September 1987

Madness, Mysticism, and Black Cultures: G.B. Shaw's Peter Keegan and Captian Shotover

Marilyn Throne

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.colby.edu/cq

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Colby. It has been accepted for inclusion in Colby Quarterly by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Colby. For more information, please contact mfkelly@colby.edu.
ONE LEARNS to trust George Bernard Shaw's characters to operate within their respective plays as dynamic polarities, logically and systemically providing an exegesis for the playwright's philosophy. One learns to trust George Bernard Shaw to provide in his Prefaces attention calling "ahems" to nuances which crystallize characterizations and clarify thematic content. In the light of all this trust, it is rather astounding to discover the enigmatic recalcitrance of Peter Keegan in *John Bull's Other Island* and Captain Shotover in *Heartbreak House* to yield to logic, system, or crystallization.

To be sure, Shaw gives us clues to their significance in their names: Peter Keegan is obviously a "key again," and Captain Shotover, just as obviously, is the "shot fired over the bows," the signal of the British navy to an unfriendly vessel to heave to and be boarded, which must have been easily identified by Shaw's English audience, whose empire was dependent on maritime power. But such nominal devices can be difficult to decipher. A "key" to understanding, one assumes; a shot fired in warning. But understanding what and warning of what, and why are these patently important characters described as mad by both Shaw and the other characters in the plays? What has made them mad, and is their madness relevant to the understanding and the warning?

When the critics are consulted, one discovers that both Keegan and Shotover have received great and useful attention, and yet their enigma is only heightened by what has been written about them. Bernard F. Dukore says that Peter Keegan is not a "viable alternative" to Larry Doyle and Tom Broadbent and their respective cynicism and optimism (52), while A. M. Gibbs interprets Keegan as "echoing the lost causes of the previous century" (133); "all he can do is submit" (131). Both Harold Ferrar and Alfred Turco, Jr., see Keegan as representing spirituality, but Ferrar says the defrocked priest is the "pure spirituality" of Ireland (41), and Turco says his spirituality is "dreaming" (190).

Captain Shotover, says Turco, is "the prophet" who can no longer reach his goal (249); Michael W. Kaufman indicates that "while Shotover represents Shaw's prophetic spokesman anatomizing England's political plight, he is simultaneously the embodied symbol of the inebriation of the most dynamic potential for creative change" (8). Maurice Valency finds
the ancient captain "Shaw's most memorable character," but one that "resists precise definition"; Shotover is, according to Valency, "a persistent spirit haunting a time that is no longer congenial to his temper and is unable to utilize his genius" (342).

While several critics make passing comparisons of these two characters, it is Turco's observation that most edifies:

[Shotover's] similarities to Keegan are . . . striking—both have had experiences of a mystical nature (the ex-priest's confession of a dying Hindu, Shotover's marriage to a West Indian Negress) and avoid painful contact with their fellows by offering no resistance to (and even tacitly encouraging) the notion that they are mad. (252)

Instead of assuming that Keegan and Shotover must represent something lost or being lost from the cultures of their birth—the increasingly industrial Irish and the nineteenth-century English—it might be more rewarding to consider the two characteristics shared by Keegan and Shotover, their madness and their mystical experiences, and how these characteristics set them aside from their societies. One is ineluctably drawn to wonder if perhaps these characteristics are interdependent. After all, in some respects Keegan and Shotover are the most practical and clear-sighted characters in their respective plays. So just what is Shaw's definition of madness? And what is the definition of madness applied to Keegan and Shotover by other and supposedly more "wholesome" members of the two societies which, Shaw makes clear, are teetering on brinks of disaster?

It should not be surprising to discover that the illogical, even inexplicable, ingredient in the makeup of Keegan and Shotover, which makes them simultaneously practical, mad, and visionary, is their experience with forbidden, alien, and "black" cultures and with the mystical knowledge of those cultures.

II

Peter Keegan and Captain Shotover are both introduced to us as madmen and then discovered to be the most practical and true-seeing characters in their respective plays.

Act II of John Bull's Other Island opens with Keegan in conversation with a grasshopper, an action that may amuse us, but that terrifies the innocent eavesdropper, Patsy Farrell. We learn immediately from Keegan himself that he has been defrocked because he is mad.

