

Portrait of British 20th Century Reflected in D. H. Lawrence's *The Virgin and The Gipsy*

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Abstract

*The purpose of this study is to see the condition of British society in the early 20th Century reflected in D.H. Lawrence's *The Virgin and the Gypsy*. The social condition here is related to the reflection of different class-level social life. There are two aims of this study, the first aim is to identify the social condition of England in the early twentieth century depicted in the novel, and the second is to find the social criticism implied through some characterization of the characters in the novel. This research uses a sociological approach with mixed-method analysis. The method used is library research since the thesis deals with a novel. The main data was collected from *The Virgin and The Gipsy* novel; while the supporting data were collected from internet pages; and other books related to the subject matter. The research finding is that the England social condition was marked by four characteristics, namely: the existence of class distinction, the rise of the middle class, the loss of the nobility's power, and the influence of position on social status. In addition, through the representation of the characters in the novel, the author tries to criticize the way the different classes of people in building a relationship with each other and to criticize the social treatment and judgment toward the lower-class people. During the early twentieth century, the gap between the rich and the poor was obvious and it influences the way people built a relationship in society.*

Keyword: *Social Condition, Social Class, British society*

Introduction

Talking about society and its condition in a certain country is always interesting, moreover, the country is England. A society is a kind of collective entity, as is a nation, a state, an organization, and a family (Copp, 1992). Discussing the social condition of society requires someone's wide range of understanding because it covers many aspects of living to talk about as Dean (Dean, 2010) said, a society is thus a 'problematic unity', at once an ideal of an interdependent and harmonious whole and yet porous, fragile, exposed, conflict- and friction-ridden from inside and out, and subject to fragmentation and dissolution. Therefore, to find out the social conditions of a country can be seen from various aspects, such as the

condition of social class, economy, culture, education, marriage life, and others. Thus, culture is important in discussing a society. Culture is a set of beliefs, traditions, and values which link people together. It helps society develop and exist. It is a culture that makes the identification in any given society, without its society is incomplete. (Mammeri et al., 2018).

For an author, the social conditions of a country can be an inspiration for him to express his views on world problems because literature is a bridge to social understanding more aesthetically. But it is not only about aestheticism, it is the reflection of humankind's life and how their society works (Widiyanti, 2021). A literary work exists because of society. In other words, the existence of literary work is influenced by the condition and phenomenon in society either in politics, society, religion, economy, and culture (Susanti, 2017). What is displayed in a literary work is often a real-life picture of society. Therefore, it is not strange for an author to describe the condition of society in his work.

One of the authors who describes the condition of society a lot in his work is D.H. Lawrence (Lawrence, 1997). He is one of the most well-known authors in British history. Through his novels, he explores human relationships like friendship, marriage, and others that may influence social conditions. Lawrence's stories are close to his personal life and the society in which he lived. Using his novels, D. H. Lawrence wants to respond to his experiences and share his ideas and understanding of life. The theme may be simple but there is one element that is considered the strength of Lawrence's stories, and that is the characters. In his novels, the experiences of the characters are familiar to the readers since all of them may experience the same problems.

However, some of D.H. Lawrence's works are considered controversial because their themes are taboo, or considered offensive to certain classes. D.H. Lawrence has for decades been excoriated at worst, and dismissed at best, by many literary critics and the general public alike-branded with the term colonist, misogynist, and racist (not to mention pornographer). (Ruderman, 2014). In his

work entitled *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Lawrence talked about a scandal between a wife of a nobleman, and one of the husbands of her servants, meanwhile, his novel, *The Virgin and the Gipsy* featured almost the same issue as *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, which was about a scandal perpetrated by a rector's wife with a penniless man (a gypsy). Although both of the stories' main theme was about personal life, from the problems faced by the characters in the novel, the readers can capture the social condition of the country mentioned in the novel.

Among Lawrence's literary works, the researcher is interested in analyzing *The Virgin and the Gipsy* because the novel features complex issues about the social life of British society. Through the representation of the characters, the picture of British society in the era of the early 20th century is visible, especially about how the emergence of the middle class was able to change the social class order in England at that time. The second reason is the novel discusses how social classes affect people of each level to build a relationship. Some people still behave and treat other people based on their heritage and their position in society. Through this study, the researcher also hopes that the readers especially the ones who study literature, will understand how to apply sociological theory in a literary work, how to reveal the author's worldview implied in literary work, or how to analyze the intrinsic and extrinsic elements of a literary works.

Concerning *The Virgin and the Gypsy* novel, some studies have been conducted by some researchers. Cyrin Kortas (Mina & Kortas, 2022) explores the depiction of female characters as New Women in a comparative analysis of two selected short stories by two seemingly anti-feminist authors; D. H. Lawrence in England and Hanna Mina in Syria. According to Cyrin, *The Virgin and the Gypsy* by D. H. Lawrence and *"The Tragedy of Demetrio"* by Hanna Mina, sets forth an unexpected area of comparison between English and Arabic literature with a specific interest in the construction of New Woman identity at the turn of the century, namely the fragmented and complex presentations of the heroines' inner struggle between the traditional female roles and their aspirations for a freer,

more fluid identity. So, Cyrin explores *The Virgin and the Gypsy* to see the feminist ideas on women's roles.

