-law Randall who is also in love with her, to go after her own husband Hector. In short, the play is structured as a carnivalesque doomsday with intelligent women who have to sell out and weary idealists exploited by ineffectual businessmen. Initially, these socially immoral triangles of sexuality and economy shock the characters but the comic way they begin to choose to act naturally in such decadence instead following social ideals gradually opens them up to each other as well as their own helplessness in the lack of economic means.

Captain Shotover's house literally and metaphorically resembles a ship because both in the theme and form of the play, it is the group that matters. Not escaping the tragedy of the luxury British ship Titanic which sank in 1912 almost as a historical omen of the upcoming Great War, the ship metaphor is employed by Shaw to invoke a symbolic stage for social disaster and historical tragedy. European imagination is familiar with artistic interpretations of such marine disasters.[1] Such marine accidents with social catastrophes from the age of discovery onwards were captured intensely in the hinterland of European memory as a metaphor of the

[1] One of the most well-known examples of such critiques of imperial greed backed by the rising modern opportunities of colonialism and commercialism was Theodore Géricault's painting *The Raft of Medusa*. It sublimely depicted the tragedy of the lower and middle class crew and passengers of the French expedition ship Medusa whom were left to die on an inefficient raft by the ship's aristocratic captain after it crashed en route to Senegal. Only 15 of 150 had survived. The giant sized painting's installation at the annual and royally sponsored exhibition of Salon de Paris of the French Académie de Beaux-Arts in 1819 in the post-revolutionary atmosphere of the French Revolution caused scandal and controversy in intellectual chambers all over Europe. According to the accounts of the few survivors who desperately drifted in the open sea for twelve days, every imaginable horror was committed on the raft from mutiny and suicide to raging madness, racist violence and cannibalism (Boime, 2004, p. 135). The marine accident and its artistic depiction remain as a tragic memoir of the catastrophic morality of European colonialism to this day.

breakdown of modernity's promises against the sublime forces of nature. Following the same historical nightmare, Captain Shotover's unwelcoming ship-house, which none of the guests can leave at will once they are on board, also reminds us a modern counterpart of another imaginative incubus of Europe's imperial marine enterprises aiming to conquer the world: The Flying Dutchman, the legendary ghost ship that can never make the land and is cursed with sailing the oceans forever. Instead of focusing on individual storylines, the informed context of the Great War coupled with the hindsight criticism of the end of all such tragedies provides Shaw a symbolically haunting and haunted atmosphere embroidered in the relations of the characters with the setting and in the central theme of failed communion in isolation. The metaphor of the isolated ship in the grip of the power of nature frames the experience of the sublime in comparison with the comic manifestations of the lack of communication and human understanding between the incompatible characters as the imagined crew of this drifting ship. The notion of such homelessness in nature embedded in the experience of the sublime casts the comedy of manners Shaw denotes in the relations between the characters more obvious as a liminal yearning for home and connection with others.

As Miss Dunn falls asleep at the beginning of the play while waiting to be welcomed, there is a slight suggestion that the entire play could be her dream as well. Thus, setting the stage with a mix of historical authenticity, literary metaphor and the twilight of a waking dream, Shaw conveniently appeals to thick and authentic descriptions by the characters when they relate their first impressions of each other instead of resorting to the realism of social decorum and propriety. Like an innocent novice at the gate of a monastery and the feet of a harsh Zen master like Captain Shotover, who aspires to attain the seventh degree of concentration, Miss Dunn is

immediately casted and morally targeted by the eccentric Captain as “a young and attractive female” (p. 70), “misguided and unfortunate” (p. 71). Miss Dunn becomes the liminal target of Shotover’s ritualistic education in making her lift to a higher level of realism in her consciousness of the world she is about to enter. These kind of galling descriptions come jocosely from Shotover throughout the play, and nobody feels welcomed or at home in this metaphorical ship but as the house’s servant points out they all get used to the lack of etiquette and even begin to try and enjoy the freedom of outspokenness. Miss Dunn soon learns that “unless I can be hard –as hard as nails– I shall go mad” (p. 156). The metaphorical mystification of the setting under the command of Captain Shotover, who actually admits that he is going weary and can’t see people as they really are or remember what he really is (p. 191), aids the acceptance of these satiric attitudes and idiosyncratic behaviours on part of the characters. The relations become more transparent to insiders and outsiders within the play as they all lose gravity in the centrifugal force of the historical disintegration, relegation and homelessness in the background.

Wilson (1969) comments that what Shaw attempts in *Heartbreak House* is to portray all the important questions of the period ranging from imperial Victorian idealism and the ruthless colonialism of big business to the inefficiency of romanticism and Nietzschean ‘devaluation of values’ in modernity as symbols of a sick Europe (p. 232). As modernity advanced gradually from sixteenth century onwards, the British Empire had managed to colonize the world and monopolize global commerce with its shipping industry and adventurous captains like Shotover, who unreservedly and frankly describes himself as “a thief, a pirate and a murderer” (p. 115). Aristocracy had fallen from power at home in the designation of social affairs together with its traditional codes. The new rising class of bourgeoisie which

replaced it had to develop a behaviour of pretence and endure the illusion of power and traditional harmony although the processes of class shift and handover of wealth were actually creating an ontological state of homelessness. Millions of peasants were thrust into cities seeking paid employment in sweatshops while the bourgeoisie had to leave the home base of the country in search of raw materials and new markets. In other words, the notion of "home" was radically shifting politically as well as economically. There was no longer any room for social pretences of decorum in this opportunistic rat race of the new anonymous everymen alienated from the products of their labour, the process of production and eventually their human essence in the Marxist sense of the concept. Lukacs (1971) describes such a universal scheme of transcendental homelessness as a historical template where an interruption in material relations causes the immanence of collective social meaning to dissolve beyond recovery (p. 41). Shaw uses the same template of alienation in introducing the play's characters to each other to actually draw his characters closer beyond superficial acquaintance and calculated manners.

This calls for a Marxist appropriation of ideological analysis into their conflicting affairs as the liminal clash of fetishized identities reflects modern anxieties of socialization and individuation. The demonstrations of modern liminality in the play are organized "as a progressive stripping away of pose and illusion from the wretched and often unsightly truth" (Meisel, 1963, p. 319) which drives the audience towards a comic encounter with the sublime paralysation of human agency before the mechanistic material forces of the age. What makes *Heartbreak House* unique is that for the first time in his writing career, Shaw does not make this analysis with arguments in favour of his socialist rationalization of love, education, politics, economy, etc. but by tragicomically, and at times absurdly, demonstrating

how optimistic views on these issues conclusively fail to come alive on the stage. The piercing merge of the comic and the sublime with nihilistic undertones, which are characteristically inherent but latent in the two concepts, gives the play an unparalleled level of critical seriousness in Shaw's bibliography alongside its frenetic dramatization of hilarity. In light of the social context of the period, the exhibition of the comic momentum in the recognition of attempted false consciousness, in the Marxist sense, on part of such an interpersonal market's buyers and sellers in Shaw's text discloses the characters' topsy-turvy and unchecked sexual and romantic interests which they utilize and exploit to package, disguise and market their actual identities. More essentially from a literary point of view, the analysis of Shaw's dramaturgical immersion in the liminality of this dialectical gap between truth and representation puts forward how the comic effect can be produced and employed as a sign to detect false social consciousness at the nexus of its production and distribution in a set of manipulative interpersonal enterprises for psychological as well as economic survival.

"All that is solid melts into air, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life," declare Marx and Engels (2013, p. 63) famously in *The Communist Manifesto*. *Heartbreak House* is a straightforward exposition of this cognitive dissonance and state of sobering up, prophesied in this famous Marxist maxim as an omen of modern liminality. The trick Shaw manages to pull from start to finish is just to let the characters tell the truth about what they think and expect of each other in the entanglement of their social duties on one hand and personal desires on the other right away. This technique of non-dramatization immediately casts the characters into an undetermined liminal sphere of existence in the realm of the sublime while comically tearing down the conventional dramatic

suspension of disbelief on part of the characters within the play itself. The guests initially show symptoms of struggle with the dissonance they experience with how abruptly the plots they intend to brew are spoiled by the hypercorrectness of the hosts but the sublime uneasiness of this catastrophic awakening is relieved in proportion to how much they can comically come down to earth in front of others and stop trying to sell their own self-image.

According to Lukacs (1971), the philosophical visions of historical ages appropriate or invent different art forms in alignment with their transcendental ideological principles (p. 40). In this sense, Shaw's immediate transition from formal to informal in the very acquaintance phase of the characters represents a world already out of joint and in dissonance in terms of a dialectical reciprocity of self-consciousness and social action. Marx and Shaw, or Dickens for that matter, were Londoners of the same century, witnessing British society's painstaking liminal disposition and sobering modern reduction from a *gemeinschaft* of cohesive status system to a *gesellschaft* of mechanical social relations with waves of mass migration from the countryside to the city. Commenting on the spectacle of the urban space and its new social forms of enchantment, Guy Debord (1994) points out that "this society which eliminates geographical distance reproduces distance internally as spectacular separation" (p. 120). By gathering all his characters outside the urban setting while playing with the mechanical plot developments and formal unfolding of well-made plays, Shaw dissolves the historical illusions of his characters instantly as well as the conventional dramatic expectations of the audience. He gives the stage to this internal distance of social relations where the liminal phase of a rite of passage occurs as the characters find themselves separated from each other and their own identities but also exposed to each other together with the audience. This is a critical

dramatic reversal by Shaw of the established practice of well-made plays which conceal important information from the characters but reveal to the audience. To that end, *Heartbreak House* showcases how the liminal separation turns modern society itself into a disintegrating, comic spectacle. In the same vein, Marx's revelation of commodity fetishism also exposes the ideological unification of community on the same grounds of manipulated social relations. *Heartbreak House* deals with the cognition patterns of surfacing this compelling and naked material disenchantment as the "ache of modernism" in Thomas Hardy's phrase (1912, p. 160). This is the cynicism that highlights the light-hearted witticism of Shaw's dark comedy.

Bearing in mind the basic etymological definition of economy as the management of a household, Shaw's play investigates also the management of social relations and identities formed around the psychic halo of material transactions. Hence, economies of living assume an altogether existential sense for the characters. During Shaw's period of national fame as England's foremost playwright, economy itself was not yet fully developed as a social science to measure patterns of commercial action and remained a part of moral philosophy concerned with well-being. To that end, the ontological implication of this semantic history of economy becomes an appropriate tool for the play's criticism because the social relations in Shaw's broken household are extremely commoditized and satirized almost in accord with Taylorism's scientific management of production for efficiency. There is normally an expected division of labour even in treating and welcoming the guests as the visits of people to each other in English society are highly governed by regulations of time and content but conventions no longer seem to work in this shipwreck of a household. The normative discourses of small or big talk rituals are completely disregarded in Shaw's play in which punctuality and social correctness

have totally disappeared. The lax atmosphere of Shavian comedy as exposed in *Heartbreak House* stems from the irony of showing how punctual worship of one another by actually self-flattering subjects in perpetual social rites provides no longer an opportunity to escape the eschatological circumstances of modernity which left no actual relation between people other than naked self-interest and "resolved personal worth into exchange value" "in the icy water of egotistical calculation" (Marx & Engels, 2013, p. 62).

In the theory of liminality, it is put forward that the experience of being subjected to a low profile in transitive periods is where human interrelatedness actually begins to take place. This loose and unconscious state is what actually forms the basis of socialization. Scene upon scene, this form of relaxation is what takes place in *Heartbreak House*. The sustenance of social relations between the characters depends on the flexibility they can acquire as subjects in sorting out a new compromise with the upcoming social enforcements. The revelation of initiating oneself to this unconventional social cooperation attributes a satirical but honest character to the regeneration of an acceptance of a new code of conduct with an open-minded consensus. At moments of collective social interaction and creating a new meaning for their presence, Shaw's characters must begin to act out of character in order to be accepted to this decadent society by revealing their own false-consciousness if they hope for salvation at all. They must come to terms with each other's transgressions against the status quo with a new social contract. Thus, a core transformative operation of deliberate cognitive dissonance is materialized when the disillusioned Ellie Dunn finally collapses:

> ELLIE: There seems to be nothing real in the world except my father and Shakespeare. Marcus's tigers are false; Mr Mangan's millions are false; there is nothing really strong and true about Hesione but her beautiful black hair; and Lady Utterword's is too pretty to be real. The one thing that was left to

> me was the Captain's seventh degree of concentration; and that turns out to be—
> CAPTAIN SHOTOVER: Rum. (p. 215)

The only reaction that the millionaire Mangan can give to this moment of collapse is to put aside all his respectability and start to take off all his clothes in an absurd frenzy. When everybody who had pressured him up to that point as an old, capitalist villain preying upon an innocent young woman condemn him with shame, he also erupts into a most revealing harangue in response to Miss Dunn's sublime moment of truth:

> MANGAN: Shame! What shame is there in this house? Let's all strip stark naked. We may as well do the thing thoroughly when we're about it. We've stripped ourselves morally naked: well, let us strip ourselves physically naked as well, and see how we like it. I tell you I can't bear this. I was brought up to be respectable. I don't mind the women dyeing their hair and the men drinking: it's human nature. But it's not human nature to tell everybody about it. Every time one of you opens your mouth I go like this [he cowers as if to avoid a missile], afraid of what will come next. How are we to have any self-respect if we don't keep it up that we're better than we really are? (p. 216)

The millionaire Mangan, who has actually exploited and oppressed Miss Dunn's family appearing as a kind-hearted benefactor, is the character who experiences the power of this liminal reduction and refinement the most. He had merely lived off his reputation as a successful captain of industry while he actually manages the money he raises from other businessmen to take advantage of failed enterprises as they near bankruptcy. When he is labelled "a slavedriver" (p. 146) by Mrs. Hushabye, Miss Dunn's father is there to immediately correct her "romantic ideas about business" (p. 147). In his view, Mangan is not even a cunning and harsh swindler but merely an appearance who cannot even go near the men he sets to work or run the machinery he owns.

In the way Mangan is peeled layer by layer, the template of the game of penetrating fictions and fabrications of personality become obvious. Mrs.