The Church let me be its priest as long as it thought me fit for its work. When it took away my papers it meant you to know that I was only a poor madman, unfit and unworthy to take charge of the souls of the people. (92)

The most obvious manifestation of Keegan's madness is his insistence that he is brother to all other creatures, including the grasshopper, a seemingly harmless trait that provides amusement to the good people of Rosscullen.
When Tom Broadbent foolishly insists on delivering Matthew Haffigan’s pig via his motorcar, and the subsequent struggle for control of brakes and wheel between Broadbent and the pig results in the demolition of half the market square and the slaughter of the pig, it is Peter Keegan alone of the men of Rosscullen who is not amused. Sarcastically he objects to laughter at the death of a brother creature: “There is danger, destruction, torment! What more do we need to make us merry?” (134). But his grim objection is turned to more humor by the irrepressible Barney Doran: “Bedad I’m sorry for your poor bruddher, Misther Keegan; but I recom­mend you to thry him wid a couple o’ fried eggs for your breakfast to­morrow” (134).

Nowhere is Keegan’s universality of brotherhood clearer—or more clearly mad—than in his exchange with Tom Broadbent over that entrepreneur’s plans for Rosscullen’s future. When Broadbent objects to being likened to the devil, Keegan withdraws the comparison, “. . . since the word offends you . . . ” (158), and instead likens the Englishman to an ass. Of course, this epithet is also unfavorably received though Keegan explains: “You may take it without offence from a madman who calls the ass his brother—and a very honest, useful and faithful brother, too” (158–59). In other words, not only is Keegan claiming and accepting brotherhood with the grasshopper, the pig, and the ass, but also with the scheming Broadbent, a singularly mad claim since Keegan is the only character in Rosscullen who sees through Broadbent’s plan for the village.

For it is axiomatic that however mad Keegan may be, he is also portrayed as a man of knowledge, perception, and understanding. In Act II, when Nora tentatively questions him about his travels and what home and home things seemed like when he returned, Keegan immediately understands that she is asking what she can expect from Larry, whom she loves, and who is returning home to Rosscullen after an absence of eighteen years. As she walks up the hill to the Round Tower, Keegan muses aloud, “Aye, he’s come to torment you; and you’re driven already to tor­ment him” (96), intuiting that there will be no reunion or romance and that neither Nora nor Larry will be personally happy with the outcome (as indeed, they are not).

Again, Keegan intuitively understands Tom Broadbent, whom, in his youth, he would have called a hypocrite. But now he knows that Broadbent is sincere insofar as he can be. Keegan remembers:

There is a saying in the Scripture which runs—so far as the memory of an oldish man can carry the words—Let not the right side of your brain know what the left side doeth. I learnt at Oxford that this is the secret of the Englishman’s strange power over making the best of both worlds. (139)

It is Peter Keegan who edifies the audience and startles both Larry Doyle and Tom Broadbent by exposing the commercial cynicism of the Garden City scheme, mocking by refrain Broadbent’s virtue of efficiency, even as Mark Antony once mocked Brutus’s honor: “You will reorganize
the scheme efficiently; you will liquidate its second bankruptcy efficiently . . . you will drive Haffigan to America very efficiently . . . then no doubt your English and American shareholders will spend all the money we make for them very efficiently . . . ; and you will devote what they save to fresh land development schemes. For four wicked centuries the world has dreamed this foolish dream of efficiency; and the end is not yet. But the end will come” (160).

Captain Shotover, too, is introduced as mad—or if not really mad, then addled, or senile, or maybe just eccentric. Ellie first describes him as “A wild-looking old gentleman” (51), and upon his first entrance, he irrationally insists that Ellie must be the daughter of his old piratical boatswain, Billie Dunn, confides that he himself is trying to attain “the seventh degree of concentration” (53) while his daughter Hesione invites guests that distract him, mentions his second daughter (Ariadne) and claims that she married her husband because he reminded her of the wooden figurehead of the Captain’s ship, pours out the tea Nurse Guinness brings for Ellie, and then darts off to make the young visitor, now tired, upset, thirsty, and bewildered, a cup of his own China tea—which Guinness says he’ll forget all about.

To a degree, it is difficult to take the captain as a dangerous madman in that house where normal people seem to thrive on humiliation, grief, fear, blackmail, plots and schemes against each other and even against themselves. The old man scurries in and out of conversations, dropping pithy or outrageous observations, and then rushing off—as Ellie discovers—to get a shot of rum. Even his experiments with dynamite involve the eccentric but evidently harmless idea of setting it off with a mind ray; and Hesione admonishes him not to drop his dynamite about the house, as one would admonish a child not to drop his toys.

