

**THE LOWER CLASS IN THOMAS GRAY'S "ELEGY WRITTEN IN
A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD"**

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ABSTRACT "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard", by Thomas Gray is the main source data of this study. It is a poem of reflections – reflections of death, nature, the lots of marginal people, the poor, or the lower class which becomes the subject matter of the study. The objectives are to find out the concept of lower class in social discrimination. It is qualitative research. The research result show that the examples of discrimination found in Stanza 4,8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17 and 18. In this elegy, the social stratification formed by itself and the system is the closed system. The poor belongs to the lower class and always becomes a focus of attention owing to their being wretched, powerless and illiterate. They are actually great in their low quality. All of these traits are beautifully exposed in the poem.

Keywords: lower class, social stratification, elegy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" is one of the distinctive examples of graveyard poetry. Writers often set in graveyards, exploring the theme of human mortality and bereavement. It may also be the most artificial one. It is written with a beautiful and sentimental language. Thus, it takes a long time for Gray to write and finish the elegy. He spends nine years to finish the poem. Nevertheless, it is the poetic diction that makes it difficult for the reader at times to understand or to get the messages of the poem. It presents the simple thoughts and feelings which can be understood widely.

People at the present time, as well as those of Gray's time, are of the same type with the same features. Loss of self-identity with self-interestedness as a hidden shield still marks the attitude of the present people especially the town dwellers. Argumentative talks and manners protecting the self-interestedness prevail in nearly every corner of life. Vanity preserved to bury all types of weakness is, in general a significant feature of people of all ages, but made flourish by the people living in town.

*Far from the madding crowd's ignoble
strife,*

Their sober wishes never learned to stray;

A long the cool, sequestered vale of life

They kept their noiseless tenor of their way

(Line: 73 – 76)

The society, especially the town dwellers, is already in chaotic condition. Man, though surrounded by various things always feels isolated and one has to survive hard in life; consequently, all ways are to be legalized to achieve a goal. The soul of man no longer rest upon secure foundations. Everything around him is unsteady and contradictory. This soul has become more complicated, his spirit more bitter and his outlook more bewildered. However, the villagers plod on faithfully, never straying from their lot in life.

From one extent, Gray exposes a pessimistic way of life through his elegy especially that of the poor. The poor not only oppressed by new doubts but are inspired by new horizons, new perspectives and a trust for new relations with fellow men. The poor wish to be in equality with his fellow men without any form of discrimination. On the other hand, in equality always exists in the world. The question now is why inequality or discrimination always exists in the social community. The answer to this question is because there are layers or division of people in any society. There are social stratifications in social life.

Gray makes a specified focus on the marginal people who are always beyond the reach of the hands of luck. Even luck known for her gentle smiling

and loving may wear a formed mask when dwelling with the poor. Gray then makes a deep pondering of the poor existence, the reasons why they are rejected. This social phenomenon can still be found in the society today. This question causes the writer to observe the phenomenon through the elegy of Gray.

In this research, class system or social class is the form of stratification dimension which analyzed in gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*. Social class stratifies people of the society according to the amount and source of income, which usually derives from the occupational activities, the ownership of property, or both. Marx then divides society into three groups of people, *the aristocracy, bourgeoisie, and proletarian masses* which are also called *the upper class, middle class and lower class or working class*. These classes are found in Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*.

II. RESEARCH PROCEDURES

Gray makes a specified focus on the marginal people who are always beyond the reach of the hands of luck. Even luck known for her gentle smiling and loving may wear a formed mask when dwelling with the poor. Gray then makes a deep pondering of the poor existence, the reasons why they are rejected. This social phenomenon can still be found in the society today. This question causes the writer to observe the phenomenon through the elegy of Gray.

To answer research questions, qualitative research method is to be applied in this study. which is the research design, data collection procedure and analysis use qualitative study. groups ascribe to a social or human problem. [6] The content analysis is applied as it is concerned with the classification, evaluation, and comparison of the content of communication or document. The primary data obtained from Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* and the secondary data got from journals, articles, written text books, encyclopedia, dictionaries, websites, and so on. Meanwhile, the theory adopted in this subject matter is based on Marxist theory. This approach is relevant to find out what laid down inside the poetry and its

relationship to the society.

