



## The Hell in Paradise: Revisiting British Development in George Bernard Shaw's *Widower's Houses*

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### Abstract

Nineteenth-century Britain, also known as the Victorian Britain, was the age of prosperity, advancement, the dominance of the British Empire, liberality, and enhancements in diverse social grounds. Through the light of New Historicist approach, the present study comes to critically question the idealism of the Victorian era and particularly that of the 1880s. Through exploring George Bernard Shaw's *Widower's House* it is intended to provide an illuminating understanding of the different aspects of the Victorian England. Focusing on the works of literature, New Historicist critical standpoint brings about less subjective views towards the past and a clearer view of all incidents. The present study seeks to demonstrate that England, and more specifically London as the centre of the nineteenth-century world, was not the suggested paradise described in newspapers but rather a city in which poverty enslaved people and suffocated them in dreadful houses built around the city without having basic facilities. Sartorius in *Widowers' Houses*, as a brutal slum landlord who keeps his tenants in such a dreadful condition, represents the owners of such indecent houses which have been rented to poor classes of society. This research

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lastly demonstrates the controversy of the state of the city suggested by authorities and the true state suggested by the author.

## Keywords

Power Relations; Discourse; Ideology; Modernity in Britain; *Widower's House*; New Historicism

## 1. Introduction

George Bernard Shaw, one of the most significant playwrights of the nineteenth century, was born in Dublin, continued his way to England and wrote more than sixty plays. He entered other fields far from the realm of drama, among which politics is notable. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature in 1925. His first play to be staged was *Widower's Houses* which revolves around a merciless landlord who ruthlessly treats the poor tenants and has them kept in a dreadful condition. This play will be meticulously scrutinized due to its significance as a major text of the late Victorian era.

As a new approach of analysing works of literature, New Historicism or cultural poetics, has recently come to existence and evolved around the ideas of Stephen Greenblatt whose theory was mainly based on Michel Foucault's philosophy. New Historicist approach includes a large scope of evidence, gathers them like pieces of a puzzle in order to come up with a thorough judgment. Through reading literature, New Historicists attempt to achieve less subjective history and unbiased history. However, according to New Historicism, there is no objective history, but the New Historicist never stops trying to achieve at least partial objective facts concerning history.

The present paper first introduces the review of recent literature conducted on the play. The next section includes the theoretical framework and critical terminology employed throughout the study focusing on New Historicism. Then the reading and discussion of the paper are presented in which the extracts from the play have been investigated in terms of the study's critical terminology. Finally, the concluding section of the paper follows in which the findings and implications are presented.



## 2. Literature Review

This brief literature review attempts to show that despite countless researches conducted on this text but hardly any research has been penned from a New Historicist outlook, which displays the uniqueness of this study. There are indisputably various research works on this well-remembered play, but the researcher has modestly chosen a few of them, which are as follows:

In an article entitled “*Reversing the Conventional Patterns: Shaw’s First Attempt at Repudiation to Social Norms*” (2017), Azeez Jasim Mohammed illustrates that George Bernard Shaw attempts to change the traditional patterns by reversing and rejecting the prevailing conventions of the society. As he points out: “The main focus of this paper is the idea which argues that if conventional patterns mean the irrational and what is out of the realistic thinking, the reversing of such conventional patterns can be accepted rationally” (87). Accordingly, it can be observed that in *Widowers’ Houses*, Shaw seeks social Reformation. For example, by rejecting her marriage, Blanche goes beyond the conventional patterns of a Victorian woman, and by repudiating her womanliness, she seeks liberation and independence.

Tony Jason Stafford in his book, *Shaw’s Settings: Garden and Libraries* (2013), focuses on the significance of garden and library as two notable tools in Shaw’s plays. He points out “*In Widowers’ Houses*, the library is present for the same reason the garden is, as a powerful and subtle revelation of attitudes in British society, attitudes that spawn appearance, pretense, and hypocrisy” (19). The very first words of the play were “the garden”, at the restaurant of a hotel in a fine afternoon in August. The meaning presented through using such a setting is related to the life of upper-class British society, their appearance, the tranquility of their condition and their idyllic life. In Act II also there is a garden which makes an ironic contrast. Sartorius invites Cokane with, “*what do you say to a stroll through the garden Mr. Cokane?*” while Lickcheese describes the slum houses with “houses that you wouldn’t hardly look at without holding your nose”. Here one can simply recognizes a powerful ironic contrast. Shaw also uses a library to support his purpose. Ac II as an instance begins with the scene of an expensive library, beautifully decorated with books, which are symbols of Sartorius’s world of appearances and hypocrisy.