But like Keegan, Shotover is practical in human relationships, and where Keegan understands Broadbent’s modern economics, Shotover understands modern technology.

After Hector has met Hesione’s sister and realized that he is enamoured of her, he asks his father-in-law Shotover: “Listen, O sage. How long dare you concentrate on a feeling without risking having it fixed in your consciousness all the rest of your life?” (85). Shotover’s quick answer, “Ninety minutes,” is comic, but we should not miss the point that it is to the old man that Hector turns with his question and that trust is more credible if we consider other instances of Shotover’s quick, intuitive perceptions about the people in the house.

As an example, although initially the captain sizes up Boss Mangan as simply “Not ablebodied” (73), the moment Shotover is alone with the industrial boss, he comes to the relevant point: “Youre going to marry Dunn’s daughter. Dont. Youre too old” (74). And when Mangan tries to talk tough—“I intend to. I mean to. See? . . . Thats the sort of man I am; and there will be a better understanding between us when you make up
your mind to that, Captain" (74-75)—Shotover crisply tells him to stop talking like a movie and then makes Mangan confess that he is not worth the hundred thousand a year people believe.

It is the captain, too, who understands that when his daughter Ariadne snaps at Ellie for talking glibly about heartbreak, she is really indicating her own fear that her heart has never broken because “she has none to break” (123). He tells her: “If you had no heart how could you want to have it broken, child?” (123-24), providing at once reassurance and paternal affection to this daughter he has pretended not to recognize and who has, as he himself tells her, broken his heart when she left him years before:

You left because you did not want us. Was there no heartbreak in that for your father? You tore yourself up by the roots; and the ground healed up and brought forth fresh plants and forgot you. What right had you to come back and probe old wounds? (152)

Perhaps the strangest ingredient in the concoction of Heartbreak House is that, although he is the oldest character, Captain Shotover is the only character who knows anything about modern—that is, twentieth century—technology. Hector Hushabye and Randall Utterword are men without any practical skills, unless there is practicality in playing the flute and making up tall tales. Mazzini Dunn, son of poet parents, had a good enough idea to start a business by which others have become rich, but not sufficient practical sense to hang onto the business or its profits. And Boss Mangan, who “owns” factories and has a position in the government, is, we learn, the most incapable of all. Mazzini tells Hesione: “... he doesn’t know anything about machinery. He never goes near the men: he couldn’t manage them: he is afraid of them. I never can get him to take the least interest in the works: he hardly knows more about them than you do” (101).

It is Captain Shotover who, by his inventions, keeps the household solvent. He may be working on a fantastic mind ray that will explode the ammunition in the other fellow’s gunbelt, but he has actually and practically produced a patent lifeboat and a “ship with the magnetic keel that suck[s] up submarines” (89). Shotover may have been born in the first half of the nineteenth century, but he possesses the inventive genius of the twentieth. Curiously, it is only the concept of the mind-ray and its dependence on achieving the “seventh degree of concentration” that persuades us Shotover is more mad than eccentric, as it is only Keegan’s very real response to the pig and the grasshopper as brothers that convince us he is mad.

III

The remove of Peter Keegan and Captain Shotover from mere eccentricity to madness is based on their visionary abilities or claims to such abilities. After all, any old man might find rum a way to help him concen-
trace, any lonely person might playfully chat with a grasshopper that seems to respond. But visionary abilities, or even just a belief in them, is true enigma. For the visionary is one who sees beyond what can be seen. He is saint, or he is wizard. And either of those terms implies that he lives outside society’s normal patterns of behavior and, therefore, that he is mad.

