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Representing marriage, patriarchy, and class in Harley Granville Barker's *The Marrying of Ann Leete*

Representasi pernikahan, patriarki, dan kelas dalam The Marrying of Ann Leete karya Harley Granville Barker

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Abstract

Marriage was very important in Victorian society because it was tied to how men and women were expected to act, the power of families, and the different levels of society. Many past studies have looked at marriage as a topic in Victorian literature, but not much focus has been on how marriage works as a way of talking about culture that creates and supports power relationships. This study looks at how marriage is shown in Harley Granville Barker's play *The Marrying of Ann Leete* by using Stuart Hall's ideas about representation and Michel Foucault's concept of discourse. The study looks at conversations, how characters act with each other, and the big disagreements about marriage in the play, using a detailed description approach and by looking at the text closely. The results show that marriage is shown in four connected ways. Marriage is seen as a social responsibility, especially for women, and serves as a way to control how women are seen and act. Second, marriage gives power to fathers and men, allowing them to decide who women can marry. Third, marriage helps keep the class system in place by limiting relationships based on social standing and family background. In the end, the play shows how Ann Leete deals with negotiation and resistance by questioning common ideas about gender, power, and social class. The study finds that marriage in this drama works as a way of talking about culture that both supports and challenges the existing power structures. By using both Hall's and Foucault's ideas, the study shows how literature helps shape, settle, and deal with social power.

Keywords: class, cultural discourse, marriage, patriarchy, representation.

Abstrak

Pernikahan menempati posisi penting dalam masyarakat Victoria sebagai institusi yang berkaitan erat dengan peran gender, otoritas keluarga, dan kelas sosial. Meskipun penelitian sebelumnya telah mengkaji pernikahan sebagai tema dalam sastra Victoria, perhatian terhadap fungsinya sebagai wacana budaya yang menghasilkan dan melegitimasi relasi kuasa masih terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis representasi pernikahan dalam drama The Marrying of Ann Leete karya Harley Granville Barker dengan menggunakan teori representasi Stuart Hall dan konsep wacana Michel Foucault. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan teknik analisis tekstual terhadap dialog, interaksi antartokoh, dan konflik dramatik yang berkaitan dengan pernikahan. Hasil penelitian

menunjukkan bahwa pernikahan direpresentasikan dalam empat bentuk yang saling berkaitan. Pertama, pernikahan dikonstruksi sebagai kewajiban sosial, terutama bagi perempuan, sehingga berfungsi mengatur identitas dan perilaku perempuan. Kedua, pernikahan melegitimasi otoritas patriarkal dengan memberikan kekuasaan kepada ayah dan figur laki-laki dalam menentukan pilihan perkawinan perempuan. Ketiga, pernikahan berfungsi sebagai sarana reproduksi hierarki kelas melalui pembatasan hubungan berdasarkan status sosial dan latar belakang keluarga. Keempat, drama ini menampilkan negosiasi dan resistensi terhadap wacana dominan melalui tokoh Ann Leete yang menentang gender, otoritas, dan kelas sosial. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa pernikahan dalam The Marrying of Ann Leete berfungsi sebagai wacana budaya yang sekaligus mempertahankan dan menantang struktur kuasa yang ada. Melalui penggabungan perspektif Hall dan Foucault, penelitian ini menunjukkan bagaimana representasi sastra berperan dalam membentuk, menormalisasi, dan menegosiasikan relasi kuasa sosial.

Kata kunci: kelas, patriarki, pernikahan, representasi, wacana budaya.