In a new study entitled “Bernard Shaw and Totalitarianism: Longing for Utopia”, Matthew Yde (2013) illustrates “There is a difference between giving the devil his due, and giving the devil all the best tunes; Shaw often does the latter with his tyrant-heroes” (99). He points out that Shaw gives his support to radical evil, to be specific, in *Widowers’ Houses* he gives voice to the cruelty and ruthlessness of the slum landlord, Sartorius, and his daughter, Blanche. What is noteworthy is that in this article, little attention has been paid to these radical evils, and they have not been analysed. They can be discussed from a social, individual, economic, and political prospective.

In “*Widowers’ Houses: A Play for the 1890s and 1990s*” (1994), Frederick P. W. McDowell states that “In this mostly realistic play, there are mythical elements in the characters that take them beyond their realistic appearances and circumstances and make them as interesting to our sensibilities in the 1990s as they had been disturbing to the sensibilities of an 1892 audience” (237). *Widowers’ Houses* explores social issues which have their parallel in our contemporary situation. The need for affordable housing for the poor, the society’s obligation to the oppressed and social Darwinism which is evident in the character of Lickcheese, who gains power through crafty and cunning, struggle against adversaries, and the corruption of the government at all levels are instances one can find in the play. Additionally, the failure of the Commission to revoke the abuse of the slum landlords has its parallel in the United States, in Housing and Urban Development Department in 1989.

James Woodfield in “Shaw’s *Widowers’ Houses: Comedy for Socialism’s Sake*” (1991), argues that

The question of slum landlordism lay at the heart of the problem of property ownership and social evils. The issue, and its topicality, combined with Shaw’s personal experience in politics, literature, and the theatre, provide a content for the transformation of ‘Rheingold’ into *Widowers’ Houses*. (53)

Shaw attempted at presenting a new drama with paying attention to real personal, social, economic and political issues. Therefore, he uses a conventional drama which is familiar for the audience and conveys his message through changing the characters and plot. The name of the characters for instance belongs to the comic tradition; “Trench” is a symbol of rather boyish manners, with a foolish and cowardly personality. “Blanche” illustrates purity, however at the same time she has contrary



implications like her unwomanliness. “Sartorius” portraying a gentleman of the older generation, is not a conventional parent and has not a blocking role for his daughter. “Lickcheese”, reminding us of lickspittle nature, is a wily slave. And “Cokane” represents leisure and luxuriousness. Consequently, through distinct frames, Shaw conveys social, economic and political discourses.

Diderik Roll-Hansen in “Sartorius and the Scribes of the Bible: Satiric Method in *Widowers’ Houses*” (1975), contends that because of his interest in Christianity, George Bernard Shaw has used New Testament and Biblical references. He asserts that Sartorius and the scribes have some common and equivalent attributes however at the same time the play is inspired by a political philosophy which is entirely contrary to Christ’s denunciation of the scribes. In a part of the play we read:

It is not illegal, he argues, to leave a staircase without steps so that the slum-dwellers risk breaking their limbs. To repair the staircase would only mean providing free firewood for the poor, who cannot afford to get it anywhere else, you will find them missing again in less than three days: burnt, sir, every stick of them (41). Therefore, it can be argued that Sartorius acts like the scribes to remain out of the eyes of the law, and attempts to justify his illegal activities through his explanations to Harry Trench. The scribes also had affectations, wearing long robes and making long prayers in order to “get the reputation of being very pious custodians of the law and receive respectful greetings in the market place” (7) the way Sartorius was concerned about his reputation.

*Widowers’ Houses* has been studied and analysed from socio-political, feminist, and Marxist approaches by almost a large number of researchers. The present paper is an attempt to examine the history and hidden realities existed in the Victorian era, in order to illustrate that it was a time of regress for the poor, despite the superficial progress it was making. From a New Historicist outlook, the living conditions of these people, inadequacy of the ruling system, the corruption of the economy and the abuse of the upper classes of society are all portrayed well.