Peter Keegan’s madness is not in attributing brotherhood to a grasshopper, a pig, an ass, and Broadbent, but in actually believing in that brotherhood, and through that belief seeing the world as veritable hell—and as potential heaven. On the one hand, as he tells Larry Doyle:

This world, sir, is very clearly a place of torment and penance, a place where the fool flourishes and the good and wise are hated and persecuted, a place where men and women torture one another in the name of love. . . . there is only one place of horror and torment known to my religion; and that place is hell. Therefore it is plain to me that this earth of ours must be hell. . . . (140)

On the other hand, this earth could be heaven—not Tom Broadbent’s Anglican “blue satin place” filled with “pious old ladies” (163)—but a union of earth, humanity, and divinity:

In my dreams it is a country where the State is the Church and the Church the people: three in one and one in three. It is a commonwealth in which work is play and play is life: three in one and one in three. It is a temple in which the priest is the worshipper and the worshipper the worshipped: three in one and one in three. It is a godhead in 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. (163)

Nor is Captain Shotover mad because he confuses Mazzini and Billie Dunn; he does that on purpose. Shotover is mad because he sees that Heartbreak House and its inhabitants are in hell, and because he knows that heaven is available. Like Keegan, Shotover refuses to distinguish between “fellowcreatures”—though he does not seem to, or have an opportunity to, include asses and grasshoppers in that category. He asks Randall Utterword: “Do you suppose that at my age I make distinctions between one fellowcreature and another?” (76). When Mangan is awakened from the hypnotic state and calls out in anguish because his heart is breaking, the captain enters crying: “There is a soul in torment here” (113). About Hector, Shotover observes: “The man is at home all day, like a damned soul in hell” (125). Identifying himself as a hound of hell, he says, “It is not my house: it is only my kennel” (151).

Shotover is aware that the evil he perceives is caused by and created by human beings. In a long conversation with Hector which is full of references to hell, Shotover alludes also to Genesis and to the struggle begun there between man and the forces of Satan. He says:

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. (86)

When Boss Mangan argues that whether or not he marries Ellie, it is not
Shotover's business, the captain retorts: "It is everybody's business. The stars in their courses are shaken when such things happen" (74). And during the same encounter, when Mangan asks whose house he is in, Shotover replies: "You are beneath the dome of heaven, in the house of God" (75).

It is evident, then, that Shaw attributes to both characters the same kind of madness, and that madness consists of a double vision: the vision of actuality which perceives the hell that men can make of earth, and the mystical vision which perceives the heaven that somehow obtains above or beyond or coincidentally with manmade hell.

Shaw gives no reasons why Keegan and Shotover alone of the characters in the two plays have these visionary qualities except that Keegan and Shotover are the only ones who have had mystical experiences with alien and "black" cultures.

Peter Keegan has supposedly gone mad after confessing a dying black man. The story Larry Doyle has heard about it is "that when the devil came for the black heathen, he took off your head and turned it three times round before putting it on again; and that your head's been turned ever since" (140). The true story, as Keegan tells it, is of going to comfort an elderly and dying Hindu, who told him "one of those tales of unmerited misfortune, of cruel luck, of relentless persecution by destiny, which sometimes wither the commonplaces of consolation on the lips of a priest" (140). But instead of complaining, as he had every right to, the dying Hindu told Keegan that his misfortunes had been brought upon him by sins he himself had committed in a former existence.

Then without a word of comfort from me, he died with a clear-eyed resignation that my most earnest exhortations have rarely produced in a Christian, and left me sitting there by his bedside with the mystery of this world suddenly revealed to me. (140)

Keegan has suddenly perceived that the hell of this world is not gratuitous or caused by reverses of luck or man's standing with God, or with the gods, but that it is manmade.

Captain Shotover's experience with the alien or black culture is less clear. Nurse Guinness tells Ellie in the whirlwind initial scene that "They say he sold himself to the devil in Zanzibar before he was a captain..." (54), but Shotover tells Ellie that that is a story he himself made up in order to save his soul:

I had to deal with men so degraded that they wouldn't obey me unless I swore at them and kicked them and beat them with my fists... I tricked these thieves into believing I'd sold myself to the devil. It saved my soul from the kicking and swearing that was damning me by inches. (127)

Hector Hushabye, enamoured of Ariadne, tells Randall Utterword, long enthralled to the same woman, that he is under a spell: "Old Shotover sold himself to the devil in Zanzibar. The devil gave him a black witch for a wife; and these two demon daughters are their mystical progeny" (137).
But the “demon daughters,” Hesione and Ariadne, are actually the progeny of Shotover’s second marriage—to an Englishwoman, one assumes. On the other hand, Shotover himself advises Mangan to “marry a West Indian negress,” as he himself did, because “The negress redeemed me” (76). When Ellie muses that she’d rather marry the captain than the boss, Shotover tells her: “And I have a wife somewhere in Jamaica: a black one. My first wife. Unless she’s dead” (130). We are never sure just what happened to the captain in Zanzibar, but his marriage to a black woman is obviously real; and intriguingly, the hint that the first wife may not be dead means that Shotover’s daughters may not be legitimate. Still, their legitimacy is probably not significant: clearly they are Shotover’s daughters, belonging to him more than to any mother and sharing traits of his eccentric and energetic personality.