INTRODUCTION

In the past, marriage has played a big role in how people connect with each other, how families are organized, and how social rankings are set (Asfaw & Alene, 2023; Jain, 2019). Marriage, besides being a personal relationship between two people, also shows a different cultural system that societies build and keep values about gender, authority, class, and morality (Khatun et al., 2022). During the Victorian time in England, marriage was very important for keeping family traditions alive, maintaining social status, and managing how women were expected to act inside the home (Isakovna & Dildora, 2025). Consequently, marriage exceeds personal matters, operating as a cultural institution associated with broader systems of authority and social control. Victorian era literature frequently reflects the significance of marriage in 19th century culture (Salman & Abdul-khadim, 2024). In many books, marriage is used as a way to show the struggle between what people really want and what society expects (Mare et al., 2025). Even though marriage is often shown as a romantic relationship in literature, there's more to it than just love. They often show how personal decisions are influenced by cultural rules and social structures (Carrion-rivera, 2024; Chabika et al., 2024). Because of this, marriage can be seen not just as something that happens in society, but also as a conversation between cultures that shapes how people understand roles for men and women, who holds power in the family, and the levels of importance different groups have in society (Asim et al., 2024).

Harley Granville Barker's *The Marrying of Ann Leete* (1899) is a literary work relating to these issues. The play, set in an aristocratic family, depicts marriage as a way for personal ambitions, family expectations, political interests, and class concerns. The conflict concerning Ann Leete's marriage reveals conflicts of duty, obedience, social status, and individual rights. The play portrays marriage not just as a romantic institution, but as a cultural mechanism that

strengthens patriarchal authority and class privilege.

Themes including gender inequality, household ideology, women's agency, and social class have all been studied in earlier Victorian theater study (Yudith et al., 2024). According to Firdausiyah and Rahayu (2025) and Midhin and Obeid (2023), studies of Barker's plays have primarily focused on political liberalism, theatrical modernity, and how women are portrayed in patriarchal societies. Although these studies provide valuable insights into the social dimensions of Victorian drama, they typically approach marriage as a narrative outcome. The institutional role of marriage in creating and legitimizing particular types of social knowledge and power has not received much attention.

This study examines marriage as a cultural discourse in *The Marrying of Ann Leete*. The study examines the construction of meanings related to marriage within the play through language, social practices, and power relations, drawing on Stuart Hall's representation theory and Michel Foucault's discursive approach. Hall's (1996) stresses that meanings are created through representational systems rather than given, whereas Foucault's notion of discourse explains how social institutions produce regimes of truth that normalize particular forms of authority and hierarchy (Hall, 1996). By integrating these viewpoints, marriage can be examined not only as a social institution depicted in the text but also as a discursive formation that influences and legitimizes patriarchal authority and class hierarchy.

According to Hall (1997), meaning is not only found in objects, events, or social institution, rather, it is generated by representational systems functioning within particular cultural contexts. Representation operates as a process for constructing and conveying concepts, ideas, and social values through language, images, and symbolic practices (Hall, 1997). Hall places that representation is not just a mirror of reality. It plays crucial role in generating meanings that influence how people comprehend the social world. Representational practices contribute to the normalization and acceptance of specific ideas and values as common sense within a culture (Murdianto & Kirom, 2025). As a result, literary texts can be seen as venues for the construction, contestation, and negotiation of cultural meanings. *The Marrying of Ann Leete* explores marriage not just as a narrative event but also as an object of representation. This research examines the portrayal of marriage through characters, dialogue, and dramatic conflict, and how these portrayals shape meanings associated with gender roles, familial authority, social obligation, and class distinctions.

The reader can create a framework for comprehending marriage as a representational and

discursive phenomena by combining the writings of Hall and Foucault. While Foucault's method makes it clear how these portrayals function within broader power structures and societal control mechanisms, Hall's theory permits an investigation of how marriage is portrayed in the play. According to this study, marriage is a cultural discourse that operates through representation. Marriage's importance is thought to be shaped by cultural and discursive practices that impact social interactions rather than being constant or universally applicable. Using this approach, the study investigates how marriage creates chances for negotiation and resistance while legitimizing patriarchal authority and maintaining class hierarchy.

Thus, the objective of this research is to investigate the portrayal of marriage as a cultural discourse that justifies patriarchal authority and class hierarchy. This study contributes to discussions of cultural representation, discourse, and power in Victorian drama by positioning marriage as the primary object of representation in gender conflict, rather than as a background element, and offering a new perspective on Barker's relatively rarely discussed play.