Hushabye's husband Hector, who has himself been a similar perpetrator of romantic lies in his extramarital affair with Miss Ellie, declares that they all know each other's poses; the psychological thrill of this estranged house comes from the game of finding out "the man under the pose" (p. 196). Shaw comically makes sure that no character in the play can act as he is expected to; even the burglar, who is caught on the job by the other characters, begs to be turned over to the police to sin off his conscience by spending the rest of his life repenting in a cell. Mangan, exasperated with the sense of unreality, complains that "the very burglars can't behave naturally in this house" (p. 172). Although it is against Mangan's conception of human nature to come out with one's secrets so openly, Shaw's tragicomic strategy favors Hector's game in revealing the false fetishism of community. Carpenter (1969) attributes the method of convicting false judgments in Shaw's critical comedies to how "his characters seem ridiculous when they act in accord with ideals and sympathetic when they behave naturally" (p. 71). This comic paradox serves to exhibit the ideological determinism between material substructures and sociocultural codes of behaviour when Shaw mocks the mutual social expectations of the characters through each other's pretensions and withdrawals in *Heartbreak House*.

Throughout the play, the characters exchange false personal appearances just as commodities are marketed by way of misrepresenting their actual use value in capitalism. All the characters actually have difficulty in making both ends in a state of unacknowledged poverty. The whole objective of socialization for them seems to be to conceal the subjective awareness of their own conditions behind a very much acknowledged gentility in rituals of bartering identity against the encroachment of capitalism. However, they cannot escape their liminal entrapment and have to appeal to the same mechanistic cycle of social delusions which are shattered throughout the

play due to the cross purposes of the characters. In the context of *Heartbreak House*, such a satirical mismanagement of egotistical calculations results in a discursive and behavioural negligence of the character's historical liminality as a gap between cognition and performance in dialectic terms. Channelling the Marxist analysis of conflict as the drive of change into social psychology, what we observe in Shaw's modern liminal subjects is that they begin to show irrational actions by unmasking their true identity like Mangan because it has become inevitably obligatory for them. The conflicts of their sexual and economic interests cannot be domesticated to form and serve any common social or single-handed individual purpose anymore. Economy is the main moral disposition for them, and that's why when the hypocritical presentation of their economic prospects are challenged and hold against them, they are existentially displaced to an isolated noosphere. The relations of materiality gain an importance beyond a mere monetary nexus when this in-between state of social transition is blurred by ambiguity, anonymity and inferiority just as it is the case with individual psychology in rites of passage. The ghost ship-house of Shotover thus transforms into a liminal zone where the characters bluntly exert the forces of society on each other with outright humiliation and anger released in comic forms.

For the same reason, Shaw's female characters in the play are also neither angels at home as mothers, spouses and sisters nor madwomen in the attic but objects of a gentle satire because the process of structuralization of new ideological norms that produce conformity in the ritual subjects has not come about yet. They are all stuck between a rock and a hard place as modern commodities in the market of arranged marriages and love affairs. Such ritualistic social transformations end up in a question of identity as the privileges of social status are reduced temporarily until

new value structures emerge. Through various dialectical schemes, like the seclusion we see in the household's juxtaposition with the city and the materialistic puzzles different couples get lost in with love triangles, the characters have to endure many tests of honesty in order to appropriate the new order of things. Although initially posed as the young and victimized heroine in the social microcosm of "this ship we are all in … This soul's prison we call England" (Shaw, 2003, p. 231), in the words of Hector, Miss Dunn too cannot escape condemnation at the hands of his educator Captain Shotover to whom she turns to as her ideal lover in the end after the failed romance with Hector and the failed marriage with Mangan. The seemingly mad, old man Shotover, who is the only one to welcome the day of reckoning by shouting "Stand by, all hands, for judgment!" (p. 233) when bombs start to fall on the house, is actually the only character who wanted to remain true to life's intensity instead of keeping up with social shams for comfort:

> SHOTOVER: A man's interest in the world is only the overflow from his interest in himself. . . . I see my daughters and their men living foolish lives of romance and sentiment and snobbery. I see you, the younger generation, turning from their romance and sentiment and snobbery to money and comfort and hard common sense. . . . You are going to let the fear of poverty govern your life; and your reward will be that you will eat, but you will not live. (p. 189)

This is the key moment of expression in *Heartbreak House* which washes the imagined community's dirty laundry in public as an impoverished threshold people, deprived of vitality. The characters know each other's materialistic calculations disguised as emotions but act upon their own self-interest with indifference and without any condemnation of others who do exactly the same. Hector admits that it is impossible to kill this human vermin because "we are members one of another" and as poor devils they "live among the disease germs and the doctors and the lawyers and the parsons and the restaurant chefs and the tradesmen and the servants and all

the rest of the parasites and blackmailers" (p. 125). Rubbing each other's noses in this inescapable modern liminality and undermining the established formulas of social cohesion, this conscious but unconscientious comic operation is linked to the pragmatic abolishment of control mechanisms. Shaw's ritualistic new satirical social contract overrules the calculated meanings that are structured upon the raw material needs of the characters. From the clash of immanent psychobiological urges for survival in a new set of chaotic circumstances and extrinsic structures for order derives the buffer zone of mystification that keeps human interrelatedness in a phenomenally well-functioning but noumenally manipulated alignment within a differentiated network of status system. This moment when Captain Shotover not only recognizes but also articulates the *raison d'être* of the false consciousness of the characters is extremely important to showcase how the material illusion can no longer be sustained in the psychological exchanges between commodified subjects in light of their comic sublime encounters.

It is at this point that it becomes possible to introduce heartbreak as the experience of the sublime after the comic demonstrations of the characters' inner conflicts and cross purposes. Amidst the corrective comedy of manners, Ellie Dunn is suddenly captured by "a horrible fear that my heart is broken, but heartbreak is not like what I thought it must be" to which Mrs. Hushabye's bluntly responds by saying "It's only life educating you, pettikins" (p. 103). Staring into an imaginary distance, Miss Dunn further comments on how their hearts are breaking, and that is the essence of all that is happening:

> ELLIE: It is a curious sensation: the sort of pain that goes mercifully beyond our powers of feeling. When your heart is broken, your boats are burned: nothing matters any more. It is the end of happiness and the beginning of peace. (p. 180)

The sublime confrontation with different forms heartbreak in their affairs helps the characters achieve a certain degree of self-knowledge. The disillusioned Miss Dunn, who had high hopes for social mobility in marrying the millionaire Mangan and for pure romance in flirting with Hector, has to admit to Captain Shotover in the end that only after the experience of heartbreak she ironically feels "as if there was nothing I could not do, because I want nothing" (p. 192). Whitman (1977) notes how characters like Shotover "who are drifting, with no sense of purpose, no desire to reach, for there is no need to reach and nothing to reach for" (p. 189) are ironically the most self-assured in Shaw's plays. Hector's grave comment that "We of this house are only moths flying into the candle" (p. 235) underlines the same breakdown of personality in the imagery of the sublime experienced as affirmative debility before nature's supreme command of human passions.

Berst (1987) points out this sublime redemption through heartbreak with regard to how Shaw first disperses the characters' illusions by subjecting them to comic ridicule because of their egotism:

> Heartbreak has great potential if it brings an end to the pursuit of illusion, especially illusion founded on self-interest, because only by reversing the spiritually consuming whirlpool of egocentricity can the soul awaken to the broader consciousness of life and reality. (p. 158)

Shaw uses the comic to reverse the bleak egotism of the characters toward the sublime. That's why he portrays the cranky Shotover as the only character who has educated himself in heartbreak by turning it into an apprehension of broader consciousness. Living his second childhood in his old age, he dreads "the happiness of yielding and dreaming instead of resisting and doing" (p. 191). Describing the summoning of the broken hearted in the play as a liminal "Neverland", Kruse (1987) highlights how the setting serves as "an allegorical place where people are like adult children and absurdly childish; and this is basic to the repetitive and cumulative

dramatic irony . . . as being in a state of futile confusion and ruin" (p. 107). Yet, Shotover acknowledges the embrace of nothingness instead of human illusions as the only real strength derived from his experience of confronting the sublime power of nature itself:

> SHOTOVER: I was ten times happier on the bridge in the typhoon, or frozen into Arctic ice for months in darkness, than you or they have ever been. You are looking for a rich husband. At your age I looked for hardship, danger, horror, and death, that I might feel the life in me more intensely. I did not let the fear of death govern my life; and my reward was, I had my life. (p. 189)

The seemingly most ridiculous and lost character in the play thus relates the most striking experience of the sublime by having turned to the intensity of life instead of letting social illusions break his heart's passions. Like Captain Shotover's comfort in his entertainment of madness, the comic ends Shaw makes his characters suffer because of the pursuit of their own illusions also bring them to the edge of the sublime in facing the power of social reality over their self-interests.

To put a fine a point on it, the sublime mode of choiceless awareness in the heartbreaking individuation and socialization processes of the characters' liminal selves, disrupted by the comic revelation of their mutual hypocrisies, is the very template which is also at work in the fetishism of commodity. Their mode of intentional hypocrisy feeds the fetish of community. In the Marxist theory, the transformation of commodity into a fetish is a result of the separation of the use-value of products in a free-labour structure from its exchange value determined by the market network. This process hides the secret that the authentic valuation process is determined by labour in reality. Assuming that a commodity has an intrinsic value guided by the market independent of labour-power turns into a ritual behaviour like a religious belief and fetish, imposed by an absolute external force – the market, in this case. Such a fetishism of taking the social character of commodity for granted and

addressing the exchange-value as absolute leads to false consciousness about the actual value of the commodity which is actually determined by labour. In Marx, this is a secret manipulation of political economy which reduces labour's operation over the valuation of its products (Marx, 1996, p. 53). In a larger context, it goes together with the objectification and alienation of the worker and his work by dissociating the actual noumenon behind labour's products and making them appear indifferent to social relations and independent from the phenomenology of the market's reality as a pseudo-fetish. As such, the commodification of the identities of Shaw's characters, their subsequent entrapment in the worship of false social fetishes for naught and absolute devaluation of all forms of self-interest in the end merge in the dramatic experience of the comic sublime, following the steps of a rite of passage in modern liminality.

Just as Marx attempted at a disenchantment of the illusion of market-reality which masks direct exploitation of labour, Shaw does the same in the realm of commodified personal relations which alienate human beings from life itself and their actual identities. The heartbreaking experience of waking up to the modern reality of the play's fetishized community through comic encounters brings about the fatalistic forces of the sublime into effect. "Political economy is to the State, what domestic economy is to the family" says James Mill (2007, p. 1). In the aforementioned quote from Captain Shotover, the whole process of the alienation of labour as vitality, and subsequently of commodification of identity, becomes transparent in the market reality of human affairs. It underlines how private desires turn into public norms and institutions at the expense of others in disguised social relations. The concealment of cognition points out to a fetishism of 'community' organized around the fetishism of 'commodity'. That is why Miss Dunn's father

Mazzini states that "the great question is, not who we are but what we are" (p. 115). Likewise, Mrs. Hushabye becomes the agent of Mazzini's further realization of the commodification of their relations when she urges him not to sacrifice her daughter Miss Dunn to "that thing" (p. 146). The objectification and commodification of their human essence is what enables Shaw to utilize the Bergsonian notion of mechanization in the operations of the comic. In the end, the same mechanistic compulsions of the modern world urge Captain Shotover to rebel against the status quo with a more serious attack than his comical attempt at attaining the seventh degree of consciousness:

> SHOTOVER: What then is to be done? Are we to be kept forever in the mud by these hogs to whom the universe is nothing but a machine for greasing their bristles and filling their snouts? . . . There is enmity between our seed and their seed. They know it and act on it, strangling our souls. They believe in themselves. When we believe in ourselves, we shall kill them. (pp. 12-125)

The implication of the whole submergence of their real identities and motivations is that it is Shaw's characters' modern sense of urgency for vitality against the crushing mechanic social relations which make them forsake sober senses and ignore the reality of their passions. To heal the sublime heartbreak they experience, they seek compromise and peace in pseudo-socialization alongside the exchange-value of their very manipulations in a deliberately silenced consensus. The sublime gaze of the big Other is at work as a secret of socialization in the perpetual comic resistance of the characters' recognition of the conflict concerning the true nature of their relations and their pretense in return. This liminality is just as political economy's assumption that a commodity has an exchange value magically exerted from outside by the market almost with the powers of a religious fetish which is in fact a secret manipulation to be indifferent to actual social relations. Correlatively, hypocritical interactions with others in this experience of dialectic material liminality in

Heartbreak House assumes the sacredness of sustaining society but eventually it fails under Shaw's comic scrutiny.

Commodity fetishism endows material objects with new symbolic meanings which allegedly make the exchange network function properly. The template can be converted to the mystification process of both social relations and their tangible or intangible by-products. All social formations actually conceal the authentic motivations of those who value and create them. Appropriating the same theory to the realm of human relations, Shaw's comic explication of the fetishism of "community" in *Heartbreak House* acts on the same principle of laying bare the silenced actual relations that produce the sublime force of modern society upon liminal individuals. Undoubtedly, the experiences of characters are shaped by the *weltanschauung* of bourgeois values as a sorcerer "who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells" (Marx & Engels, 2013, p. 66), which makes it possible to read *Heartbreak House* as a narrative of the catatonic phase of a failed collective material transformation ritual. The spectre haunting the alienated characters is the invisible hand of the market of interpersonal relations guided by materialistic calculations. To explain in Lukacs' (1971) terms, *Heartbreak House*'s "entire inner action… is a struggle against the power of time" (p. 122) as circumscribed by the transitional material culture of the continent doomed for the Great War. Hence, the loss of punctuality, identity and status go hand in hand in the Captain's desert, impoverished household. The guests and hosts of Captain Shotover's dinner and slumber party have to abide by the new rules of this liminal game of identity loss, putting aside the bartering of self-images as exchange values and sublimely confront the real valuation of their lives in

juxtaposition with others in the changing modern reality in order to survive this unconventional and comic social test of authenticity.

CHAPTER 4

THE COMIC AND LIMINAL UNSELFING IN *MAJOR BARBARA*

Bernard Shaw models the main motifs of moral conversion and clash with parental authority in *Major Barbara* on the anonymous legends of the third century Christian martyr Barbara, patron saint of firemen, armourers and artillerymen. This background denotes his ritualistic approach to drama which targets and plays with the moral assumptions of the audience's collective historical unconscious. The instructive stages of Saint Barbara's legend inform Shaw's plot in the play with a twist in the end and a contrast of characterization throughout for a fresh and challenging change of mentality on the theme of indoctrination and social domestication of the individual in the process of adverse juvenescence against the background of parental love and oppression. The legend goes that Saint Barbara was locked up in a tower as a child by her pagan father to keep her away from the evils of the outside world. After secretly converting to Christianity, Barbara made a public confession of her conversion by putting up a sign of the Holy Trinity on a Roman bathhouse built by her father. When she also refused to marry the man of her father's choice, she was brought to trial and eventually beheaded by her own father who is related to have been struck by lightning right after the execution as a form of divine punishment or poetic justice – hence the saint's association with fire and artillery (Williams, 1975, pp. 156-185). The atrocious suffering of Barbara in her father's hands who was exceedingly protective of her innocence, her refusal to submit to any earthly authority in the name of a higher order despite its deadly consequences and subsequent exaltation as a martyr by the Catholic Church all convey a fearful and pitiful sense of the tragic sublime with several psychological connotations of virgin

sacrifice, Electra complex, religious fever and divine retribution. The very sublimation of a historical incident into a fabular legend of religious indoctrination from generation to generation in the case of the beatification of Saint Barbara is a perfect example of the collective narration of a rite of passage for the establishment of a new morality in a liminal age like the transition from pagan antiquity to medievalism with the disintegration of the Roman Empire in the West.