III. FINDING AND INTERPRETATION

Discrimination against the Lower Class

In this poem, the example of discrimination can be found in stanza 4, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, and 18.

Stanza 4:

*Beneath those rugged elms, that
yew-tree's shade,*

*Where heaves the turf in many a
mould'ring heap,*

Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,

*The rude forefathers of the hamlet
sleep.*

This stanza portrays the cemetery of the poor, "each in his narrow cell for ever laid," in which the poor are buried under a big shady tree without gravestone only a simple sculpture or a wood having no epitaph decked on it as a sigh to let people know that it is a grave. It looks like a heap of garbage covered with decaying leaves. Commonly, the tombs of the poor are placed outside the church courtyard. In contrast to the rich, they are engraved in the churchyard with beautiful gravestone and some words, and epitaph, sculptured on it as memory of their lifetime.

The other instance of

discrimination against the poor can be seen in stanza 8. In this stanza, Gray reminds the wealthy and the powerful not to belittle the poor owing to their simple accomplishment. From the surface/end, it is seen that the lots of the poor are obscure and this is always regarded as fixed data to judge their future is without any prospects. Yet, few realize that people how great the standing is cannot be judge. The wheel of life is turning up and down. A fool of yesterday may be a wise man today.

The lower class are also treated badly even up to the final stage of their life, the funeral. This can be seen in stanza 10. Here Gray illustrate the when the rich die, there will be a memory. There are also "*the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault,*" referring to the interior of a church housing the tombs of important people and with carved or ornamented arched roof. Companion will be in lines escorting the dead to the grave. The preparation made for the funeral of the rich is completely luxurious.

Meanwhile, in stanza 12, Gray illustrates that the lower class die and they are forgotten. In contrast, the rich are always noticed, honoured and treated well regardless their qualities. Their wealth or power makes them better or more valuable

than the unlettered rustic.
*Perhaps in this neglected spot is
laid
 Some heart once pregnant with celestial
 fire;
 Hands, that the road of empire might have
 sway'd
 Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre.*

Stanza: 12)

Continuing the ideas of stanza 12, the next stanza also shows discrimination between the poor and the rich in getting knowledge. In Gray's age, there is no free public education, no free public libraries, and very limited opportunities given to a child of a shepherd or cottage farmer to learn reading. People let alone to have access to the range of books and other opportunities that would enable one to develop their natural and talents. The word "ample page" here explicitly shows that knowledge is vast and unlimited to everyone.

Then, in the next stanza, Gray compares the humble village, the lower class people to "*many a gem of purest ray serene,*" this means that the poor and uneducated cannot develop themselves though they have talent; they have no chance to have a better life; they are relatively unnoticed, unseen. In sarcastic manner, the lower class people are born to die. They spend their life in nothingness. Every minute of their life is wasted. Nothing is gained and nothing will also be gained. This metaphorically shows that for the lower class people, the present and

the future are floating. In the next three stanza 16, 17, 18, Gray still touches the conditions of the low class people, their lots and their abandoned existence.

People are divided into Classes

In this “elegy”, the social stratification is formed by itself and the system is the closed system. It means the system does not allow a member of a layer into another layer. In gray’s time, people in rural areas are much more isolated than they are today. Moreover, they do not have access to a good education, even if they have made their way to a university, the strict English class system would exclude them from enrolling.

The poverty down their enthusiasm and freezes the flow of idea and restrict them even to dream to be a better person. They also have no chance of attaining power and wealth. The freezing of their brilliant ideas or talents are well exposed in the following:

*Chill Penury repress ‘d their noble rage,
And froze the genial current of the soul*
(Line: 51-52)

To sum up, in this scene, the narrator shows some allegorical figure who represent general traits of the eighteenth-century humanity: *Ambition* (29) . It is the personification referring to the desire to succeed. *Grandeur* (31) refers to people with wealth, social standing, and power. *Memory* (38) refers to memorials, commemorations, headstones, and epitaph used to preserve the memory of important people. *Honour* (43), *Flattery*

and *death* (44), *Knowledge* (49), *Penury* (51), *Luxury* and *Pride* (71), *Forgetfulness* (85), and *Nature* (91), in shifting from individuals to universal types characterize the people who live in the large world. The, because of these qualities, people are divided into classes. In Gray’s “elegy”, the people are stratified into the poor and the rich. It is divided according to the wealth they have. In other words, the people in Gray’s “elegy” are stratified from the economic point of view. The poor refer to the people with no money or less money living in poverty, different from the rich living in luxury, with so much money and the poverty. The lower class is usually attributed to the manual workers and in this poem, the farmers (ploughmen)

Yet apart from all the discriminations faced by the lower class people, they could still survive as they have some merits though always unnoticed.