But it is undoubtedly significant that the experiences we are examining are both with “black” cultures, with the Hindu culture, with the Indian Ocean island culture of Zanzibar, and with the Jamaican culture, all quite different than the English culture.

*John Bull’s Other Island* and *Heartbreak House* were both written during the height of the British Empire, when the sun never set upon it, when the Englishman went out from his home island to govern, enlighten, and Christianize the world, sure of his own superiority and of the superiority of his own culture and its laws and technology and religion.

It is equally significant that both experiences are described as mystical in nature, especially since Keegan and Shotover are presented in their respective plays as the characters with the most practical and useful knowledge. They are not innately mystical men; they are not men who pursue dreams. In his youth, Keegan walked all over Europe, a most concrete way of experiencing places and people; Shotover was a tough, alert captain of a vessel, and now even in his eighties, his mind is creative and clever in a technological sense, and he fights to keep from slipping into the dreaming stage of old age: “I drink now to keep sober . . .” (130).

IV

THE MYSTICAL experiences Shaw provides for Keegan and Shotover occur in opposition to all the benefits of their white, English, and European societies, and it is obviously those mystical experiences that make Keegan the promise, and Shotover the warning, for their societies.

For as we have seen, neither Peter Keegan nor Captain Shotover is a failure in his society except for his madness and his impotence. The madness is clearly associated with knowledge that each of the men has obtained. And the impotence is both condition for and result of learning that knowledge.

Keegan is helpless before the testimonial of the dying Hindu to the peace and spirituality of his belief; there is nothing the priest can do to
comfort a man who needs no comfort. And after that experience, Keegan is impotent within his own church, defrocked because his new questions about the western system make him incapable of ministering to the people living tightly within that system. He is isolated from his society because he no longer shares his society's definitions of good and evil and their causes, and he must carry on his conversations with a grasshopper. He tells Broadbent: "I only make the hearts of my countrymen harder when I preach to them. . . . I am better alone, at the Round Tower, dreaming of heaven" (162).

Shotover has accepted the rumor of selling his soul to the devil because there was no other way he could cope with the savage and brutal men of his crew—an impotence within his societal role. Now, truly possessed, he runs from confrontations with the people of his household, who represent his society. He tells Ellie: "It confuses me to be answered. It discourages me. I cannot bear men and women. I have to run away" (128). But when Ellie denies the old man his rum, he grows docile; Hector says she "has the Ancient Mariner on a string like a Pekinese dog" (131). The power of his invention, his amazing energy, the outrage of his pithy retorts, all nod impotently under the false moon of the garden light.

It is these conditions of impotence that reveal the wisdom of Keegan and Shotover. In that impotence that acknowledges his own inability to change the world, Peter Keegan can commune with his fellow creatures and feel the innate holiness of Ireland—or of any land:

Ireland, sir, for good or evil, is like no other place under heaven; and no man can touch its sod or breathe its air without becoming better or worse. It produces two kinds of men in strange perfection: saints and traitors. . . . the day may come when these islands shall live by the quality of their men rather than by the abundance of their minerals. . . . (159)

Shotover, likewise acknowledging the hell he sees about him, understands that the world is God-created and therefore a potential heaven. In the half dream he has succumbed to, while Ellie guesses at part of his vision and yearns for "Life with a blessing!" (149), Shotover envisions the destruction of the English society. His state is almost trancelike, and there is a mystic purity to the very cadences of his sentences, as well as to the metaphorical aptness of the foundering ship of the drunken skipper. The core of his vision is a contrast of the pettiness of cultures and systems with the monumental forces of creation itself. Ships are sunk in storms and on the rocks and because of stupid or drunken leadership. But:

At sea nothing happens to the sea. Nothing happens to the sky. The sun comes up from the east and goes down to the west. The moon grows from a sickle to an arc lamp, and comes later and later until she is lost in the light as other things are lost in the darkness. After the typhoon, the flying-fish glitter in the sunshine like birds. It's amazing how they get along, all things considered. Nothing happens, except something not worth mentioning. (155)

The sinking of the ship is, of course, what is not worth mentioning. As for
Keegan it is not worth fighting against Broadbent's Garden City scheme or his campaign for Parliament.