Shaw's modernized retelling of the same legend in comic terms during a new liminal phase of Western consciousness in the transition from the Victorian apex of conventional religiosity to the pragmatic and secular mentality of modernity in *Major Barbara* is based on the reversing mechanism of laughter in how he questions the solid and naïve convictions of the legend's archetypal father and daughter figures. As a modern storyteller, Shaw simply projects the contemporary consequences and reflections of their historical aspirations into the liminal mindsets and affairs of modern individuals and puts it to the test of modern times as well as laughter. His treatment of the classic confrontation between a conservative man of the establishment whose wealth comes from the selfish destruction of others and his revolutionary daughter whose sacrificial faith is derived from the salvation of others puts on the stage a dubious interrogation of conventional socio-psychological roles as a modern take on a canonized Christian narrative of a rite of passage. Bearing in mind Bergson's understanding of the mechanic element of repetition in the recognition and presentation of the comic, Marx's (2005) remark that all great historical phenomena in the world appear twice, the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce (p. 1), hits the nails of Shaw's dramatic morality and comic technique right on the head.

Major Barbara opens with a scene of family summoning organized by Lady Britomart to settle the future of her three children, Stephen, Sarah and Barbara, by discussing their marriage and inheritance prospects with respect to the ambiguous relationship they have with their father Andrew Undershaft, an incredibly wealthy and intellectually pompous munitions manufacturer, who hasn't seen his children grow up after separating from Lady Britomart. The fiancés of Sarah and Barbara, Charles Lomax and a Greek scholar Adolphus Cusins respectively, are also invited to this important meeting where family secrets which make the characters question their status and reconsider their identities are brought to the table with an open-minded calculation of means and ends, sorting out their opportunities for optimum social mobility. At the beginning of the play, it is only Barbara and her father Undershaft who seem to be self-conscious of their status in society with complacency as they think they have already made an enlightened moral leap in their lives. Denying the opportunities of her class, Barbara has discharged her maid and lives on a minimum amount of money because she has chosen to serve the poor in the Salvation Army. She has freed herself from the age's decorum and propriety by joining the Salvation Army, one of the most valiant reformist religious sects of the day. Undershaft, on the contrary, has firmly established himself as a profiteer of war without being troubled by its humane catastrophes because he considers himself a realist in the affairs of finance and statecraft. Undershaft conceives his business as a duty to make society function. Crompton (1965, p. 94) comments that Shaw might have had the philanthropist scientist Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite, in mind in drawing the character of Undershaft. Nobel was typically a confused but celebrated nineteenth-century hero whose endowment of the Nobel Peace Prize at the turn of the century became an ironic incentive to solve the problems of the age which his

discoveries in business, chemistry and engineering had created. Similarly, the facts that Undershaft didn't inherit the profitable armament factory from his own family but was recruited and adopted as a promising foundling to continue the business because of a tradition which was established way back during the reign of James I and he will also do the same salve his conscience. The invention of such a tradition in the play is Shaw's dramatic complication and challenge to Victorian aristocracy's justification of social aptitude on the basis of birth and blood as the age began to pave the way for industrial pioneers and business magnates like Nobel and Henry Ford in real life or the fictional Undershaft.

The question of whom Undershaft will recruit as the next owner of his gigantic armament factory to take over the business naturally unsettles the whole family relations as Lady Britomart insists on breaking the Undershaft tradition and transferring the management to their own son Stephen who is actually unwilling to taint himself with money earned at the expense of blood. Everding (1983) points out how Shaw uses the stage to lead the audience towards its own religious awakening by creating "a dramatic structure that appears initially to reinforce traditional values and that subsequently confronts the viewer with his own perception of reality" (p. 103). The shift of dramatic focus from the traditional question of Stephen's inheritance of family business to Barbara's spiritual and Undershaft's ideological axes serves the same purpose. The play's transgressive liminal tension is essentially embedded in the confrontation between Barbara's vital morality of social service and Undershaft's rigid understanding of the actual mechanics of modern capitalism as they provoke each other and strike a bargain to see who will be able to convert the other to his or her cause after paying respective visits to Barbara's Salvation Army shelter and the extremely modernized industrial town of Undershaft's factory

workers. What has produced such an invitation to a moment of truth between Barbara and her father in the family summoning can be described as a challenge to a rite of passage in all forms and signs of status to establish one's own identity, values and social prospects through juxtaposition with others.

The dramatic tension of the play emerges in several binary encounters between spouses, parents and children in matters of morality and materiality. The differences of survival and self-image goals between oppositional characters produce clashes of will and material prospects each time their position in society is lightly and ironically threatened by one another's moral advances and possible actions based on these self-proclaimed values. In their respective situational contexts, Shaw makes his characters place their powerful and weak cards on the table both gently and unashamedly in this game of social stratification with regard to their mechanic familial and social expectations of conferment to each other. According to Gordon's (1990) classification of the forms of the comic sublime in Shavian dramaturgy, in *Major Barbara*, it is the subjection of characters with different levels of moral convictions to the will power of each other to resolve their own inner conflicts and material dilemmas (p. 6). This brings about liminal transformations in first bearing the comic brunt of resistance and then urging for seriousness with uncommon moral solutions. The notion of the comic sublime as expressed in the ironic tension between the fervent idealism of Barbara and the stark monetary pragmatism of her father who challenges to replace her Christian conception of the medieval Fatherhood of God out of touch with modern realities illuminates a clash between internal and external authority as one of the main characteristics of unselfing liminality in the machinery of socialization in Freudian terms.

The tripartite division of the play's acts unfolds in the manner of a rite of passage which eventually ordains the characters with their new selves with a sober appreciation of the real circumstances of the world they had been taking for granted. Initially, Barbara is presented as having already been separated from her class with her romantic devotion to the salvation of the poor as if she is a self-ordained priestess of the Christian cause. Without being aware of the fact that they have been maintaining their social status with the financial support of their father, all the children of Britomart and Undershaft seem to have distanced themselves from the capitalist and entrepreneurial morality of the family's evil patriarch who has established himself as the chief of the world's military-industrial complex. Barbara has found gnosis in the Salvation Army's doctrine of feeding and clothing the poor to open them up to spiritual benevolence, and she also entertains an intellectual satisfaction in her engagement to a professor of Greek who follows her leadership in the Salvation movement rather pretentiously but out of his pure love for Barbara. As a Cambridge fellow who has been to India and Japan, Stephen is satisfied to be an intellectually vigorous, young and bachelor English gentleman who is keener on mainstream politics for the good of the Empire rather than heroic but bloody commercial enterprises in the manner of his father. Sarah is a portrayed as a docile and mundane woman of her class, happily settled in a relationship with her plainspoken fiancé who is only a young man about town, just expecting his inheritance in ten years.

Although Lady Britomart acknowledges that they will all be "as poor as church mice" (Shaw, 1959, p. 53) unless they change course of action and persuade their father to make a proper provision for their future comfort, the Undershaft children seem not only indifferent to the danger of poverty but also proud of their

self-conscious modesty and wholehearted embrace of assumed lowliness. At that, Stephen even wows to die or live in the ghetto rather than ask his father for a penny more for sustenance. When confronted with the brutal facts of their lives, the children's response is a romantic denial which introduces the contrast of the comic because the development of their very awareness with which they antagonize their parents has been enabled by the financial comfort their business mogul patriarch has provided for them far into adulthood. As a figure of weakened matriarchal moderation, Lady Britomart has swallowed their limitations and conceives the "universe exactly as if it were a large house in Wilton Crescent" (p. 51). Yet, in order to escape a sublime confrontation with the real arrangements of their private world at the expense of the suffering of millions killed with their father's weapons just at the threshold of their household, the children have no other option but to further lower themselves, identify with the subaltern or the mainstream and distance themselves from reality – Barbara with her devotion to spirituality, Stephen to intellectualism, and Sarah to mere sentimentalism.

As such, *Major Barbara*'s situational comedy is characterized by the familiar tragic irony of the discrepancy between realism and idealism. Shaw sets up the scene immediately alongside the premises of naturalist drama with its insistence on the power of environment and heredity as the moulders of individual consciousness. Barbara's bargain with her father complicates the naturalist assumption as she draws the romantic long bow by claiming that she can also save the soul of his father just like she has worked her magic on many other men and women she has picked up in the street and prepared them to receive the Lord. In terms of class, Undershaft is a dubious figure difficult to reckon with because his gospel is "to preach socialism to the rich and rebellion to the poor, whereby he twists the same rope from both ends"

(MacCarthy, 1951, p. 47). The play unfolds in a pragmatic structural scheme that entraps both the rich and the poor in the same vicious circle at the hands of Undershaft. After many years of separation, his intervention in the affairs of his family with his grip over society introduces him as the Freudian figure of the absent father whose patriarchal authority is inescapable. Wisenthal (1987) notes that in *Major Barbara* "the first act is in part concerned with the economic problems of the rich, the second with the economic problems of the poor, and in both cases the money comes from Undershaft" (p. 191). Nevertheless, Barbara does not back down from the challenge as she conceives herself classless and dares to be the romantic hero, convinced that not she but her father will be mocked by a higher apprehension of divine truth and earthly reality.

The romantic convention of showing women as angels applies to Shaw's characterization of Barbara to a certain degree. In the capitalist world of modern, industrial England, she stands out as the otherworldly, female saviour. She embodies the eternal feminine from two different perspectives as both the object and subject of love. Firstly, she is deemed worthy of the infatuation of a would-be philosopher like Cusins. Secondly, and more importantly, she plays the Good Shepherd who lays down her life for the poor and marginalized flock of God. She is a beautiful and highly marriageable stock heroine at once but has also managed to achieve a sexless, commanding public persona with her sense of religious discipline. In Shaw's family reunion plot, she seems to be the maturest evolutionary product of the foundling Undershaft's marriage to the aristocratic Lady Britomart, and she acts as the glue that binds the family together with an embodiment of her father's creative genius and her mother's domineering weight channelled into spiritual ardour instead of Victorian social decorum. However, a touch of jollity and frivolity makes up for the artificiality

of this idolization in the hands of Shaw as a foreshadowing of the unselfing and unmasking process that awaits her in the clash with the controversial modern realities of her charity's financial resources during her father's visit to the Salvation Army shelter which begins her liminal phase of transformation.

In contrast to Barbara, Undershaft appears as a Nietzschean antichrist on the surface as he overtly condemns the worship of the poor as a social sickness because the modernist and futurist agenda of his secular gospel considers poverty as the worst crime. Purdom (1963, p. 209) underlines a dark, prophetic quality in Undershaft's passionate renunciation of poverty as a slum boy turned into a seemingly new money for in 1905 when the play was written, despite the advances in science and industry, it was fully believed, from a class perspective, that people lived in a world of scarcity and society could never redeem from absolute poverty. The beginning of the century when *Major Barbara* was first performed was a time of economic distress in England with frequent processions of the unemployed in London (Albert, 2013, p. 19). Even the prime ministers of the time had no answer to the appeals of the destitute because they thought the problem was embedded in "fundamental economic laws which are not laws of society but laws of nature, and which no legislation will enable us to overcome" (Adams, 1949, p. 216).

In the same vein, Undershaft also identifies degenerate, detrimental and inefficient elements of slave-morality in the pre-modern, medievalist practice of the Salvationist Army in making up for the weaknesses of the down-and-outs by merely sheltering them instead of organizing them with a will to power and modern life at all costs. In Barbara's sacrificial commitment to the poor, a characterization of the Kantian beautiful is observed insofar as she is "devoid of all interest" (Baxley, 2005, p. 33), while in Undershaft's rigid exaltation of the brutal life force, the Hegelian

pattern of recognizing the Self through limitations, their acknowledgement and transcendence in terms of a struggle to the death within master-slave dialectics exposes the sublime aspect of the encounter with the irreducible and stubborn will of nature beyond good and evil. The Hegelian notion of inter-subjective recognition is dramatized by Shaw which begins:

> . . . with particular individuals, certain of themselves as determining centers of desire, who struggle in an attempt to dominate each other, but ultimately progresses towards increasingly universal individuals who seek to rationally live together in mutual benefit and recognition. (Vernon, 2013, p. 180)

There is certainly a Hobbesian tone in Shaw's interpretation of a destroyer figure like Undershaft to highlight the different aspects of the debate on the transition from a state of nature to a state of society. Undershaft argues that what has enabled whatever modern society the humankind has brought about is controversially embedded in submitting to the reckless struggle of life to the death. This is why Lady Britomart introduces his father to Stephen as someone with "a sort of religion of wrongness" (p. 59), preaching immorality while practicing morality. In Britomart's eyes, Undershaft is someone "above the law" (p. 55) as an arms dealer who can defy all social, moral and governmental obligations. Assumptions about the secret of right and wrong, which "has puzzled all the philosophers, baffled all the lawyers, muddled all the men of business and ruined most of the artists" (p. 193), merely tickles Undershaft's moral sentiment. His *weltanschauung* is a liminal world of dubious modern morality in contrast to the black and white romanticism of Barbara's pre-modern religious commitments but Barbara's vital challenge to him acts as the crankshaft that sets his conscience in motion in restoring the family towards a phase of aggregative recognition after liminal criticism and sublime indifference. Barbara believes that her father has a "soul to be save just like anybody else" (p. 63), and this

attitude levels down the image of the all-powerful patriarch to the degree of the common man.

What Barbara intends to achieve can be interpreted as the subjection of her father to liminality by depriving him of his high and mighty social status so that he may have an experience of the sublime in terms of understanding his place in the world as a subordinate, lowly creation of God. Such a characterization would have easily ended as a tragedy in the hands of a more dramatic playwright because the play's most obviously portrayed emotion is Barbara's loss of faith against the unredeemable evil in the world affairs organized by her own father. Yet, Shaw introduces the comic aspect into their relations which eases the return to the status quo as all characters earn another dimension with the corrective cynicism of laughter throughout the play. The play begins with Lady Britomart's warning to Stephen that she demands more than an "everyday matter-of-course attention" (p. 52) as she is about to reveal family secrets which will destabilize their understanding of each other as family members, and it ends with Undershaft's gentle patronizing to Cusins the Euripidean professor, whom he designates as the next Undershaft, when he mundanely expects him at the factory sharp at six o'clock in the morning like any ordinary factory worker (p. 153). The return to normalcy is achieved with a transition from Lady Britomart's alarming didacticism of no use to Undershaft's comic rendition of the sublime burden of accepting one's liminal social limitations and engaging with modernity's conflicts in its ever mechanistic terms.