### 3. Critical Concepts and Terminology

New Historicism, that covers a broad scope from historical documents to records of all offices of the era, is one of the latest approaches to literature, and it came to existence as a reaction to New Criticism that is text-centered. However, this approach



uses the literary works belonging to the same era to discover discourses, ideologies, and power relations of the period. The major argument of New Historicism is to be able to find the missing parts of the history or clear it up when it is mutilated, to go through discourses of minorities and illustrates how they are subverted. The term came into existence by Stephen Greenblatt when he “collected a bunch of essays and then, out of a kind of desperation to get the introduction done, he wrote that the essays represented something called a “New Historicism” (*Learning to Curse* 97). It has been highly influential since the 1980s.

A significant aspect of New Historicism which separates it from Old Historicism is the controversial view towards the concept of history. To a New Historicist, history is always subjective. However, to an Old Historicist, history is objective. This dispute over history brings about new discourses which shapes a different view towards what actually happened. To an old historicist, history is a means to understand a literary work. Conversely, to a New Historicist, history and literature have interactive relations and are more likely to complete one another.

Another aspect of New Historicism which comes to the reader’s interest, is the fact that even the New Historicist of contemporary era is still affected by ideologies and his/her conclusions are shaped consequently. As Hamilton states in *Historicism* (2003):

Greenblatt does not fully explain his disquiet here. Many of his critics have taken him to be expressing pessimism concerning both our ability to be historical and to escape from ideology. We are, they object, unreasonably confined to writing an unchallenged history of the present, incapable of seeing round our ideological blinkers. (137)

Our way of thinking is thus indebted to the “*invisible bullets*” around us which lead us to a false understanding of our present time. This consequently suggests that what we come to understand from history of the past is still not fully objective. However, it is the result of our own era, the discourses, the ideologies and the subversions, that meticulously and covertly shape our way of thinking.

### 3.1. Power Relations

The most significant characteristic of power in a New Historicist view is the assumption that it does not belong to one person or a group of people. On the contrary, it circulates among different layers of society. Where ever power is to be



found, there is always Subversion which leads to a systematic hegemonic power which is some form of discourse that justifies power in favor of the ruling class. It does so through legitimizing norms and ideas and bringing about the superiority of power in every layer of society.

The actual way through which power circulates is the social and cultural context that involve all the individuals. Moreover, every part of the society makes an effort to maintain this power through different discourses.”[A] way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action” (220). In this sense power is not only physical force; it is something beyond that which shapes a set of behaviors. Consequently, it is fair to say that power in such sense is not always destructive and bad; it can be productive as well.

As Stephen Greenblatt asserts, “the production of subversion is the very state of power.” (*Renaissance Self-fashioning* 19). Accordingly, subversion is an inseparable characteristic of power. It is through subversion that power justifies its own existence. “[F]or New Historicists the nature of power may remain the same but the form that it takes may not. They however, try to identify what forms power takes as it changes from one period to another” (Sadjadi 54). It is important to understand that one of the ways which power changes its form is through diverse discourses and that these discourses are means for power to survive.

### 3.2. Discourse

Through analyzing different discourses, the researcher comes to a better understanding concerning power relations. It is through various discourses that power comes to define itself. It was observed that power is not essentially destructive. On the contrary, it can be quite productive for it creates different discourses via language. These discourses consequently are ways through which a society is being shaped. The important point to notice is that our sense of reality is merely shaped by language and this fact represents the significance of discourse.

Another central point which is of high significance is that “discourses function in alliance with or in opposition to each other. A good example to demonstrate this phenomenon is the nineteenth- century conflicts between the discourses of religion and science.” (Sadjadi 49). Accordingly, these discourses have some sort of



resistance on their other sides. They resist to each other to maintain their power hence the dominant discourse is undoubtedly in accordance with the dominant power.

Discourses are both influencing and being influenced in relation of power. “Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the ‘nature’ of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern” (Weedon 108). In this view, discourses not only create sets of behaviors however, they constitute the way subjects get to feel and think which the deepest parts of every individual’s identity are. It affects both consciousness and unconsciousness of an individual. We are redefined in such discourses hence our individuality is infected by such discourses.