When Ellie complains that he is of "no use" to her, Shotover rejoins: "What did you expect? A Savior, eh?" (127). He is not a savior, nor is Keegan, nor is saving their societies the purpose or point of their wisdom. For the systems don't matter to Keegan and Shotover. Catholicism, capitalism, Irish land reform, the British system of government, the colonies which Hastings Utterword governs, these are matters extrinsic to the visions of our madmen. When Hector cries out for advice on what he is to do to continue his way of life, Shotover says: "Do? Nothing simpler. Learn your business as an Englishman" (156). This is not Shaw's apogee of the British way of life. Quite the contrary. The Englishman's business, Shotover says, is "Navigation. Learn it and live; or leave it and be damned" (156). If Hector wants to save his life he must be willing to sail away metaphorically and spiritually from his island, and he can no longer rely on his father-in-law, whose wider vision, like Peter Keegan's, is no longer parochial, but universal.

Finally, it does not matter to the universe if Heartbreak House or Rosscullen, Ireland, lives or dies, whether the drunken skipper's ship founders on the rocks, or whether Matthew Haffigan is cheated out of his land and the Irish children once more turned into lackeys for the rich. The sea continues; the sky continues; the possibility of heaven and hell continues, whether in the dynamite cave where the cowardly burglars, Billie Dunn and Boss Mangan, hide from the bombs, or in the soft Irish twilight near the Round Tower where Patsy Farrell frightens himself with his superstitions and Tom Broadbent damns his own soul by dividing his brain into sentiment and efficiency.

In "Lapis Lazuli," William Butler Yeats talks about "Old civilizations put to the sword. / Then they and their wisdom went to rack. . . ." Civilizations and systems come and go; what is true, what is universal, what is worth caring about is the very energy and purity of life that Peter Keegan sees in the soft misty promise of an Ireland which could again be the island of saints, and that Captain Shotover sees in a more virile way in the dangers of the sea:

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. . . . 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. (128-29)

The enigma of Peter Keegan and Captain Shotover is born of mysticism, of Shaw's belief that there is a core or root of life that cannot be systematized, but that matters far more than any codification of government, economics, or religion. In the Don Juan dream sequence of *Man and Superman* Shaw also suggests that human life must have a purpose that rises above mere earthly schemes and that must strive to create God's world, or heaven. In *John Bull's Other Island* and *Heartbreak*
House, the dream of Don Juan can only be expressed through mad characters, for as western—and more emphatically, British—civilization defines sanity, it holds no place for those truths which can only be intuited.

The impotence of the two characters is important. Their knowledge cannot be pursued; like Shotover’s seventh degree of concentration, it can only be assumed. And its benefits cannot be formed into a system or standard with which to govern society, because in the God-centered universe only God governs.

What is most startling about these two characters is the depth of mysticism they reveal in Shaw, a mysticism seemingly more innate to his countrymen Yeats or James Stephens, who also wrote of the universality of life: in The Crock of Gold, the awakening Caitlin learns that “she was not an individual only; she was also part of a mighty organism ordained, through whatever stress, to achieve its oneness, and this great being was threefold, comprising in its mighty units God and Man and Nature—the immortal trinity” (221). Shaw is not usually sorted with his mystical and lyrical countrymen. We treasure him for the keen rational edge of his satiric wit.

Yet as the creations of Peter Keegan and Captain Shotover attest, Shaw believed that no human society can thrive on reason alone, and he warned his modern, urbanized, industrialized, systematized audience of that fact. Other cultures, he insisted, cultures that were not so “successful” as the western world judges success, black cultures, primitive cultures, have knowledge that cannot be evidentially proved or tested but that is seminal to the thriving of any worthwhile society.

Shaw did not find twentieth-century Ireland, struggling with such things as Home Rule and Land Reform, living by its ancient knowledge. But in the phallic omnipresence of the Round Tower he evokes the memory of that ancient Celtic civilization and its lost, tacit, mystical union with its gods and its land; even as he uses the unbounded sea in Heartbreak House to test the electric virility of his ancient mariner, one who has found life in the midst of deadly storms and ice and has returned to find only death in the moribund life of his own society.

**Works Cited**