The comic twist in the play's pivotal inheritance scheme is that the half-hearted natural heir to the family business is seriously admonished by his mother to realize that he is a grown-up man who needs to assume responsibility but it's eventually the laidback attitude of the daring outsider to the family in the character of

Cusins who wins the social mobility game. The loss of power in an aristocratic woman like Lady Britomart as the daughter of an earl and Undershaft's empowerment to world leadership in business as a foundling are juxtaposed by Shaw as an example of modern liminality in a chaotic world of social stratification with completely uncommon and random opportunities. With several comic demonstrations, Lady Britomart's motherly aristocratic schemes just do not work anymore in the modern set of relationships; she fails to make use of her son's position in the family to interfere in the household and has also no influence as a mother on Barbara whom she had expected to make the most brilliant career of all the children. Stephen ends up as a shy bachelor, and Barbara publicly becomes more valiant and visible than Stephen not as a good-tempered, classy and domestic Victorian female figure but as a poor-mouth religious revivalist against class conventions. In the end, as Britomart's strained Victorian expectations come to nothing in accordance with the Kantian scheme of laughter, it is the comic intellectual duellos of Cusins and Undershaft in making each other understand how real life works that resolve the family tensions, ease the pains of unselfing and lead to the restoration of order with new roles for each family member.

In the characters of Adolphus Cusins and Charles Lomax, Shaw gives an idea about how he constructs and balances the sense of humour in plays with complementary pairs. Cusins is observably under a strain which stems from the struggle between his intellectual conscience and an impulsive inclination to "inhuman ridicule" (p. 62) while the emptyheaded Lomax freely plunges into ill-timed and suppressed laughter whenever the occasion serves. As the external members of the family on the verge of marriage to the Undershaft daughters, their characterization of temper and laxity respectively helps to illustrate the mechanism

of the comic sublime at work in liminal situations which call for an intellectual analysis as well as humiliation. Lady Britomart thinks that Cusins' involvement in the Salvation Army is only to worship Barbara, casting him as the foolish lover despite his appearance of ancient sagacity. The characters' antagonistic circumstances allow them to spot and strike the weaknesses in each other but their under-handed exigency to get along for the common good of all forces them to cooperate in good humour despite their surface conflicts. Lady Britomart has found out and is well aware of how Cusins systematically humbugs her (p. 74) but all the same she plays along with him because this knowledge empowers her. Lady Britomart also comments that because Lomax, the other son-in-law, never thinks, he never actually means anything (p. 64); Lomax's absentminded remarks represent the unfiltered, obscene element in the comic in itself without any social restraint. With the liberty of his comic clumsiness on the basis of his relatively more settled prospects with his fiancé, Lomax is the first person among them to detach himself from mannerism and put it straight to Undershaft that "getting into heaven is not exactly in your line" (p. 70). When he also inopportunely and banteringly interrupts Lady Britomart's explanation of the reason of Undershaft's visit, it is up to Cusins to correct Lomax's vulgar vocabulary about Undershaft and academically paraphrase the case of family discord to be addressed in the family summoning with such a serious tone that it ironically raises a laugh.

The contradictory modes Cusins and Lomax respond to the serious, perplexing conflicts of the family enable Shaw to introduce the social gaze which appeals to the audience and puts the Undershafts under the comic scrutiny. Enjoying her luxury as the apple of the family's eye, Barbara feels free to take the mickey out of them and call them Cholly and Dolly like a street girl in front of everybody

although this vulgarity shivers down Lady Britomart's spine who always asks them to "behave themselves" (p. 62). Against the sublime confrontation with the rigid reality of their inter-family affairs, the parallelism between intellectual and vulgar easiness in the future son-in-laws and their different modes of openness to ridicule themselves in the name of love serve to mechanize Bergson's juxtaposition of rigidity and elasticity in the operations of the comic. The domestication of conflicts with moments of comic relief highlights the corrective social function of laughter in their affairs.

In the family's rite of passage, Undershaft is sketched as the trickster figure that haunts the liminal transformation of the ritual subjects with the power of conversion. Undershafts stands out as a figuration of Bergson's *élan vital*, "a coherent self flowing through time, acting as much through time and space as acted upon" whose inner consistency overwhelms the certainties and confuses "the fragmentary, poorly-formed moralities of conventional men" (Berst, 1963, p. 73). For instance, Lady Britomart collapses into tears when her children go after their devilish father instead of praying with her but Stephen explains that their father is not actually stealing their affection from their mother; the man just raises curiosity as a center of power (p. 74). As a self-made man, Undershaft has a natural grip that hurts while at the same time challenging people, and his awareness and gentle handling of his powers make his attitude all the more sly as a fox. He is so indifferent to matters of family affection that initially he cannot even recall how many children he has with Lady Britomart. The actualities of the corrupt world he manages endow him with the sublime effect of silenced emotions. He takes pride in not being an educated gentleman and welcomes the dropping of manners but as per the requirements of his malevolent business, he has developed the skill to disguise his character to such an

extent that even in his relation to his own family all he can do is embarrassingly think about what part to play. His acute awareness of all kinds of mechanistic social roles as he contemplates whether to play the part of a father or an intrusive stranger gives way to a comic mimesis when Lady Britomart even has to ask him to enjoy himself as a member of the family and just be sincere and natural (p. 67). Nevertheless, Undershaft is ruthlessly unashamed of his convictions when the discussion comes to the moral aspects of his cannon business. He is fully firm in his belief that his status quo morality is the one true morality which works for him and society:

> UNDERSHAFT: I am not one of those men who keep their morals and their business in watertight compartments. . . . Therefore your Christmas card moralities of peace on earth and goodwill among men are of no use to me. Your Christianity, which enjoins you to resist not evil, and to turn the other cheek, would make me a bankrupt. My morality—my religion—must have a place for cannons and torpedoes in it. (p. 71)

It is upon this statement of Undershaft's morality that Barbara naively remarks her belief that all men are "just children of one Father; and the sooner they stop calling one another names the better" (p. 71) and invites her father to the Salvation Army to save his soul as well. Barbara denies that there either good men or scoundrels in the world. She refuses to acknowledge the modern diversity of human character and considers everyone ranging from criminals to philanthropists as potential sinners but also believes that the same salvation is ready for them all. She believes in the ideal of *communitas* like Father Keegan in *John Bull's Other Island* and devotes her life to altruism as her own chosen form of unselfing. Stephen also mocks his father's business by exposing its religious hypocrisy when he says he was kowtowed everywhere as the heir to "Undershaft and Lazarus, Death and Destruction Dealers: address Christendom and Judea" (p. 55). Shaw's entire comic strategy depends on how he explicitly invites his characters to overcome the entrapment of false

consciousness by realizing their own hypocritical automatism through seeing the results of their actions in the distorting mirrors of the situations their personalities get entangled in like the liminal confrontations between father and children.

The modern liminality of the comic sublime in *Major Barbara* is based on this demonstration of contradiction in group dynamics. The material circumstances and prospects of the family members call them to suppress their behaviours and just go about their business but Shaw makes them express their ideas in the most inopportune moments and wholeheartedly make moral statements to humiliate others which actually end up as self-incrimination. This ideational limbo where they take turns explaining their motivations serve as a no man's land to change sides upon persuasion by the other. Shaw takes advantage of these moments to produce the comic aspect in order to convert the rigidity of the characters with the corrective social function of laughter. Bergson's suggestion that the comic rounds off the corners in character and aims to readapt the individual to his environment fully agrees Shaw's dramaturgy. The sublime moments of truth the characters force on each other is cushioned with the help of laughter when they begin to doubt each other's cognitive mechanisms, and the rhetoric of their logical causation seems to be suspended due to obstruction from others who have the power to either alienate them or help them with their transitional burdens in reconciling back with the group.

However, Barbara initially refuses to acknowledge that she needs to be advised by a father figure as she believes that "there are no orphans in the Salvation Army" (p. 69). Undershaft's response to Barbara's show of firmness and complacency is to mock the Christian notion of God as the supreme Father taking care of his children by pointing out the contradiction embedded in the Salvation Army's motto "Blood and Fire" which Undershaft jokes that it might as well be his

own. Undershaft cynically remarks that Barbara's Christian Father figure has plenty of experience with the same sort of blood and fire as in his business and claims that these tools are what actually cleanse and purify men (p. 69). Undershaft is closer to the experience of sublime as a manufacturer of murder and mutilation. He has the same power as nature in his hands in terms of destruction and indifference to human sensibility which are the atrophic characters of the sublime. This has developed a cynic sense of humour in him that his daily amiability depends on achievements like inventing guns which blows up dummy soldiers at faster and faster speeds. Shaw portrays the contradictions of Undershaft with such lucidity that his apparent cruelty raises comic sympathy as the audience is drawn nearer to the comic sublime with regard to the fact that Undershaft's business of destruction with even more sublime powers than nature itself is the driving force of all human history. He notes that "[t]he more destructive the war becomes the more fascinating we find it" (p. 70). In alignment with Bergson's explanation that the comic actually intends to destroy personal powers as a social corrective, the same formula is inherent Shaw's appeal to the comic sublime as a warzone of liminal figures; the more relentless the moral targeting becomes the more the audience finds it comic.

The second act when Undershaft visits Barbara at the Salvation Shelter becomes a battleground in such a sense. Barbara is seen at work among the poor while her father observes her character and judges the nature of the relationship she has developed with the disadvantaged and destitute. From self-conscious, unemployed workers to poor, abandoned housewives, Barbara mixes with these companions in misfortune like a sister in command of their fate. However, as the people in the shelter talk among themselves, it becomes obvious that they rather pretend to be pious and make up stories of conversion to benefit from the

Salvationists' benevolence. The actual suffering of the poor is not presented by Shaw in any form of religious idolization which stands in stark contrast to Barbara's naïve convictions. Shaw's acknowledgement of the real circumstances of the poor leaves no room for religious consolation. On the contrary, the whole theatricality of the shelter's organization is underlined by an unemployed painter when he says that in order to benefit from the Salvation Army, he will "play the game as good as any of em" (p. 78). Shaw's sketches of poor refugees in the shelter do not suffer from false consciousness in this sense; they are well aware of the true nature of their social and economic situation. From the beginning, it is Barbara who is trapped in false consciousness as she does not seem to face the degeneration in the shelter where dissimulation between social classes has become the norm as a case of modern liminality. The people in the shelter constantly feel in debt for the meals they are provided, and they rationalize their service to the shelter in simple economic terms whereas Barbara has to remind them that they should pay back in volunteer work for love of the poor like themselves (p. 89). The comedy it produces is naturally perceived easily by Undershaft who can be as thick as thieves with the working class while also keeping them on arm's length as a capitalist. Undershaft is free of romantic notions about poverty because he has been a common, poor man in the past, and he knows at the gut level that the portrayal of poverty as a blessing and love of the poor as a virtue is merely a social pretension (p. 97). In short, the shelter is far from Barbara's vision of a harmonious Kingdom of Heaven on earth and closer to a purgatory where people are deprived of dignity, status and power due to poverty as a characteristic and permanent condition of liminality for modern men and women.

Much to the mischance of Barbara when her father arrives, she even has to deal with a threatening alcohol abuser who arrives at the shelter and causes mischief

by hitting one of the Salvationists. The bullying ruffian who has come to get 'his girl' out of the shelter accuses Barbara of hypocrisy, confessing that he does not believe in their God because he thinks they actually do not believe in God either (p. 84). This becomes a test for Barbara to work her conversion magic and prove that she can cast her spell in all her encounters. She is confident that with her mastery of ceremonial enchantment she can cure anyone in no time. Throughout the act which is the first round of the bargain between Undershaft and Barbara, Undershaft rubs his hands in glee as he watches her daughter try to take wickedness out of the newcomers and residents in the shelter. Yet, he himself takes pleasure in immediately engaging with the poor in his own terms, announcing that he thinks poverty is not a thing to be proud of. In ironic contrast with the setting, he jocosely states that his religion is being a millionaire, and he wouldn't have their income, not for all their conscience (p. 88).

Barbara and Undershaft enter into a contest to establish their authority. Barbara seriously addresses the emotional confusion in people and instructs them with cliché moral aphorisms to get them converted by confessing. In extremely ordinary conversations, Barbara abruptly attempts to act like an exorcist in the middle of a ritual by suddenly reminding her targets of conversion that they are befriending the devil and the remorse they feel occurs because he is getting round them at that moment (p. 89). She asks people not to wrestle with the power of salvation and give in to it in their hearts (p. 90). Undershaft, on the other hand, addresses himself to others in rational terms on equal grounds, accepting the most critical accusations held against him, like his richness being dependent on keeping people poor, with a sense of humour and open-mindedness. The way Barbara tries to elevate her position with an ideal religiosity and nostalgic saintliness while the

millionaire Undershaft lowers himself to the level of common people and nicely engages in conversation with them creates the liminal zone of the comic sublime in this representative setting of the modern social and economic conflicts where the morality of the past clashes with the naked truths of the age on Shaw's stage.

With the entrance of Cusins to the shelter, the scale of the comic truth begins to weigh on Undershaft's pan. Arriving in the middle of an argument between Barbara and the alcoholic ruffian whom she is trying to convert about whether one should turn the other cheek or take revenge, Cusins disregards contemporary morality and agrees with the latter proposition by further adding that it is also naturally "what an ancient Greek would have done" (p. 92). Putting himself forward as a collector of religions, Cusins is puzzled and perplexed by how he can believe them all, highlighting the modern impossibility of belief in singular moral systems anymore. In the delicate network of their prospects, Cusins's intellectualism tends to resolve the conflicts between Barbara's sentimentalism and Undershaft's down-to-earth, straightforward logic in favor of the latter despite his emotional interest in Barbara. This further exposes their transgression of katagelophobia as they begin to relax and become comfortable in taking turns as laughing stocks rendered helpless by the complexities of the age. Trying to keep up with her saintliness, Barbara insists on the presence of sublime metaphysical notions like the "soul". She dives into old-fashioned scholastic arguments that the soul's existence can be confirmed by the fact that it hurts when one goes against it instead of confronting and submitting to it (p. 92). Yet, these medieval assertions about the liminal awareness of the soul strike as completely out of tune with the crushing material spirit of modern times. When Undershaft goes into the heart of the matter by controversially stating that only money and gunpowder are necessary to any form of salvation in society's

organization, it is Cusins who reminds him that Barbara will never stand that and he will have to choose between his own version of religion and that of his daughter if he is to pass the rite of passage they have forced on each other in reestablishing their relationship.