Scholars have focused on the institution of marriage in their studies of Victorian literature and culture. The study "Wedlock as Deadlock and Beyond: Closure and the Victorian Marriage Ideal" by Joseph Allen Boone (1984) argues that marriage was a fundamental cultural ideal in Victorian culture and served as a narrative mechanism that maintained societal order and domestic security. Boone demonstrates how Victorian literature frequently portrayed marriage as the peak of personal and societal development, supporting dominant cultural norms on gender, family, and morality (BOONE, 1984). Although Boone offers valuable insights into the ideological importance of marriage in Victorian culture, his analysis centers on the general Victorian marriage ideal instead of examining the particular ways in which marriage functions as a discourse of power in Barker's drama.

The rise of the New Woman and how gender roles changed in late Victorian drama and literature is another key area to study (Qureishi, 2024). Research in this field shows that female characters are causing more challenges to old ideas about marriage, home life, and following rules (Chin, 2023). Discussions about women's independence, education, and involvement in public life are part of the New Woman idea (Jannah, 2024; Sanchez, 2025). In this framework, marriage is often viewed as a place where people resist and work out differences related to gender. Instead of looking at marriage as a way of supporting certain power relationships, these studies mainly look at how women take action and bring about changes in society.

Studies on marriage have also looked at issues of consent and patriarchal domination

(Kyei et al., 2024). Nelson (2015) examines how nineteenth-century literary works reveal the limitations on women's consent as imposed by the legal and social frameworks surrounding marriage in "The Law and the Lady: Consent and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century British Literature". According to her findings, patriarchal power structures that restricted women's freedom of choice were closely associated with marriage. Nelson's work stresses the legal and social circumstances of permission rather than the representational and discursive creation of marriage in dramatic text, albeit offering insightful information about the marriage-gendered power dynamic.

In more detail, research on Harley Granville Barker is still fairly limited. Wixson (2009) examines gender, race, and inwardness in Barker's *The Marrying of Ann Leete* and *The Secret Life.* He shows that Barker's female characters struggle with the challenge of self-hood and fulfillment in the face of societal pressures that oppress women. In addition, Wixson examines how female subjectivity relates to larger political issues, such as race and colonial ideology. This study offers considerable insights into identity formation and gender politics, but it does not focus on marriage as a cultural discourse that creates and legitimizes patriarchal and class-based power relations.

A significant research gap is revealed by reviewing previous studies. There has been little attention paid to how marriage functions as a cultural discourse that creates, normalizes, and legitimizes patriarchal power and class hierarchy, despite the fact that previous research has examined Victorian notions of marriage, female agency, consent, gender, and subjectivity. Additionally, no study has combined Foucault's discursive method with Stuart Hall's representation theory to analyze marriage in *The Marrying of Ann Leete*. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the representation of marriage as a cultural discourse that produces and sustains power relations in Barker's play.

METODE

The study looks at how marriage is understood in the play by looking at the words used, the ways people act in society, and how power is used, using ideas from Stuart Hall's work on representation and Michel Foucault's approach to how language shapes ideas. Hall's constructionist view says that meanings are made through the use of symbols and signs, not that they are already there by nature. Meanwhile, Foucault's idea about discourse shows how social institutions create systems of truth that make certain kinds of authority and hierarchy seem

normal. By including these points, marriage can be looked at not just as a social institution mentioned in the text, but also as a way of talking that helps support and make acceptable patriarchal power and class differences.

Therefore, the goal of this research is to look into how marriage is presented as a cultural idea that supports male power and social class. This study adds to conversations about how culture is shown, how people talk, and who has power in plays from the Victorian era. It focuses on marriage as the main topic that shows gender conflicts instead of just being a side part of the story.