#### 4. *Widower’s Houses*: A New Historicism Reading

This section goes through a meticulous analysis of the text by discussing the concepts of power relations, discourses, and ideologies to shed light on the hidden and forgotten consequences that the lower class had to bear, to illuminate more objectively how the glory of the Victorian era brought more misery upon the lower class. The New Historicist approach indicates that literature is capable of revealing the mysteries and vagueness of history and illustrating the unspoken realities of poverty and misery that during the Victorian era, the lower classes of society suffered from.

The era in which *Widower’s Houses* has been both composed and set is considered to be the Victorian era. The period longs from the day queen Victoria came into power from 1837 until her death in 1901. Growth of the population is of major significance in this era; “the population of England and Wales almost doubled from 16.8 million in 1851 to 30.5 million in 1901” (UK government web archive). In relation to foreign affairs Britain cannot simply be consider as some islands anymore; however, it is “the empire on which the sun never sets” (Wilson, 1829). It is vast with many colonies in every part of the planet that enriches the empire on a daily basis through the large amount of wealth it produces.

The significance of the Victorian era mostly goes back to the advancement in industries, education, freedom of speech, and public health. However, this era did not witness only positive aspects and achievements. With the rapid growth of London, housing began to be considered as a serious problem. Industries shaped a new class





in England namely as the middle class. As these middle class were populating the city the problem of housing became of major importance: "Private renting from housing landlords was the dominant tenure." (Kemp 186). This issue caused several problems during the era. "Hideous slums, some of them acres wide, some no more than crannies of obscure misery, make up a substantial part of the metropolis... In big, once handsome houses, thirty or more people of all ages may inhabit a single room" (Chesney 231). It was considered that such private ownership with no surveillance from the authorities allowed the landlords to do as they wished concerning the poor tenants therefore, they were usually kept brutally in disgraceful conditions.

In some other examples of the text, the power relations in some instances inside the text are manifestly disclosed:

Cokane: By the way, Harry, I have often meant to ask you: is Lady Roxdale your mother's sister or your father's?

*[This shot tells immediately. The gentleman is perceptibly interested]. (6)*

This is in the very beginning of the first act where Dr. Trench and Cokane are at the restaurant and they eventually get to meet with Sartorius and her daughter Blanche. Through a misunderstanding caused by the waiter of the restaurant we had previously realized that Sartorius makes very little effort in making any acquaintance of any sort until he hears the name of someone he knows.

Sartorius is a clever person who is considered to be aware of power relations. In this part he accidentally hears the name of Lady Roxdale who is Trench's aunt. Lady Roxdale is in possession of a good fortune and power; hence Sartorius finds this opportunity to make an acquaintance with Cokane and Dr. Trench. As the acquaintance continues Dr. Trench falls in love with Sartorius's daughter and asks to marry her. Sartorius who is well-aware of the relations of Trench with his aunt asks something from him:

Sartorius: Yes, a Reasonable guarantee. I shall expect you to write to your relatives explaining your intentions and adding what you think proper as to my daughter's fitness for the best society. When you can shew me a few letters from the principal members of your family, congratulating you in a fairly cordial way, I shall be satisfied.

(17)



This is another instance when Sartorius is positing himself in relation of power and by using the power cycle and connecting to it, he seeks to construct a stable situation for his family. Subjects and individuals define themselves all in relation of power. In the very beginning of the play, we realize how ignorant Sartorius is towards Trench and Cokane, but the moment he realizes, Dr. Trench's acquaintance with lady Roxdale, his behavior changes and he becomes interested to meet with them. Therefore, one can argue that Sartorius wants to link himself and his daughter to this circle of power through Trench's aunt. This is why he asks for the literal consent of Dr. Trench's family.

Lickcheese: The Sanitary Inspector has been complaining again about NO 13 Robbin's Row. He says he will bring it before the vestry.

Sartorius: Did you tell him that I am on the vestry?

Lickcheese: Yes, sir

Sartorius: What did he say to that?

Lickcheese: Said he supposed so, or you wouldn't dare to break the law so scandalous. I only tell you what he said.

Sartorius: Hm! Do you know his name!

Lickcheese: Yes, sir. Speakman (28)

Sartorius: Write it down in the diary for the day of the next meeting of the health committee. I will teach Mr. speakman his duty to members of vestry.