Undershaft's response is simply to point out the hollowness and illusions of their Salvation Army enthusiasm by describing and demonstrating how the organization actually works. The Salvation Army is a charitable organization of Protestant Christian origin, established in 1865. The aim of its founders was the relief of poverty while bringing spiritual salvation to the poor. What discerns it from other charitable churches is that Salvationists refer to their ministers in terms of military ranks such as major, captain, colonel, etc. because they conceive themselves as waging a war against poverty. The Army's initial converts were the marginalized undesirables in society such as alcoholics, prostitutes, addicts and homeless people. Salvationists took it to the streets in brass band parades, publicly seeking individuals to convert. In the play, the use of the Salvation Army shelter as a liminal setting helps Shaw to contrast Barbara's spiritual war with the actual military wars schemed by her father's industry. Father and daughter have to face each other on different sides of a moral battle in the organization of society. However, as a recent convert and lover of Barbara, Cusins explains the symbolic stance of the Salvation Army shelter as a liminal space of moral mobility better than either Barbara with her verbose ecstasies of piety or Undershaft with his antagonistic, rational flouting. When faced with the accusation by Undershaft that his belief in the Army's cause is insincere, Cusins takes up the challenge of defending the Army's methods of conversion as a modern form of archaic rites of passage:

> CUSINS: [The Salvation Army] has banished the fear and remorse and despair of the old hellridden evangelical sects. . . . It picks the waster out of

> the public house and makes a man of him: it finds a worm wriggling in a back kitchen, and lo! a woman! Men and women of rank too, sons and daughters of the Highest. It takes the poor professor of Greek, the most artificial and self-suppressed of human creatures, . . . sends him down the public street drumming dithyrambs. (p. 94)

Cusins is highlighting the ritualistic element of bringing people together in an egalitarian spiritual communion of the high and the low in society. He expresses the organization's effect on himself with Dionysian terms of dissolution of personality. Modern artificialities of social rank are dispersed in the shelter, and Undershaft accepts to go along with the game as part of his bargain with Barbara until he can find the opportunity to unmask this illusion of nostalgic *communitas* beyond time and space. Undershaft wins over Cusins more easily than Barbara when they acknowledge a certain degree of madness in each other with a rapturous yearning for freedom, power and command of life and death. They unite the moment they accept this as the basic secret of all their motivation in life. Undershaft believes in a moral stratification with this conviction being the acid test to distinguish those who can devote themselves to causes larger than themselves instead of petty personal motives. He presses the elitist point that that together with Cusins and Barbara, they don't have anything "to do with the common mob of slaves and idolaters" (p. 97) as a poet, a saint and a millionaire. Undershaft considers Barbara mad as well as an anachronistic saviour of souls completely out of tune with the modern zeitgeist. Yet, he patiently waits for a moment he can turn on a dime in the transactions going on around him to bring Barbara back to modern sensibilities on the basis of material facts.

Undershaft directly sets his mind on buying the Salvation Army to entrap Barbara's conscience and show that "all religious organizations exist by selling themselves to the rich" (p. 98), which means that the wicked and the good are all in

the same boat, feeding the same machinery. The sequence where Cusins explains that the Salvation Army makes the poor sober, honest, happy and unselfish and think about heavenly things is interrupted by Undershaft's comic sublimation of these qualities into the job requirements of modern employers to make people work better for larger profits. Understanding the insight of this suppressed ideological alliance between the Church and modern business, Cusins cannot but admit that Undershaft is right although he is "an infernal old rascal" (p. 98) and begins to submit himself to Undershaft's conversion. Mrs. Baines, Barbara's superior in the Army, reinforces the pragmatism of keeping the poor full and clothed by pointing out how it prevents them from rioting every once and then, and suddenly Barbara is driven into a corner by all her allies in the shelter. The final straw in Barbara's defeat is to see Mrs. Baines accept and Cusins delight in Undershaft's generous donation of five thousand pounds to the shelter while she had herself refused even two pence of contribution from her father because there is blood in his hands. As Shaw orchestrates a crescendo of the comic sublime with Undershaft listing numerous atrocities and war crimes that make him money, Cusins overpraising the modern mammoth, Machiavellian millionaire Undershaft's unselfishness to the skies, and Mrs. Baines thanking God for the infinite goodness in the universe, Barbara takes her badge of and pins it on the collar of her father, striking her flag in the bargain and resigning herself fully to liminal unselfing. She is cleaned out and lost her job, facing with the same situation as the poor she had been trying to save. The controversies of her world sublimely engulf Barbara one after another in an uproar as her will breaks down, and the realities of her relations come down hard on her as the audience laughs at her naivety and ignorance of her spiritual efforts.

The process of depersonalization after being subjected to the comic sublime is completed with Barbara's hopeless resignation from the Salvation Army when she discovers the dirty sources which finance their altruistic Christian enterprise. Yet, the comic juxtaposition of Barbara's naivety and Undershaft's cruelty eventually results in Barbara's conversion to the pragmatism of her father after her visit to his industrial complex in the final round, and she sees what his business actually represents: "the wonderful forethought, the power of organization, the administrative capacity, the financial genius, the colossal capital" (p. 131). The epiphanic recognition of the controversial social function of Undershaft's business by Barbara may seem out of the blue without any correlative dramatic conviction but it follows the logic of rites of passage when the ritual subject is ordained to a new role and status in the order of society after the experience of liminality.

In the final act, Shaw makes no bones about how a return to the Church's sentimental idealism of communion is no answer to modernity's conflicts. He is utterly ruthless in his criticism of inefficiency in religious institutions. Lady Britomart snaps the absentminded Lomax's head off as he attempts to defend the Church with his usual drivelling and asks him to speak of something suited to his mental capacity, and Lomax's double edged answer is that "surely the Church of England is suited to all our capacities" (p. 114). Shaw's humour brings down all halfway houses in the last act, and he freely gives the stage to the exposition of the Undershaft gospel as the credo of the modern age's social order. The purchase of Cusins's soul despite his intellectual defences by the Prince of Darkness Undershaft aids Barbara's return to the status quo as well. Settling his children's livelihood with Lady Britomart right away, he turns to the question of recruiting the next manager of his arms foundry. He does not step back from disinheriting his son Stephen from the

business and instead hands over his Mephistophelian powers to Cusins, the timid intellectual, as a most unlikely candidate. However, his choice is understandable, not only in the context of the relationship between Barbara and Cusins but also given Cusins' possible stature as a modern version of a philosopher king although he is yet to be trained in the real world outside the ancient books of Greek wisdom.

Albert (2012) describes the aggregation and functional harmony achieved in the end as "a Shavian trinity in which surrogates for state, church, and people meet" with "the interplay of these three initially related yet opposed forces of intellect, religious morality, and political economy" (p.40). Shaw's ultimate vision of restoration seems to be complete when Undershaft's armament factory does not turn out to be, in Barbara's words, "a sort of pit where lost creatures with blackened faces . . . were driven and tormented by my father" but "a spotlessly clean and beautiful hillside town" (p. 126). Bloom (1987) points out that "Undershaft may be the archetype of the capitalist as amoral munitions-monger, but his arms establishment dangerously resembles a benign state socialism" (p. 13). Undershaft's modern business establishment is open to interpretation as a safe haven of the extreme left or extreme right simultaneously. He has granted full rights and pensions to his workers but the comfortable existence in this residential work camp is possible only through the existence of the fascist machinery of war in the world outside. What Shaw attempts to achieve by letting Undershaft win everyone over to his side is an ironic acknowledgement of social inequality and misery in how the real world is constructed.

The play moves towards the awakening of Barbara in limbo to the chaos which must be faced in the seeming orderliness of the world. Barbara comes back to earth throughout this learning process, and Undershaft remarks that learning

something “always feels at first as if you had lost something” (p. 128); and in Barbara’s case, what she loses throughout her ritualistic education is nothing less than her own self-image against the crushing realities of the modern age. In the end, Barbara dares to go to the factory of death because she has no choice but to see it for herself as she admits that “there must be some truth or other behind all this frightful irony” (p. 128). She submits to the sublime sense of weakness before modern society’s working mechanism after the comic confrontations which burst the bubble of her utopic visions at the Salvation Army shelter. Cusins describes this sublime feeling as “an abyss of moral horror” (p. 136). Bentley (1957, p. 167) recognizes selling oneself as the ultimate horror in Shaw’s dramatic principles. After touring the armament factory with Barbara and standing at the threshold of the immensely destructive modern forces of production, Cusins also faces the same dubious reality and liminal conflict of the basis of the mechanistic, industrial world, commenting that Undershaft’s organization of the contemporary workforce is “all horribly, frightfully, immorally, unanswerably perfect” (p. 130) – that is to say, in one word, sublime.

Although Barbara’s conversion by Undershaft is carried with much less dramatic force than the comic climax of her surrender to liminal disillusionment in the denouement of the second act, it is intended by Shaw to jolt back the audience to reality. The functional harmony in the end can only be achieved at the cost of subjection to the sublime through the agency of the comic. Eventually, Barbara hypnotically attempts to describe the sensation of her gradual liminal unselfing and moral collapse in exactly the same terms the experience of the sublime evokes in facing nature’s destructive powers:

> BARBARA: Today I feel—oh! how can I put it into words? Sarah: do you remember the earthquake at Cannes? . . . —how little the surprise of the first

> shock mattered compared to the dread and horror of waiting for the second? That is how I feel in this place today. I stood on the rock I thought eternal; and without a word of warning it reeled and crumbled under me. I was safe with an infinite wisdom watching me, an army marching to Salvation with me; and in a moment, at a stroke of your pen in a cheque book, I stood alone; and the heavens were empty. (p. 140)

Thus, Shaw transfigures the experience of the sublime observed in the confrontation with nature's powers into the realm of social realities faced by liminal individuals suffering the modern anxiety of change, survival and organization as if going through a rite of passage. Before joining the Salvation Army, Barbara used to feel she was in her own power which she admits was a time she never knew what to do with herself. She joined to Army to submit herself to the sublime power of God but only to realize that despite their best intentions, their organization too was in the grip of modern capitalists like her father whose hands stretch everywhere with the monetary means and political schemes that run the world. The fact that their charity organization is just an almoner of the rich in the suppression of the poor with the minimum costs of bread and blankets places her in an unbearable position of moral breakdown. Undershaft coldheartedly scorns Barbara's successive character changes and accuses her with making too much of her "little tinpot tragedy" (p. 140) because he literally plays with fire in his own factory. It can be accidentally blown up any moment with the power of a real earthquake, not figuratively as in Barbara's elevated narrative of her moral standing. The factory produces comfort for its owners and workers while bringing death to anonymous millions. The setting of the armament factory turns into a metaphorical bed of nails for all which shows how modern social order is still achieved by nothing but the archaic and natural domestication of one's existential and material anxiety at the expense of others', no matter what the level of contemporary civilization purports to be:

> UNDERSHAFT: . . . when you are organizing civilization you have to make up your mind whether trouble and anxiety are good things or not. If you decide that they are, then, I take it, you simply don't organize civilization; and there you are, with trouble and anxiety enough to make us all angels! But if you decide the other way, you may as well go through with it. (p. 131.)

Going through with it means the affirmation of the seeming chaos of the modern world and the sublime inner working of the natural will to live which pales all moral values and perspectives in comparison. In fact, Undershaft is doing his best to serve this social survival instinct by incorporating all his family members into his organization despite their own morals and his business traditions. As an exposition of the will to live at all costs in all living things, Undershaft enigmatically confesses that what actually drives his business is the brutal force of life which he is only a part of. He proudly announces the credo of the medieval founder of his cannon business who wrote up the following motto in his first shop: "All have the right to fight: None have the right to judge" (p. 138). The comedy produced by Shaw's portrayal of the characters with their mechanistic roles and aspirations as world-betterers in their own psychological corners of the world suddenly comes to a halt when they open their eyes and meet each other in the common ground they materially share in participating the survival schemes of modern society with the power of evil and evil of power included in the picture as well.

Shaw makes the audience burst into sinister laughs with black humor in the end by showing how easily and cunningly all of Undershaft's family members change sides and join him in his kingdom of darkness. Cusins was initially portrayed as the ancient wisdom incarnate but he ends up bargaining his salary as the new manager of Undershaft's factory; Barbara had first appeared on the stage like the modern face of Saint Barbara who died for her beliefs but in the end she confesses that she would have to marry the person of her father's choice who would be the

successor to his death business. They have to share the world's guilt upon their realization that they cannot escape being the accomplice of the status quo. They have to look at evil in the face without any illusions. Shaw's conclusion seems to be that there is no salvation in personal righteousness; hope resides in treating redemption as a collective social matter. In this sense, as a philosophical comedy, the play deals with the bankruptcy of nineteenth-century liberalism. The tremendous changes in social circumstances after the Industrial Revolution unleashed the powers of anarchy as laws lagged behind men like Undershaft who led it and made traditional institutions out of date, turning morals upside down. In the preface to *Major Barbara*, Shaw notes how the literature of the age already reflects this conflict with "tragedies in which the heroes are bandits, and comedies in which law-abiding and conventionally moral folk are compelled to satirize themselves by outraging the conscience of the spectators every time they do their duty" (p. 45). The expression of the comic sublime in *Major Barbara* precisely follows this premise. The liminality of modern social existence ridicules and butchers the idealist convictions of the past ages, and Shaw ultimately submerges the audience in the sublime public sphere of this socially corrective realization with his dramaturgy of the comic.

CHAPTER 5

THE COMEDY OF HEROIC WILL IN *JOHN BULL'S OTHER ISLAND*

In his study on Shavian comedy, Gordon (1990) puts forward that Shaw's plays stress both the subversive and conservative functions of the genre (p. 4) in how he induces the comic sublime sometimes as the affirmation and sometimes as the negation of heroic will in confronting the conventional and accepting or rejecting a new social role's challenging moral premises. Portraying the modern subtleties and challenges of heroic liminality in a theatrical rite of passage, MacCarthy (1951) notes that the contemporary originality of Shaw's *John Bull's Other Island* in contrast with the qualities of the well-made play was in being a play "with hardly any story, with no climax, without the vestige of a plot, and without anything like an ending" (p. 25). The urgent, modern impact of the play is in introducing the audience to a liminal zone without the possibility of individuation in how the modern subject cannot come to terms with the fact that the ultimate reality behind phenomena is merely an uncanny self-image without traces, characterized by alienation. Giving the stage to fragmentary, episodic and seething expositions of the comic and the sublime, Shaw robs the characters of the unity of the heroic journey by casting them out of the world they take for granted into liminality and landing them in the comic insecurity of the sublime experience as they reverse roles as outsider and insider figures with respect to how they feel at home in their social environment. This scheme of the comic sublime in the play follows the basic tenet in Shavian dramaturgy of "setting up stereotypes in order to reverse them, reinforcing recognition and then replacing the image with something even more emotionally lethal" (Saddlemyer, 1999, p. 225).