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method, as described by Rohmah and Latifah in 2022, to explore how marriage is portrayed in Barker's play The Marrying of Ann Leete. The main information includes conversations, how characters relate to each other, and story scenes that talk about marriage, how men and women deal with each other, who is in charge in families, and the different levels of wealth and status in the play. Secondary data comes from books, journal articles, and academic papers that discuss topics like Victorian marriage, patriarchy, class structure, Stuart Hall's ideas about representation, and Michel Foucault's thoughts on discourse.

Dialogues, statements, and scenes related to marriage, authority, social duty, and differences in class were found, selected, and grouped into categories according to common themes. The data that was collected was looked at in different steps. At first, the way marriages were shown was based on Hall's representation theory. The next step was looking into the different meanings people have about marriage to understand how these ideas influence the social expectations around gender and class. Third, Foucault's idea about discourse was used to look at how these representations act as tools of power that support patriarchal authority and show the class hierarchy. The findings are grouped into four main areas: marriage as a social duty, marriage showing patriarchal power, marriage as a way to keep social classes, and the discussion against marriage ideas.

HASIL DAN PEMBAHASAN

Social Background

Victorian Society and Marriage

In Victorian society, marriage played a key role in social life and was seen as one of the most important social institutions (Sariwulandari, 2022). Marriage helped keep society organized, provide financial security, and continue family lines, along with offering emotional and personal

benefits (Amirah et al., 2025). In Victorian times, marriage was usually seen as the best and most normal ending to adult life, especially for women (Isakovn). Boone (1984) argues that the Victorian idea of marriage helped create a peaceful home life and a stable society by showing that marriage was the proper foundation for family and moral behavior (Boone & Vickers, 2011; Boucher, 2015; Isakovna & Dildora, 2025). Women usually saw marriage as something they had to do because of society, not because they wanted to personally (Puspitaningrum & Philia, 2022; Ye et al., 2024). Motherhood, taking care of the home, and being devoted to the family were all seen as important parts of what it means to be a woman (Delgado-herrera & Aceves-go, 2024). Because marriage was seen as the main way to become respected and recognized in society, women who didn't choose to marry often ended up in a risky and unstable social position.

Family Authority and Patriarchy

During the Victorian era, society was strongly influenced by traditional male-centered beliefs.Men were seen as the main leaders in their families and also held important positions in society as a whole (Gupta et al., 2023; Suleimenova, 2022). According to Zheng et al.(2026), it was commonly thought that fathers had a big role in making decisions about their children's education, friendships, and marriage. In this situation, patriarchal authority was often made stronger and given to the next generation through marriage. In this context, marriage was often used to strengthen and continue patriarchal power from one generation to the next. The idea that men and women should have separate roles helped make gender inequality worse. Men were usually involved in public affairs, politics, and business, while women were expected to stay within the home and take care of family matters. As a result, the traits of obedience, modesty, and dependence were connected to the idea of what was considered ideal for women in Victorian times (Tu, 2023). These societal rules often limited women's freedom when it came to making personal decisions and getting married (Toirova et al., 2026).

Social Mobility and Class Hierarchy

Social status greatly influenced personal connections, including marriage, as noted in Karney's 2021 study. Marriages usually helped people feel emotionally satisfied, but they also played important social and economic roles, like protecting money, keeping family honor, and strengthening connections between strong families (Roman et al., 2025). Because of these reasons, relationships between people from different social classes were often met with suspicion

(Bao et al., 2024). Choosing a spouse was closely connected to matters of status, respect, and social acceptance (Sennott et al., 2022; Toirova et al., 2026). So, marriage became an important way to keep class differences alive and support the current social order.

The Coming of the New Woman

As the nineteenth century came to an end, traditional ideas about marriage and the roles of men and women began to face more challenges and questions (Stone & Alderwick, 2021). The rise of the New Woman showed how views on women's education, jobs, independence, and participation in public life were changing (Kaymaz et al., 2026). The idea of the New Woman questioned the belief that a woman's main aim in life should be to get married and instead encouraged women to have more freedom in deciding their own futures (Jannah, 2024; Jiang, 2026). In the late Victorian period, literary and dramatic works began to include female characters who questioned traditional ideas about marriage, home life, and obedience (Sharma, 2025; Vierra, 2023). Disagreements between old beliefs and new ideas about women being independent came from these cultural discussions. Harley Granville Barker wrote *The Marrying of Ann Leete* during a time when society was dealing with issues like marriage, power, gender roles, and class. The play shows how marriage, as a cultural tradition in late Victorian times, is full of conflict by focusing on Ann Leete's struggle against what her family and society expect of her.