The Distinctive Merits of the Poor

The poor or the lowly are always looked down and ignored by the rich. they are restricted to develop their abilities, owing to the lack of education. instead of all the devoid of the lowly, they still have some good qualities which become the pillars and make them survive.

*Th’ applause of list’ning senates to command
The threats of pain and ruin to despise,
To scatter plenty o’er a smiling land,
And read their hist’ry in a nation eyes,*
(Stanza:16)

The stanza shows that the villagers

are prohibited or prevented from receiving applause for no grounds as always received by the politician in the senate house who at time seem to do lots to the nation yet in practice, though not at all, they are not doing anything for the welfare of the people, but the politicians ultimately get good names at least as the heroes of the nation. Such way of life are seldom adopted by the lowly. They are still pure in the course of life. Although their lives are restricted by their position in society, they are not tempted to do any crime, such as wading through slaughter to a throne and shutting the gates of mercy. This means that they try their best despite all the weaknesses, to be away from doing evils. Yet unluckily, their lots do not allow them to do virtues either. This is again seen in stanza 7.

*Their lot forbade: nor circumscrib'd alone
 Their growing virtues but their crimes confin'd;
 Forbade to wade through slaughter to a throne,
 And shut the gates of mercy of mankind,*

Continuing to the next stanza, their lot prevents them from hiding truth and shame, from bragging and using pretty or flattery words to gain luxury to feed their pride.

*Their struggling pangs of conscious truth to hide,
 To quench the blushes of ingenious shame,
 Or heap the shrive of Luxury and Pride
 With incense kindled at the Muse's flame.*

Beside that of their lot, the villagers, the poor, plod on faithfully, never straying from their lot in life as common people. This description is found in the following stanza:

*Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
 Their sober wishes never learn'd to stray;
 Along the cool sequentered vale of life
 they kept the noiseless tenor of their way.*
 (Stanza: 19)

Despite living their life far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife, even the poor have memorials, and though they may be decked with uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculptures, as it is mentioned in the next stanza, they still demand people's respect.

From the findings, it can be seen that this poem might leave an impression that the author intends to present members of the lower class as being more worthy of praise than their upper class counterparts. This will be a reasonable assumption, since so much of the poem devoted to praise the simple virtues of the poor. In the larger scope, though the position that Gray takes is that all people, poor or rich, are equal. The rich should not look down on the poor because class discrimination will not be found in the afterlife. Thus, it is not necessary for society to stratify people into various different groups because at the end, it will bring to discrimination, the inequality among people in the society which leads to disharmonious and will cause problems for themselves.

Discrimination will not happen if people are not stratified into graded classes.

IV. CONCLUSION

The framework in the *Pepaccur* consists of opening, content and closing verse. From the results of the analysis, all of the *Pepaccur* frameworks are contained in it. On the contents verse, almost all *Pepaccur* contains advice. However, the research findings obtained in one of the *Pepaccur*, the contents verse contains a description of the story to tie Lampung women by giving precious metals (gold). Referring to the subject of this research which concerned with the analysis of the lower class portrayed in Thomas Gray's poem "Elegy Written in a country Churchyard" some conclusion can be drawn as follows:

1. discrimination is inequality or differentiation in treating people unfairly in society which may usually victimizes the lower class.
2. Social stratification is generally formed by itself as a result of the interactions among people of different economic level, life standard, welfare, backgrounds and characteristics in the society.
3. In Gray's poem, the social class

is divided into the rich and the poor in which the latter is known as the lower class

4. Generally, people tend to respect or glorify the rich, while the poor remain unnoticed.
5. Basically and ultimately, people are equal.

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