In *John Bull's Other Island*, the question of dubious identities takes the form of casting liminality in terms of outsider and insider figures. The forms of social adaptation on part of the protagonists reflect the liminal tension between external social expectations and their own internal aspirations. Trying to fit in with the English society, Irish Lawrence Doyle partners in a London based civil engineering company with the opportunist businessman Tom Broadbent with whom he goes back to Ireland for a land and property development project which forces him towards a confrontation with his dual identity. The comic vitality is enabled in Broadbent's characterization as a romantic entrepreneur with political ideals for the people of Rosscullen, Doyle's hometown, with whom he has actually no authentic connection. While Doyle is an outsider figure in England and Broadbent an insider, they reverse roles once they set their foot in Rosscullen, and this helps Shaw to display their different responses to liminality with respect to their changing social environment. Against the pressure of modern opportunities in Broadbent's attempt to transform the poor farming town of Rosscullen into an amusement park, it is Doyle's indifference to his own prospects to the extent of leaving even his love interest Nora to Broadbent, who does not miss the chance, which makes the audience question the contractibility of Broadbent's aspirations and keeps the play's atmosphere and action in limbo. The hypocrisy of what is going on in the town is recognized by the priest Keegan who unsuccessfully attempts to act as the moderator of Doyle's awakening to his real identity.

Throughout the play, Shaw simultaneously depicts the affirmation and negation of heroic will by means of characterization with a tandem amalgam of comic sublimation through social interactions in which it is impossible to discern the essential from the trivial. O'Donnell (1965) points out how Shaw's tragicomic drama

is “a portrayal of life in which the will is the key to human motives and all human relationships are, in one degree of intensity or another, conflicts of will” (p. 77). In terms of the traditional narratives of heroic will from an anthropological perspective, that Achilles, the archetypal Western hero, can ask for a recompense against the breach of his rights, and gods can side with humans in their earthly struggles for honor and recognition, translates into the significant idea that man has a claim in the designation of the world or at least has the mental conviction to do so. The journeys of epic heroes in oral cultures usually begin in the midst of things, in *medias res*, because the audience is already familiar with the background of the situation, and their stories are conclusive. An end is achieved in the restoration of a new taxonomical arrangement of things and beings, justifying and rationalizing man’s presence in a certain hierarchy. Shaw plays with this traditional idea of the epic *medias res* and completion of heroic will by making the in-betweenness of his characters perpetual as an inured introduction of the audience to the world of defamiliarization where none of the characters experience the expected growth of a rite of passage by staying the same as ever. The characters not only retain but also reinforce the fixed social positions they occupy at the beginning of their heroic journeys no matter whether they succeed or fail in the social trials of their personal integrity. This comic and ironic reduction of sublime heroic characterization in Western literature can be traced back to Byron’s portrait of Don Juan as a mere vagabond libertine and a showman without actuality or to Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*’s playfulness as a never-ending narrative of perpetual traces without actuality. Similarly, the long discussions and conflicting relations of Shaw’s three protagonists, Broadbent, Doyle, and Keegan, have no last resort in terms of a grand narrative. In anthropological terms, they are tripping and tramping as liminal entities in a rite of

passage towards a change of paradigm which intrinsically cancels out the possibility of any conclusive shift.

As the play opens, Doyle and Broadbent share the same home office as bachelor friends near the Parliament Square Garden in Westminster, London, competently administering their civil engineering company. With maps of the world, advertisement of steamships and portraits of former British prime ministers hanging on their walls, the setting Shaw introduces their characters reflects the entrepreneurial spirit of the age with a sense of heroic, imperial power. As Broadbent gently orders his servant to pack his revolver as well together with his belongings for the business journey to Ireland in an understating tone, the first clue to his character is given as a genial businessman who takes care to err on the side of caution. Broadbent is presented as a projection of John Bull, the conventional personification of the English national character in political writings and caricatures which originated in the satires of John Arbuthnot in the eighteenth century. With his jolly common sense and well-intentioned matter-of-factness, Broadbent embodies this freeborn archetype of the English gentleman with his character pragmatically wavering from the extremes of idealist romance to downright efficiency, from heroic defiance to soft power. Shaw indulges in the power clashes of the Irish question with Broadbent and Doyle's company's interest in the land development scheme in John Bull's 'other island' Ireland by contrasting the stereotypical images of the English and Irish in these characteristic social tensions as liminal properties. Broadbent's attitude represents the colonialist, maverick businessman who disguises his self-profiteering interests behind a political rhetoric of progress in the name of the Commonwealth's success as a unity, and Doyle's cooperation with him as an Irish

partner acts a buffer to suppress the class antagonism and national defiance that might come from the impoverished Irish peasantry.

Before their business expedition starts, Broadbent's job interview with the stage Irishman Tim Haffigan, whom he wants to employ as an intermediary with the local people throughout their field research in Ireland, brings together national stereotypes on the stage, producing the comic in easily identifiable behavioural mechanisms. Like John Bull, the stage Irishman or Paddywhackery is a caricatured portrayal of the Irish personality as "garrulous, boastful, unreliable, hard-drinking, belligerent (though cowardly) and chronically impecunious" (Welsch, 1996, p. 534). The comic amiability which develops between Broadbent and Haffigan with typical enactments of their national sentiments is interrupted by Doyle's arrival with curt remarks about his fellow countryman. At a single glance, he calls Haffigan a "seedy swindler" (Shaw, 2004, p. 18). Doyle's liminal stance as an Irishman who managed to slip through the net of poverty in his home country by achieving social mobility in London with hard work and sternness brings forth realism into Shaw's dramatic algorithm of characterization in the play. The high-spirited show of reckless geniality between the stock characters of Broadbent and Haffigan withdraws from the scene and is replaced by the gravity of Doyle's question of identity, stirred by the idea of going back to his birthplace which sounds threateningly repugnant to him. The business duo of Broadbent and Doyle thus represents a liminal unity of the comic and the sublime protagonists amidst the material transformations of modernity with their respective practical mutability and grave rigidity alongside Bergson's scheme of critical comedy.

Broadbent is a typical liberal in favour of free trade whenever it benefits his interests who thinks that "the unholy alliance of the publicans, the bishops, the Tories

and The Times" (p. 11) ruins England as well as Ireland. For instance, in order not to look intimidating in trying convince Haffigan to work for him as his secretary against the interests of his own folk, he does not refrain from freely indulging in whisky with him as he defends the closure of all public houses to save people from alcohol abuse which Haffigan admits to be the "curse o me unhappy counthry" (p. 11). With his sense of self-complacent criticism of social questions, Broadbent is comfortable in his skin as a transgressor who can abuse his privileges and get away with his manipulations. In this sense, he appears as the perfect candidate for a rite of passage in order to temper his essence but conversely, Shaw allows him full liberty as a trickster eyer who tests others' mettle to put them to use in circumstances which favour his own advantages. As a figure of authority with his abundant material means, he takes psychological advantage of the liminal dilemmas of those who scale lower in terms of all kinds of social stratification. His commonplace poses of grandeur give way to the mechanistic depiction of the comic in how it is actually possible to know every word he's going to say before he says it as Haffigan also remarks with self-flattery. Shaw frequently makes use of schemes of repetitive obviousness and exaggeration of the commonplace in inducing the comic as a tool of interpersonal assent in their job interview sequence:

> BROADBENT: What I say is, why not start a Garden City in Ireland?
> HAFFIGAN: [with enthusiasm]. That's just what was on the tip o me tongue to ask you. Why not? [Defiantly] Tell me why not.
> BROADBENT. There are difficulties. I shall overcome them; but there are difficulties. When I first arrive in Ireland I shall be hated as an Englishman. . . .
> HAFFIGAN: Never fear, sir. We know how to respict a brave innimy.
> BROADBENT: . . . I saw at once that you were a thorough Irishman, with all the faults and all the qualities of your race: rash and improvident but brave and goodnatured; not likely to succeed in business on your own account perhaps, but eloquent, humorous, a lover of freedom. . . .
> HAFFIGAN [impulsively]: Damn it! Call me Tim. A man that talks about Ireland as you do may call me anything. Gimme a howlt o that whisky bottle [he replenishes]. (pp. 13-14)

Broadbent's power of negotiation is thus characterized by his comic predictability in theatrically delivering the expectations of his interlocutors precisely to have them in his corner. That's why he can comfortably explain his interest in Ireland by pushing Haffigan's leg with an articulate sense of self-seeking interest and complaining how South Africa has been unfortunately enslaved, leaving nowhere other than neighbouring Ireland as the only place left on earth for the English to liberate toward prosperity. Broadbent does not hesitate to hilariously use the strength of his highly mechanical verbosity until his self-advertisement wearies his opponents to the point of submission to his views, reinforcing his soft power. He of course does not believe that Haffigan believes in him when he says that his English plan is to take a little money out of England and spend it in Ireland to build a Garden City for the Land Development Syndicate even though he is corrected by Haffigan that such plans of the English historically work vice versa. All the same, they play along the game of mutual agreeableness on the basis of their common interests. Practicing his rhetorical influence on the Irish with Haffigan, Broadbent appeals to comic amusement in his encounters throughout the play to point out his corrective resolutions always as the single way out of all kinds of trouble and social discordance. The conversation with Haffigan, which he starts with exaggerated remarks about how his life will be in danger in Ireland but he is ready face it bravely and set off on the journey at all costs like a modern Odysseus, ends with the electrification of Haffigan who vows to accompany him even to China, Madagascar or the North Pole if he is paid fairly. His partner Doyle likens this ability of Broadbent to instinctively make himself look like a fool to the way a caterpillar camouflages itself as a leaf to divert the attention of both its enemies and prey (p. 34). Broadbent's comic cunning is developed due to his fear of dominance by others which he tries to habituate by acquiring an air of

fellowship to the point of pretending to be a greater fool than he is when necessary. Broadbent is aware of the contagious power of humour and uses it like a sorcerer. He thus utilizes the comic as a pragmatic display of sublime mental capacity and leadership power to get liminal characters wrapped around his fingers.

Throughout the unfolding of the play, Shaw appeals to comic misapprehensions of stereotypical English and Irish identities but the play's central discussion of mechanistic English efficiency as opposed to dreamy Irish romanticism highlights the different expressions of the comic sublime in the inverse power relays in the characterization axis of Broadbent and Doyle. Doyle is presented as a thin-skinned, dissatisfied but refined Irishman in opposition to the pompous and eupeptic Broadbent. He is at once irritated to see Broadbent engage with a countryman of his and makes sure to play good cop, bad cop in initiating Haffigan to their business organization. He immediately spots the humbugger in Haffigan whom he reveals not be an Irishman at all but merely a descendant of one. However, the uneasiness of Doyle with the Irish background goes deeper than protecting his business interests with his partner. From his own experience with the English, he knows that:

> DOYLE: . . . when a thoroughly worthless Irishman comes to England, and finds the whole place full of romantic duffers like you, who will let him loaf and drink and sponge and brag as long as he flatters your sense of moral superiority by playing the fool and degrading himself and his country, he soon learns the antics that take you in. He picks them up at the theatre or the music hall. (p. 21)

Doyle himself has suffered the painstaking process of migration as an ailment of modern liminality in industrializing civilization. Explaining the cause of his faint indifference, he is actually psychologically projecting the debilitating and disappointing results of his own Irish romanticism to the English. He is expressing how his vitality is suffocated by the theatrical tomfooleries of modern existence required by the material necessities of the changing times and pumped by the culture

industry. The way he criticizes the antics that trap people with his wide awake consciousness and grim presence on the stage serve also an interactive reminder and warning to the audience about the artificial conditioning of dramatic production. Doyle's sense of moral duty in standing for truth instead of the comic imagination and sycophantic humbuggery of Broadbent contrives the sublime into their opposition. The man about town attitude of Broadbent contrasts strongly with the gravity of Doyle who has paid the price by bearing the brunt of modernity's social adversities as an immigrant, authentically encapsulating him as the original liminal character in the play.

For the same reason, he dreads going back to his hometown Rosscullen with Broadbent to look after a property the mortgage of which their syndicate has foreclosed at the expense of people he knew and loved from his childhood in Ireland. Estranged from his national background and nostalgic environment albeit without any indication of emotional drift into homesickness, Doyle has become "the Complete Outsider" (Shaw, 1997, p. 36) in the words of his creator. As Shaw first wrote the play for the Irish audience at the Irish Literary Theatre, which preceded the Abbey Theatre (Purdom, 1963, p. 201), Shaw's autobiographical comments on his own experience as a voluntary Irish exile in London sheds light on the nature of the challenge that awaits Doyle in confronting his past:

> The truth is that all men are in a false position in society until they have realized their possibilities and imposed them upon their neighbors. They are tormented by a continual shortcoming in themselves; yet they irritate others by a continual overweening. . . . The overrated inheritor of a position for which he has no capacity, and the underrated nobody who is a born genius, are alike why because they are alike out of place. (Shaw, 1997, p. 11)

Doyle's problem is the challenge of self-realization while he feels "out of place". His inner discord and apparent lack of self-reliance can only be resolved by the acknowledgement of whether he succeeded as an outsider in English society or

failed. Going back to Rosscullen with his partner Broadbent, “the overrated inheritor”, will be a test of his success or failure in finding out his place in society as “the underrated nobody” and see whether it is above or below his birthplace.