Analysis

Marriage as Social Duty

This first section demonstrates that in the world of drama, marriage is understood as a social obligation.

GEORGE: I won't argue about it.

ANN: I suppose that a woman's profession is marriage.

GEORGE: My lord has departed.

ANN: There'll be others to come. I'm not afraid of being married.

SARAH: What did Papa want Mrs. Opie for?

ANN: There'll be a great many things I shall want to know about men now.

GEORGE: Wisdom cometh with sorrow . . . oh, my sister.

SARAH: I believe you two are both about as selfish as you can be.

GEORGE: I am an egotist . . . with attachments.

ANN: Make use of me.

GEORGE: Ann, you marry--when you marry--to please yourself.

ANN: There's much in life that I don't like, Sally.

SARAH: There's much more that you will.

((Barker, 1916), Act II p. 25)

Hall believes that these statements show that marriage is depicted as an intrinsic aspect of a woman's identity. Marriage is framed not as a personal choice but as a social function linked to women by culture. The first quote's use of the term "profession" is significant in that it likens marriage to a role that must be fulfilled. In the second quote, the modal verb "must" is used, which excludes any option other than marriage. Such portrayals position women as individuals whose existence is validated by marriage. In this drama, marriage serves not only as a romantic aspiration but also as a social mechanism that regulates women's lives.

Marriage as Patriarchal Authority

Once marriage was recognized as a social obligation, the drama unveiled who had the authority to decide how it was executed.

ANN. [To her affianced.] Good-bye now.

LORD JOHN. When do I see you?

ANN. Papa says soon.

LORD JOHN. Very soon, please. Tatton, my friend, Brighton's no nearer.

ANN. If I can think better of all this, I shall. Good-bye.

((Barker, 1916), Act 2 p. 37)

She turns away from him. He stands for a moment considering her, but follows TATTON away through the orchard. GEORGE andSARAH are watching their sister, who then comments on her little affair with life.

ANN. I'm growing up. [Then with a sudden tremor.] Sally, don't let me be forced to marry.

GEORGE. Force of circumstances, my dear Ann.

((Barker, 1916), Act II p. 37)

ANN. I mean to disobey you . . to stay here . . never to be unhappy.

CARNABY. So pleased!

ANN. I want to be an ordinary woman . . not clever . . not fortunate.

CARNABY. I can't hear.

ANN. Not clever. I don't believe in you, Papa.

CARNABY. I exist . . I'm very sorry.

ANN. I won't be married to any man. I refuse to be tempted . . I won't see him again.

((Barker, 1916), Act III p. 55)

Hall views these dialogues as indicative of the power dynamics between father and daughter. When Ann responds to inquiries about her future by relying on her father's decisions, it portrays paternal authority as the main source of legitimacy. It seems that Ann's status as a young woman depends on the choices made by the male head of the household.

With the statement "Sally, don't let me be forced to marry," Ann demonstrates that she is aware of the societal pressures that limit her freedom. It is noteworthy that this threat does not take the form of physical violence; instead, it appears as a duty that her social surroundings consider normal. From a Foucault's perspective, this shows that the functioning of patriarchal power is achieved through normalization. The father does not have to use direct coercion, since the existing value system already gives him the legitimacy to decide his daughter's future. Marriage acts as a primary means by which this power is exercised.

When Ann states, "I don't believe in you, Papa," she is rejecting not only her father as a person but also the legitimacy of the patriarchal discourse that has been widely accepted.

Marriage as Class Reproduction

In addition to regulating gender relations, marriage also serves to maintain social class structures.