This is in the beginning of the second act of the play where, Dr. Trench and Mr. Cokane want to meet with Sartorius and deliver the good news concerning Trench's family's consent towards the marriage. Before that Sartorius's money collector joins him to deliver some news about the affairs. The condition of Sartorius's houses is fundamentally catastrophic. There is a spokesman who is determined to stand against such condition.

In this part of the story we confront power and resistance of the same sort of power. What comes to our interest is the fact that it is in the same root of discourse that power is circulating. On the one hand Mr. Speakman who is the representative of law and order and on the other hand, Sartorius who is a member of vestry. This opposition leads to an argument which obliged Sartorius to resist the opposite power, he is determined to use power and oppress the opposite power.

According Merriam Webster Dictionary, oppression is "unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power" in order to contain power. This is being done by Sartorius when



he wants to “teach the Speaksman his duty” (28). Oppression is no longer a peaceful and manipulative way of using power. It is however cruel and harsh once it is practiced.

Sartorius: £ 1:4s for repairs to No 13. What does this mean?

Lickcheese: Well, sir, it was the staircase on the third floor. It was downright dangerous: there weren't but three whole steps in it, and no handrail. I thought it best to have a few boards put in.

Sartorius: Boards! Firewood sir, firewood! They will burn every stick of it. You have spent twenty- four shillings of my money on firewood for them.

Lickcheese: they ought to be stone stairs, sir: it would be a saving in the long run. The clergyman says-

Sartorius: what! Who says?

Lickcheese: The clergyman sir, only the clergyman. Not that I make much account of him; but if you knew how he has worried me over that staircase

Sartorius: I am an Englishman; and I will suffer no priest to interfere in my business. (28-29)

In the second act of the play, Lickcheese, the money collector, insists on the horrific condition of the houses, and faces rejection once again. Sartorius says they would burn the wood fire hence they do not need it. He is ignorant and wholly against of the idea of repairing the houses. These stairs are merely an instance of how Victorian slums were like.

The power relations are of great significance in this part of the play. When Sartorius understands that the clergyman objects to the condition, he uses the discourse of Englishness. The root of such a resistance is to be found in renaissance at the time when Queen Elizabeth was in power. In the turbulent years of her rein, an issue was a big concern to her. In those years the opposition of two great powers led to bloodshed. On the one hand England faced Catholicism, on the other, Protestantism. Elizabeth astutely used the discourse of Englishness to subvert the other two opposing powers. After renaissance the English church lost most of its power and the discourse of Englishness became the dominant discourse and consequently, the dominant power.

With modernising the country through industrialisation, a new class emerged in the society named the middle class. By the emergence of this middle class, the power of the church became even less than before. This shift of power illustrates a



circulation in the course of centuries and at last English church fully loses its power. Sartorius uses the same discourse as Queen Elizabeth to maintain its power. How discourses are creating and recreating new powers is of central significance to the present study. For example, we read in the play:

Cokane [baulking himself in the act of sitting down] pah! The seat is all dusty. These foreigners are deplorably unclean in their habits.  
Trench [buoyantly] never mind: it don't matter, old chappie. Buck up, Billy, buck up. Enjoy yourself [...]  
Cokane [scandalized] In the name of common decency Harry, will you remember that you are a gentleman and not a coster on Hampstead Heath on Bank Holiday?  
(4)

This is the very beginning of the play when Cokane and Dr. Trench are travelling and have not met with Sartorius and his daughter yet. They are in a different country and considering the manners, Dr. Trench as an ignorant person whose only thought is to enjoy himself. Meanwhile Cokane is very conservative in the way he behaves. With a reproachful tone, Cokane is irritated with the unclean condition of the seats and tries to oblige Dr. Trench to act in a proper way. Two discourses are merged here. One is the obligation for the pride of Englishness he imposes on Dr. Trench and the other is the discourse of otherness. Through labelling foreigners as unclean and emphasizing English pride, he shapes a discourse in which he evokes a sense of superiority concerning the others, and by others he means the non- English people.