With only a superficial interest in the subtleties of Doyle’s personal becoming, Broadbent fails to understand why Doyle hesitates to return home as a member of a nation with “the strongest patriotism! the most inveterate homing instinct in the world” (p. 23). The fact is that Doyle is fed up with the sentimentalism of Irish pride for the sake of a sense of belonging, feeling that he has come out of imagination into actuality because he considers that “an Irishman’s heart is nothing but his imagination” (p. 23.) When Broadbent talks about the Celtic race as what represents the stoic, genuine, old English character in contrast to the “hypocrites, humbugs, Germans, Jews, Yankees, foreigners, Park Laners, cosmopolitan riffraff” and “the modern hybrids” (p. 24) who seem to have monopolized England, Doyle can’t stand this amplified eulogy to eugenics over modern liminalities. It’s not so much as Broadbent is gabbing in the usual manner of his self-serving declarations. As someone who had a low beginning in life in the Irish countryside, Doyle wants to be considered as a social success in terms of finding his position among the entrepreneurial class of businessmen in England, and he doesn’t welcome the attribution of such success to any social legacy instead of individual integrity. As an outsider trying to fit in, the hybrid identities of modern times remind him of his own liminality. Therefore, he wants to attribute his personal characteristics to more objective, natural causes. For example, Doyle is unsubtly suffocated by the attribution of melancholy and sturdiness merely to national characteristics. In lamentation, he grumbles at Broadbent that he should never suppose a man need be a Celt to feel melancholy in a place like his hometown Rosscullen and engages in a

description of his absorption by the sublime in Ireland's nature as the most essential aspect of his *bildung*:

> DOYLE: . . . you only need a touch of the Irish climate to be as big a fool as I am myself. … your wits can't thicken in that soft moist air, . . . on those hillsides of granite rocks. . . . You've . . . no such sadness in the evenings. Oh, the dreaming! … the torturing, heartscalding, never satisfying dreaming. . . . An Irishman's imagination never lets him alone, never convinces him, never satisfies him; but it makes him that he can't face reality nor deal with it nor handle it nor conquer it. . . . At last you get that you can bear nothing real at all. (pp. 25)

What Doyle is dreading is the possibility of being taken aback again by the sublime experience of nature which he thinks have ruined his wits until he got out of Ireland and assumed a new personality for himself. He thinks that the inescapability of this overwhelming confrontation with nature devitalizes people to the degree that they would "rather starve than cook a meal" (p. 26). He attributes the dullness, hopelessness, ignorance and bigotry of life in the countryside to an existential experience of the sublime which can haunt anyone with a frustrating intuition of the unreality of human affairs. Broadbent finds this meticulousness of analysis as part of the Irish charm which he thinks they fail to see in themselves. Yet, Doyle corrects his notion that the effect of the sublime is only the charm of a dream and the brutality of facts defuses it. That's why he yearns to "find a country to live in where the facts were not brutal and the dreams not unreal" (p. 37). Relapsing back to his matter of fact attitude, Broadbent belittles Doyle's experience as the usual feeling of inefficiency in the countryside. Doyle accepts the unheroic sense of uselessness generated by the perpetual, sublime face-off with nature in rural drudgeries but he further observes his disgust at how the experience of crippled imagination adversely gives way to the comic as the only form of mental activity among the "poor slovenly useless devils" (p. 26):

> DOYLE: . . . And all the while there goes on a horrible, senseless, mischievous laughter. . . . you exchange drinks with other young men; and you exchange vile stories with them; . . . you chaff and sneer and taunt them for not doing the things you daren't do yourself. And all the time you laugh, laugh, laugh! eternal derision, eternal envy, eternal folly, eternal fouling and staining and degrading. (p. 26)

Doyle is intuitively aware of how the societal taking refuge in the comic is linked with the experience of the sublime as the projection of one's weakness against and facedown by nature onto others. His observation of how the poverty and lack of means his countrymen suffer in a harsh climate lead them to plume themselves on their own worthlessness by targeting others with a humiliating sense of humor aligns with Bergson's notion of the comic as a social corrective. Doyle relates how relieved he was to arrive in England where people took questions seriously and gave serious answers. He is grateful to working with Broadbent who taught him "to live in the real world instead of an imaginary one" (p. 29). Yet, Broadbent's response to Doyle's moment of truth in confronting the essence of his character with such deep, subconscious fears misses the very philosophical point Doyle is trying to make about his need for candid and genuine social relations when he merely advises Doyle not to despair because Home Rule under English guidance will help Ireland to achieve its great potentials. Speaking in terms of a rite of passage, he also lectures Doyle about how he remembers Ireland with a "boy's eyes", having seen only "boyish things" (p. 28), and that now it's time to let his relatives see how England has made a man of him. Doyle groans at Broadbent that he always selects "my most tragic moments for your most irresistible strokes of humor" (p. 27). As "the intermingling of the burlesque and the tragical" (Hamon, 1915, p. 126) is an element of realism in Shavian drama, Shaw is thus relentless in subjecting Doyle to the comic sublime just as he is trying to sort out its very mechanism in a most intimate personal account of his social experiences.

Henry James (1970) expands on this theme of alienation by referring to the absurd in similar terms of Broadbent's mockery of Doyle's intellectualization: "The curse of mankind, that which keeps our manhood so little and so depraved, is its sense of selfhood, and the absurd abominable opinionativeness it engenders" (p. 62). Nevertheless, Doyle's mental estrangement from his environment, including Broadbent despite their pragmatic and productive business partnership, also stems from the material enforcements of modernity. Swartzlander (1988) notes that Shaw depicts three different stages of Ireland's historic land struggle (p. 86), circumscribing the effects of modernity by setting it against the medieval Ireland of monastic sages and saints, the Church's domination of land as its protector in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and finally the drastic reforms of liberation and privatization from the twentieth century onwards. The Ireland of Doyle's childhood was very much a farming country run by big estates. Only the Landlord and Tenant Act of 1870 had paved the way for the peasant proprietorship of land, and Doyle's land agent father is one of those few who managed to buy his own little farm. Doyle knows how his father would be a beggar this day if they hadn't such an opportunity. Yet, Doyle thinks that if he had been the son of a labourer instead of a minor land agent and owner, he could "have struck more grit than he did" (p. 28). Amidst the "hilarious battle between the forces of tradition and modernization" (Ochshorn, 2006, p. 180), Doyle is well aware that the Irish fell behind the times by hundreds of years and have no modern interest in the low, middle or upper subtleties of social class like he has as they merely conceive someone either as a traditional gentleman or not (p. 38).

Despite his social consciousness about the Irish question and its influence on his upbringing, he is disturbed by the distance that has grown between him and his

father now that he is going back to "that hell of littleness and monotony" (p. 30). He admits to Broadbent how he has grown fond of dealing with men of the big world and big powers that he has no idea as to what he is to say to his father who has never been further from his scrap of a house than the nearest country town in the last eighteen years he hasn't seen him. Furthermore, as a land developer, Doyle knows only too well that the distribution of land from big estates to small farmers like his father is actually a part of the capitalist scheme for the destruction of peasantry by making them financially more vulnerable so that they will turn into mortgagers who have to sell out their farms to opportunistic civil engineers like himself. He confesses that "while my father want to make St George's Channel a frontier . . . I want Ireland to be the brains of a big Commonwealth, not a Robinson Crusoe island" (p. 31). The lack of any relationship and common ground with his father further drifts Doyle into the modern liminality he is so consciously aware of in his own personal isolation. His consciousness has been moulded by different types of traditional privations and modern illusions:

> Apparently the rise of consciousness is linked to certain kinds of privation. It is the bitterness of self-consciousness that we knowers know best. Critical of the illusions that sustained mankind in earlier times, this self-consciousness of ours does little to sustain us now. The question is: which is disenchanted, the world itself or the consciousness we have of it? (Bellow, 1994, pp. 75-76)

The cause of Doyle's liminality is the rationality of the new economic and social order of modernity. None of the traditional institutions of the family or the nation can any longer conceal his estrangement from his former self due to what modernity's material transformations has brought about in his character toward being nothing but a self-seeking businessman just like Broadbent. He is suffering from Weber's (1991) conception of the disenchantment of the world, characterized by rationalization, bureaucratization and devaluation when "the ultimate and most sublime values have

retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations" (p. 155). Doyle's analytic bifurcation of nature as the sublime and society as the comic is completely a result of his modern stance as a break from the premodern ontological security of traditional social harmony. In the modern pseudo-brotherliness he has developed with Broadbent as an extension of his rational self-interest at the cost of his past, he seems to have made a secure retreat from the most sublime existential values, which he has experienced so well in his absorption of nature, toward material pragmatism. Broadbent even consoles him that such differences exist in all families but "the members rub on together all right" (p. 31). He also pompously tries to expound that the only moral questions which can accept no laxity even in the closest relationships are the political ones. By this point, his sloganeering remarks about Home Rule and Free Trade with his flashy sense of political correctness are already recognized as typical, comic stock answers by the audience. The moral elasticity of Broadbent in treating everybody on the basis of self-interest disguised as rational compromise constantly acts as the comic corrective on Doyle's curious philosophical rigidity for the attainment of sublime values. Yet, the other route of sublimation to the transcendental metaphysics of mystical life confronts Doyle in the figure of Father Keegan at the other end of the liminal disenchantment spectrum of modernity when he faces back his modest beginnings in rural life.

Instead of affirming a new heroic role in the possibility of turning his back on Broadbent as an exploiter of his people, Doyle remains dubious throughout the play despite the instructions of Father Keegan whose morality provides the clashes of will with Broadbent in an unresolved liminal tension about how the disempowered may have the upper hand in the exchanges of power. After Doyle's comparison of

Broadbent to a cunning caterpillar, Shaw introduces the ex-priest Father Keegan with a scene when he is talking a grasshopper like a madman and asking it whether Ireland is hell or purgatory (p. 43). The idiosyncratic temperament of Keegan stands in sharp contrast to Broadbent's common sense and Doyle's irresolute in-betweenness. He is a haunting figure reminiscent of traditional society where "the world remains a great enchanted garden" (Weber, 1964, p. 270) as opposed to the business duo's rationalism in purporting to turn Rosscullen into an organized, modern 'garden city'. With fantastic rumours about his magical travels across the world from Jerusalem to Oxford, some villagers do not even believe that Keegan is a man at all but still treat him as a parish priest although the Church has taken his papers, finding him unfit to take charge of people's souls. This renders him as another figure of modern liminality who fell from a position of power to a low profile by his own standards despite the community's ongoing respect for him albeit at an arm's length.

Keegan sympathizes with the dilemmas of Doyle as an exiled Irishman who has already chosen to move up the social ladder by adopting an English identity. While Keegan is grateful to his experience outside Ireland, although it eventually drove him mad, because it gave him the comparative perspective to understand the wonders he took for granted in his home country, Doyle is unwilling to climb down again by returning to his own heritage through the mediation of Father Keegan amidst the crisis caused by their business in Rosscullen. Doyle refuses his role a heroic transgressor as the actual subject of this ritual of conversion or transformation while Broadbent embarks upon his own hypocritical capitalist enterprise which creates the dark humour of the play. From the perspective of corrupt power relations,

Bohman-Kalaja (2010) describes the main action of the play as an undoing of identities with the route of passing gone wrong:

> By taking part in such power structures, the transgressor colludes in keeping existing social hierarchies in place, perhaps even of becoming an equal opportunity exploiter. With that potential, those who pass successfully into more empowered categories might be perceived as betraying those left behind, and be accused of identifying with the oppressor. (p. 110)

When Doyle is hastily offered a seat in the parliament to represent Rosscullen as someone whom the small farmers can rely on, he refuses it right away but encourages Broadbent to take up the challenge, which is actually more of the devil's own luck for their land development scheme. With his straightforward logic, Doyle is honest in his rejection of the offer and does not refrain from telling his acquaintances that he would give them hell if he remained true to his own political ideals and work against their interests by siding with the even more disadvantaged, landless, casual peasants whom even the small farmers rely on for cheap labor. Yet, he is also well aware that his idealist rejection will only get them on Broadbent's lap at the other extreme, making him "an equal opportunity exploiter". The prominent constituents of Rosscullen enthusiastically join Broadbent and chant his liberal slogans of peace, retrenchment and reform (p. 98).

The simple plot of the opportunist businessmen is lost on Rosscullen's plain folk comically as Shaw casts them as a liminal community completely ignorant of political corruption in modernity. For modern industrial purposes, their lack of capital and business rationality cut them off from the big world Doyle and Broadbent belongs to. Shaw uses this juxtaposition of superiority and inferiority to create the hilarious scene of the comic sublime when Broadbent starts his political campaign by helping one of the peasants carry his pig home in his own motorcar through the town so that the townsfolk conceives it as a powerful display of wealth and a gesture of

companionship against the hardships of rural life by two gentlemen from London. Upon arrival in Ireland, Broadbent believes he understood that "the Irish sense of humour is in abeyance" (p. 111) due the presence of a long memory of national grief. That's why he conceives the comic gesture of carrying the pig home almost as an epiphany which will win over the hearts of the Irish to him. As part of his caterpillar tactics, he expresses how delightful it will be to drive the pig in the car like a gentleman, making himself feel like an Irishman to complete his ceremonial acceptance to the community with an everyday matter-of-factness. Yet, effectively, they become the laughing stock of the whole town when they have an accident driving through Rosscullen's main street with the pig in Broadbent's lap. As the townsfolk begin to hysterically laugh at their misfortune in trying to be politically enterprising, the two urban, civil engineers feel the small-town morality of humiliating laughter upon laughter Doyle dreaded to the bones. Twisting in the wind, suddenly it is them who lose face and feel degraded as opposed to their intended schemes of political business grandeur. The inner-direction of the archaic model of charismatic historical heroes, unifying history like the world-renowned English Prime Minister Gladstone, whom Broadbent constantly refers to as the perfect embodiment of the conquering but liberating English character, is undermined and juxtaposed with the unheroic premises of insignificance and inferiority emphasizing the weakness of will in designating the representations of the world. This can be interpreted as a healthy form of humility but there is a defeatist tone in the sarcasm of Shaw's heroic reduction of Broadbent and Doyle.

Aware of the social symbolism of the hilarious accident, Keegan cynically joins the laughter with the crowd. When he is questioned about why he is laughing at the misfortunes of the two gentlemen and the poor pig which the car eventually went

over, he further gets the narrator of the incident going by saying “Why not? There is danger, destruction, torment! What more do we want to make us merry?” (p. 116). Keegan’s comment highlights how the episode has been slowly built up by Shaw as the anti-climax of the comic sublime for all the characters in the play as he multilayers all of the concept’s elements from the frustration of personal expectations exposed to societal humiliation to the juxtaposition of nature’s or fate’s sovereignty with man’s desperate reliance of modern machinery. Keegan’s final remark about the incident renders the world’s entirety as a doomed, liminal sphere of human thought as he thinks that nowhere else other than hell could such a scene be a burst of happiness for the people (p. 118). Coming from the site of the accident immensely serious and important as to himself, Broadbent’s desperate but vigilant and leery attempt at the sublimation of the accident into a political manoeuvre further deepens Shaw’s grip of the comic as the ground of social agreement of silenced consensus alongside Bergson’s interpretation of the comic’s social character as a corrective cognitive measure. Much to the hilarity of the audience, Broadbent tries to pull himself together by resorting to the rhetorical conventions of a newsbreak and public statement and addresses the congregation of the townsfolk who have turned Doyle’s aunt’s mundane sitting room into a public meeting with the solemnity of a statesman:

> BROADBENT: Gentlemen: I hope the gravity of the peril through which we have all passed . . . will prove an earnest of closer . . . relations between us in the future. We have had a somewhat agitating day: a valuable and innocent animal has lost its life. . . . I greatly regret the damage to Mr Patrick Farrell's fingers. . . . Patsy took it like an Irishman, and . . . declared his willingness to break all his fingers and toes for me on the same terms. . . . In every Irish breast I have found that spirit of liberty [A cheery voice "Hear Hear"], that instinctive mistrust of the Government ["God bless you, sir!"], that love of independence [A defiant voice, "That's it! Independence!"]. (p. 120)

Given the liminal disposition of the play, this is the moment where Shaw no longer pulls tricks to divert the audience’s attention to the sublime from the comic.