GEORGE. Did Mrs. Leete quarrel with you?

ABUD. No, sir.

GEORGE. Pray tell me more.

ABUD. I was beneath her.

GEORGE. But you're a fine-looking fellow.

ABUD. Farmer Crowe wouldn't risk his daughter being unhappy.

((Barker, 1916), Act II p. 40)

Hall views these excerpts as depicting social class as the main criterion for assessing whether someone is fit to be a partner. Rather than by personal traits or character, individual identity is determined by the social position one holds. The phrase "I was beneath her" makes it clear that romantic relationships are perceived through the lens of hierarchy, the term "beneath" emphasizes a vertical structure that distinguishes individuals according to their social status. Marriage serves as a means of class reproduction, maintaining the aristocratic social order. Marriage serves not only to bring two people together, but also to sustain the current societal power dynamics.

Negotiating and Resisting Marriage Discourse

The final section demonstrates that the discourse on marriage is not simply accepted by all the characters.

ANN. I won't be married to any man. I refuse to be tempted . . I won't see him again.
CARNABY. Yes. It's raining.
SARAH. Raining!
CARNABY. Don't you stop it raining. ((Barker, 1916), Act III p. 55)

ANN. John Abud . . you mean to marry. When you marry . . will you marry me?
A blank silence, into which breaks CARNABY'S sick voice.
CARNABY. Take me indoors. I heard you ask the gardener to marry you.
ANN. I asked him.
((Barker, 1916), Act III p. 56)

Hall sees Ann as changing from a represented object into a subject who actively creates meaning. She rejects the definitions of marriage imposed by family and society and starts to build her own understanding of relationships and life choices. The assertion "I won't be married to any man" represents a denial of the belief that women must marry to meet social obligations. At the same time, Ann undermines traditional gender norms that usually cast men as the ones who initiate by proposing to John Abud.

From a Foucault's perspective, this act can be seen as a way of resisting the dominant discourse. Resistance does not exist independently of power, it arises specifically due to the

existence of power. Ann's behavior shows that the marriage discourse is not absolute, but rather open to negotiation and contestation. Barker uses the character of Ann to demonstrate the potential for alternative interpretations of marriage to arise interpretations that are not solely dictated by patriarchy or class hierarchy. In *The Marrying of Ann Leete*, marriage is depicted not as a romantic institution but as a cultural discourse that shapes social duty, legitimizes patriarchal authority, reproduces class hierarchy, and generates resistance.

CONCLUSION

Using Stuart Hall's theory of representation and Michel Foucault's discursive approach, this study explored how marriage is represented as a cultural discourse in Harley Granville Barker's *The Marrying of Ann Leete*. The results show that in the play, marriage is depicted not just as a romantic or personal institution, but as a cultural mechanism that constructs and upholds social meanings and power dynamics. The analysis shows that marriage is initially depicted as a social obligation, especially for women, mirroring the common Victorian beliefs about gender roles and family responsibilities. Such representations portray marriage as a normative institution that describes acceptable forms of female identity and behavior. Moreover, the play depicts marriage as a way to validate patriarchal authority. Paternal authority is legitimized by marriage discourse, placing women in frameworks of subservience and reliance. It was also found in the study that marriage plays a role in the reproduction of class hierarchy. Marital expectations and the legitimacy of relationships are greatly shaped by social status, family background, and class distinctions. In this respect, marriage functions as a means of maintaining current social structures and strengthening aristocratic privilege. Collectively, these results imply that in *The Marrying of Ann Leete*, marriage serves as a cultural discourse that both generates and governs power relations within society. Marriage is depicted as a venue for the normalization of patriarchal authority and class hierarchy, but it also offers chances for resistance and redefinition. Finally, this research marks the benefit of integrating Hall's representation theory with Foucault's discourse concept when analyzing literary works. Future studies could investigate how marriage functions as a discourse of power in other Victorian dramas or contrast Barker's depiction of marriage with those in the works of Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw, and other playwrights of the time.

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