Shaw employs this sarcastically. According to our sources of knowledge, not only is England of the Victorian era not clean, but it is also dirty and disgusting, and is filled with slums, especially around the city of London. Cokane as the representative of the ruling class is describing England and whatever related to Englishness as perfect, something which authorities of the same era did. The industrialization with its great wealth that produced for Britain on a daily basis had blinded the mere facts concerning the consequences of industrialization:

Lickcheese: Mark my words, gentlemen: he'll find what a man he's lost the very first week's rents the new man'll bring him. You'll find the difference yourself r. Trench, if you or your children come into the property. I took money there when no other collector alive would have wrung it out. And this is the thanks I get for it! Why, see here, gentlemen! Look at the bag of money on the table. Hardly a penny of that but there was a hungry child crying for the bread it would have bought. But I got it for him\_ screwed and worried and bullied it out of them... do you suppose he sacked



me because I was too hard? Not a bit on it: it was because I wasn't hard enough. (32-33)

This is when Sartorius fires his money collector, goes to his daughter's room to give her the news concerning the marriage. The money collector is hapless and asks Dr. Trench and Cokane to talk to Sartorius in order to change his mind, but when he sees that these two men consider Sartorius to be a generous person, he gets angry and communicates his thoughts and ideas.

Lickcheese claims to be forced to collect money and when he sees that he does not have any chance concerning getting his job back, he creates a discourse to redeem himself from a brutal person named Sartorius. He knows he is no longer attached to the power hence the discourse which justified power for him becomes meaningless. He proposes a discourse which morally concerns Dr. Trench. He emotionally engages the audience to create a mode of resistance against the power he once served.

This is once more another instance which shows the brutality of the slumlords, and the poverty which bent people's knees during the Victorian era. The paradise which the authorities and the factory owners could see was merely a complete hell located in London. The state of the city was horrible. Law could no longer prevent such brutalities since it was at the service of the brutal.

Sartorius: I am glad to find that so far we are in perfect sympathy. I am, of course, a conservative; not a narrow or prejudiced one, I hope, nor at all opposed to true progress, but still a sound conservative. As to Lickcheese, I need say no more about him than that I have dismissed him from my service this morning for a breach of trust; and you will hardly accept his testimony as friendly or disinterested [...]

Trench: yes: that's all very fine; but the point is, what sort of home do you give them for their money? People must live somewhere, or else go to jail. Advantage is taken of that to make them pay for houses that are not fit for dogs [...]

Sartorius [pitying his innocence] my young friend: these poor people do not know how to live in proper dwellings: they would wreck them in a week. (44-45)

This is in the second act of the play where Dr. Trench announces that he will not take his father in law's money under no circumstance and Blanche says that he will not marry him. Sartorius wants to know the reason and finally after some hesitations, Trench expresses himself, saying what does is morally wrong and not accepted.



Sartorius asks him to sit down so that he can logically express himself. He does so in few paragraphs.

The way which Sartorius comes to express himself is through hegemonic discourse. Through such a discourse he justifies his profit by saying that what he does and how he does it is in favor of those poor tenants. He says that because they are unable to spend a considerable amount of money for proper housing, he is providing for them shelter with much less amount of money. Hegemonic discourse comes to him as productive and proficient. According to him, he is only providing shelter for the poor people and without his aid poor people would be without shelter.

The essence of horrible condition of housing in Victorian era is as tangible as possible while Dr. Trench says that the state of the houses is even unfit for dogs. This horrible condition is not frequently addressed to as it should have been. It seems like such horrific conditions are to be ignored as long as wealth brings victory and glory to the Victorian era. Although the Victorian era is a brilliant period in British history, at the bottom of this period there are significant signs of poverty and the backwardness of the poor and marginalized. It is as if this advancement was not universal and only facilitated life for the affluent and higher classes of society.

## 5. Conclusion

The present article sought to address the real social conditions of England in general and the housing system of late Victorian England in particular by referring to Bernard Shaw's *Widower's House*. It is an effort to portray a better sketch of London, and also to argue that the glorious paradise which is usually sketched, is merely a miserable hell for the poor middle class of the era. The other notion that the researchers would propose is the circulation of power, and how power is affecting characters' behaviors and the way power is being formed and affected by the subjects inside the play. The paper demonstrates that power is permanently circulating in different layers of a society from the very poor class to the higher class creating the modes of behavior. The last point at which the article arrives is how different discourses come to assist and shape power in different forms. It is through these social and economic discourses that power circulates. These opposing discourses have led to the catastrophic social and economic conditions of the London suburbs during the late Victorian era represented in Shaw's play.



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