Compared with Broadbent, Doyle and Keegan are too self-conscious to face this naked usurpation of the comic and too weary to oppose the idle, political chatter of Broadbent. They are the ones to recognize Broadbent's liminal collapse in his tragicomic beseeching and yearning for collectivity. Broadbent has no chance other than admitting the public humiliation of the incident like the liminal subject of a ritual test which would otherwise symbolically inform the people against his politically pretentious camouflage in coming to terms with the townsfolk unless he manages to interpret what happened in his own terms. He pulls the trick of sublimating the ridiculous to the aggregative social action, and people cheer with enthusiasm as he finally feels at home in the world of 'the other'. At that, he does not even step back from exaggerating that if it were legally possible, he should become a naturalized Irishman. When Doyle's father laments that now that Broadbent became a laughing stock, it's all up with his candidature for the town's seat in the parliament. Doyle corrects him by pointing out how Broadbent will take advantage of it in electioneering and "tell it himself as one of the most providential episodes in the history of England and Ireland" (p. 123). He emphasizes the cynical but effective cunning in the contrast between the peasant's comic narration of the pig incident and Broadbent's social sublimation of it.

Broadbent thus achieves to complete the journey of his rite of passage by mediating it himself from beginning to end in contrast to Doyle's perpetual, subconscious detachment from his own society and Keegan's intentional rejection of it. Both remain indifferent to how Broadbent hoodwinks the people of Rosscullen from their own limbo because of the liminality which modernity cast them as an immigrant and ex-priest, drained of morality, volition and responsibility. Withdrawal from heroic action and social resolution becomes the only remaining viable

alternative for them as patterns of normal societal recognition in the play only exist in a grim farcical manner between the usurpers of power and the exploited. Doyle and Keegan play the bystander and are compliant to the theatricality in Broadbent's artificial interactions with the people in order to win his way. Although Keegan admits that he would have called him a hypocrite if he was in his ignorant youth (p. 124), he now knows that the conversion of Broadbent's kind of the conquering Englishman is beyond his powers. While Broadbent is offended by Keegan's accusation, Doyle reminds him to pay heed to such remarks only as a peculiar vein of humour, coming from an overworked, old madman who literally believes "this earth of ours must be hell" (p. 127), perfectly run and kept orderly by efficient devils disguised as businessmen. Broadbent and Doyle believe that Rosscullen has an industrial future while Keegan insists that it has no future whatsoever. It is only at the end of the play that the dark comedy of this disenchanted clash of modern liminality is openly revealed by Shaw. Father Keegan makes a final attempt to shake off the pragmatic false consciousness of the oppressors by acting out of character with an inspiring saintly sermon only to be followed by Broadbent's comic change of the conversion to his mundane realities in choosing a construction site for his hotel:

> KEEGAN: In my dreams [heaven] 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 which all life is human and all humanity divine: three in one and one in three. It is, in short, the dream of a madman. (p. 164)

Bergson (2005) denotes wit in comedy as a certain way of dramatic thinking with the conversation of ideas with another like persons put "into the bargain" (p. 52). The cancellation of the dramatic effect of the visionary aspirations of Father Keegan by Broadbent's typical everyday negligence passes as a scene of denial before the comic

sublime as a liminal zone where knowledge meets ignorance and alienation simultaneously. In this sense, the social context of Broadbent's usurpation of the lands of poor Irish farmers in the background of the play's action becomes a mere metaphor for ontological homelessness and displacement as opposed to Keegan's utopic vision of *communitas* as the social ideal of antistructure and equality aimed by rites of passages with the dissolution of liminality (Turner, 1974 p. 73).

Broadbent characterizes the comic in his persistent sense of superiority against situations which actually call for submission to the sublime sense of detachment from the world in terms of not feeling at home in it. Keegan feels this sublime homelessness in the world with "the very depths of his nature" while Broadbent takes his own common sense orientation in the world so seriously that he sees no evils "that cannot be remedied by freedom, self-government and English institutions" (pp. 128-129). McDowell (1987) identifies this denial of the acknowledgement of modernity's liminal disintegration with the usual Victorian complacency as a reduction of "the profound to the commonplace" in considering himself as "superior to fate and the world's evils" (p. 72.) Stuck between the decadent but efficient realism of Broadbent and the saintly idealism of Keegan which produces the comic effect of multilayered moralities, Doyle is casted as the liminal outsider who is yet to decide his own authentic response to the modern world's conflicts insofar as he can find the courage to follow the sublimity of unselfing to its controversial ends just like Major Barbara's existential leap to what lies beyond her immature liminal consciousness. Thus, it can be contended that the unheroic premise which lies at the heart of Shaw's portrayal of the comic sublime in *John Bull's Other Island* emphasizes the modern's subject's passive mode of waiting in the liminality of negated attempts at putting the world in order. The experience of confronting the

comic sublime in modern society does not promise redemption to the characters and convey a message of emancipation to the audience but drives the pessimistic conclusion that entrapment in liminality has become perpetual in modernity where change through participation in the collective sublimation of the world is no longer possible.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Bernard Shaw's critical and rhetorical plays of ideas can be conceived as a break from the conventions of nineteenth-century theatre in the sense that they attempted at the depiction of social disruptions caused by modernity in the manifestations of the comic. Shaw's treatment of serious social issues and existential plights with lighthearted witticism was not always welcomed by the critics of the period on grounds of failed artistry. However, a closer inspection of his dramatic vehicles for the comic portrayal of modernity's sublime situations which evoke moral vocations in his liminal characters reveals a consistent dramatic strategy utilized for a critique of the mechanization of life and suffocation of human vitality in modern social relations. His aesthetic conception of the intersection of the comic and the sublime and employment of their extrapolations in how his characters respond to the changes within and without themselves in *Heartbreak House, Major Barbara* and *John Bull's Other Island* is an original critical exposition of how socialization and individuation take place and are challenged by the collective transformations of modernity.

Shaw's comic drama is a critical response to liminality experienced by modern subjects of different classes in situations of crises that call for transformation of character. This siege mentality brings the sublime in the picture as well. In Shaw, it is the comic sublime that provides the escape from the social prison of mannerism with the dissolution of personality misinformed by the automatism of false consciousness. Shaw's imaginative power lies in creating performative situations where the automatism of social norms are challenged with a rational clash that brings the mind to the realistic edge of the sublimity of what must ideally be done. Twinkles

of comic relief at moments of interpersonal crises provide gateway emotions that further help to withdraw from the narrowness of personality towards freedom in change that can take the form of conversion to greater social causes. The lightheadedness and honesty of daydreaming as the most immediately available imaginative self-satisfaction faculty of man can be seriously translated to comic fantasies on Shaw's stage in terms self-dramatization either in the affirmation or rejection of social roles.

Condemning the defeatist but artistically effective end of the pacifistic protagonist of Henry Jr.'s *The Saloon*, Shaw once commented that "People don't want works of art from you: they want help." (as cited in Duban, 2001, p. 212) This sentiment of Shaw is not a dramaturgic reaction in itself but summarizes his attitude to modern man's weakening stature at the turn of the century. In Shaw's experience of how he came to repudiate the common morality of religious conditioning in his childhood, the fundamental premise of his philosophical passion as well as his artistic strategy of destroying moral ideals can also be detected. In the preface to *Immaturity*, he explains that his immature reverence for the verbiage of religious indoctrination led him to the authentic "essentials of religion by the reduction of every fictitious element in it to the most irreverent absurdity" (as cited in Pearson, 2015, p. 16) This defence mechanism of the immature Shaw against dogmatism would also supply him with temperamental arms of artistic offense in his subsequent body of comic work as a relentless critique of all modern forms of social humbuggery.

The ultimate objective of Shavian dramaturgy is to pave the way for the transgression of the self's boundaries, submerging identity in something other and more sublime than petty, personal motives although the moral premises involved in

the new enterprise may contradict the character's previous attitude towards the modern world. All the characters in *Heartbreak House* and Doyle in *John Bull's Other Island* fail in this but the implicit comedy of their manners and their very failure in acknowledging it reinforces Shaw's moral message. Barbara commits herself from goodness to evil on the surface by her reverse conversion and acceptance of the evil embedded in how society is structured but her awakening passes as a leap towards the dubious, sublime nature of the world, aided by her coming to terms with her real social status through liminal moments of comic truth. The dichotomy of the heroic duo of Broadbent and Doyle in *John Bull's Other Island* represents the divergent possibilities of the comic in the will's clash with the powers of the sublime in the juxtaposition of society's forces with nature's powers over man. In all three plays, the dramatic production of the comic sublime through opposition and absorption patterns of thought and performance paves the way towards an alternative reasoning into the spiral of creative duty in the Nietzschean sense of the problem of the recognition of truth and the evolution of corresponding action:

> Duty is an imperious sentiment that forces us to action. . . . The origin, limits, and justification of duty we will not debate or allow to be debated. But the thinker considers everything an evolution and every evolution a subject for discussion. . . . He asks, whence comes it and whither will it go? . . . the thinker's machinery would no longer work properly if he could really feel himself unencumbered by duty in the search for knowledge? . . . Perhaps the formula will be: granted there were a duty of recognising truth, what is then the truth in regard to every other kind of duty? (Nietzsche, 2012, pp. 381-382)

Recognizing the duty of seeing the truth even though only in juxtaposition with other hypothetical, socially informed duties as in liminal rites of passage, the comic sentiment of Shaw's redundancy of his characters' initial naïve morality is merely a tool of contradiction to point out the true direction of previously incomprehensible creative actions. The way Shaw utilized the comic in his plays was his understanding of how to help the vital faculty of the liminal modern man find a way out of the

historical impasse that had engulfed the horizon in the quest for authenticity in life as well as in literature. Encumbered by an imperious sense of moral duty before truth, he attempted to shake off the lethargy of the artist-thinker caught in the hypothetical web of "whence" and "whither" questions. Shaw's plays attempt to question the falsely put questions and issues of the age by transfiguring them in light of the comic recognition of the status quo. Despite the surface playfulness of his comedies with an array of social and personal contradictions and resolutions, the underlying subliminal sentiment of their effect is therefore always a call for seriousness to attend to the exacting crisis of tragic, absurd or defeatist liminality in the creative rite of passage of the modern age.

Shaw launches this moral program with *John Bull's Other Island* and *Major Barbara* at the beginning of the century, and in the aftermath of the Great War as the end of the long nineteenth century with the catastrophic collapse of belief in the moral superiority of the West, Shaw's projection of modern liminality through the comic sublime terminates in *Heartbreak House*. The two early plays depict the pragmatic tendencies of the age in seeking solutions to society's ills through the prominence of the elite but the conclusive psychological dystopia of *Heartbreak House* reckons this as false consciousness. Putting aside the plays' strong portrayal of external history, the manifestations of the unity of the comic and the sublime inherent in the dramatic elements of characterization and plot reversals make the audience bear witness to an age of paradigm shift in the art of drama itself. In fact, there are no conventional endings in any of these three plays. Shaw himself suggests that *Major Barbara* is an extraction of the last scene of *John Bull's Other Island* "spun out for three hours and a half" (as cited in Dukore, 1984, p. 34). Broadbent casually asks Doyle to choose the construction site for a hotel in their property

development project while Barbara is routinely domesticized by asking her mother to pick up a house for herself as the culmination of her reverse conversion. In *Heartbreak House*, there is no effort to create an original dramatic denouement other than the eruption of the world's first global war like an inevitable epidemy of human society.

With these storylines, Shaw could have easily been catalogued as a nihilist dramatist but his creativity in merging the sublime with the comic in dealing with the frustrations of his liminal characters weathers the storm of defeatism as he makes sure that the audience conceives these dead-ends as by-products of the false consciousness performed and identified throughout the plays with the corrective guidance of laughter. Shaw immerses the audience in this dialectic cognitive gap between the sublime and the comic with his dramatic morality, critical of the fatalism of modern liminality's predicaments. In this sense, he achieves a sublimation of drama itself as it was practiced with mechanistic arrangements of characterization and plot in the nineteenth century.

Shaw successfully translates this modern liminality into the terms of the stage by playing with language, characterization, plot and setting – indeed, with the visibility of their lack in the conventional sense. The absence of these conventions can be summarized as "the vanishing of the hero" (Wilson, 1959, p. 17) because it is the heroic action, the ability of to insert human agency into the outcome of phenomena, which vitalizes these different categories of content. The beginnings of naturalist drama had already shifted the focus from the motives of the hero to the superimposition of the circumstances upon the individual. This stems from a "sense of metaphysical anguish" (Esslin, 2001, p. 23) in being out of harmony and devoid of purpose. Shaw's presentation of the contemporary sense of the irrationality of the

human condition with lucid reasoning may sometimes curtain how the "search of the self" (Esslin, 2001, p. 29) is acknowledged with its negating qualities. Yet, in fact, as the tools of expression have been changed or destroyed with Shaw's manifestations of the comic sublime, it is not only that the hero has vanished in his narratives but the audience is targeted as the hero or the unity to be deconstructed and liminalized with the dramatic effect.

It is true, as Tolstoy once remarked to Shaw himself, that "the problem about God and evil is too important to be spoken of in jest" (as cited in Parini, 2010, p. 113) but the refuge Shaw took in the possibilities of laughter and the comic was exponentially aiming at the elimination of the trivial in favour of the sublime respectively by their mimetic and ritualistic projections throughout his work. The creative legacy of his critical comedies does not lie in his meticulous, moral analyses of "the origin, limits, and justification of duty" in endless volumes of prefaces and pamphlets about Shavian catchphrases like Creative Evolution, Life Force, etc. but the artistic appropriation of the mechanism and meaning of the comic into the dramaturgy of his plays.

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