Another research was conducted by Fitria Aningsih (Aningsih, 2015). She explores the characters in the novel to find out about Victorian morality and post-Victorian morality. Through the exploration of two female characters, Aningsih reveal that Victorian morality can impede one's creativity and it can be classified as a form of unfair policy. In addition, post-Victorian morality stands as the opposite of Victorian morality, however, post-Victorian morality conveys liberalism values.

Oscar Ibanez Munoz (Munoz, 2000), in his research, saw *The Virgin and the Gipsy* as a work that holds a strong link with the themes and structures of some classic fairy tales but which deviates from the socializing functions imposed on the folk tale from the 17th century onwards. It tried to demonstrate that the tale aimed to achieve a re-establishment of the neat, original relationship between man and nature in what is an apology of ritual and myth.

However, this study is different from those earlier studies. The difference between this study with those studies is, this study tries to figure out the potential of the intrinsic elements of the novel such as character and characterization, setting, and plot, to see the social condition of England. In addition, the researcher uses extrinsic elements to strengthen the analysis. After reading *The Virgin and the Gipsy*, the researcher would like to limit this study to two subject matters. The first focus is to reveal the social condition of England during the twentieth century depicted in the novel. The second focus is to reveal the social criticism implied in the novel. Through the characters, the researcher tries to figure out the significance of each character in revealing the author's ideas on British society in the early twentieth century.

Literary Review

In analyzing the novel, the researcher applied a sociological approach. The sociological approach emerges as the answer to the scientific question in literary

study related to the idea that literature is a reflection of society, therefore, to be able to understand, reveal, and prove that statement, a researcher or reader needs a certain tool to understand literature better. Ringle in Larasati (Larasati & Irmawati, 2022) stated that sociology can be defined as the study of social life, social change, and the social cause and effect of human behavior. In another hand, sociology means a study dealing with the interpretation and explanation of social action and activities including orientation to the actions of one or more other actors. Since the sociological approach is important in understanding some messages in literary works, some experts specifically develop the theory of the sociology of literature.

Mursalim (Mursalim, 2019) said that the sociology of literature talks about how humans adapt to their environment, literary works are related to people's lives, even people are often able to determine the value of society through literary work. The sociology of literature means a specialized area of study that focuses its attention on the relationship between a literary work and the social structure in which it is created. Therefore, sociology and literature share identical issues. A literary work such as a novel can be regarded as an effort to recreate the social world; relations between human beings and their family, environment, politics, state, and others. The difference between sociology and literature is, sociology creates an objective society analysis, while literature goes through the surface of social structure and expresses human beings' ways of comprehending their society with their feeling. Since sociology pays attention to our behavior as social beings, its field of study ranges from the analysis of short-term contact between strangers on the street to the study of global social trends. (Ahmadi, 2021).

Research Methodology

The research aimed to explore the British social condition and the criticism implied in *The Virgin and the Gypsy novel*. It applied a qualitative method.

Qualitative research is an approach to exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. Those who engage in this form of inquiry support a way of looking at research that honors an inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research is especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors, and social contexts of particular populations (Mack et al., 2005). The main data was collected from Lawrence's novel *The Virgin and the Gypsy*, while the supporting data was collected from other resources such as the history of England during the twentieth century. Reading the novel several times was the first step taken in the process of analyzing the novel. After reading and comprehending the story, underlining some phrases and dialogues was done. The researcher then tried to analyze the intrinsic elements of the novel such as the characters and characterization, setting, and plot that potentially reflected the England social condition and some critics implied in the novel. The last step was displaying the analysis.

Discussion and Findings

The Social Condition of England in the Early Twenty Century is Depicted in the Novel

D.H Lawrence was well-known for his eccentric view, no wonder that most of his works reaped some critics. *The Virgin and the Gypsy*, one of Lawrence's novels also 'different'. This novella's theme was common, but, it was rich in the message which implied critics toward the condition of British society. This novel talked about a story of a young girl, Yvette, who tried to break free from her family and her environment. She searched for her fulfillment through love. She found her love after meeting a gypsy man on her outing day. The story began with the introduction of the main character and a description of the main character's condition and problem, how her family and her environment treated her after her

mother's scandal. The treatment made Yvette bored because she was no longer free to do what she wanted to do and chose what she preferred to have. She had a problem communicating with her grandmother, her aunt, and her father. All the things she did was considered wrong and always connected with her mother's scandal. Yvette had to face the family verdict.

From the intrinsic elements of the novel such as the characters and characterization, the setting, and the plot, the readers will be able to see the portrayal of British society based on Lawrence's critical thinking. There are some points about British society during the twentieth century that the readers can see from the novel, namely:

The Existence of Class Distinction

The social class in *The Virgin and the Gipsy* novel can be seen from the representation of the characters in the novel. The class distinction represented in the novel is the upper class, the middle class, and the working class. The different living conditions, the style of life, and the position in the society presented by the characters are shreds of evidence of the existence of classes in England. The description of class different conditions presented in the novel is as follows:

a) The Upper Class

Upper-class people are considered high-class people who have a good style in life. They are noble people and they are respected by the middle-class and the working-class people since they come from the king's family and relatives, or have a class related to the king. They are very rich and they have the best things that people need in life, such as houses, food, education, and entertainment. Before the middle-class people take over control of society in England, the noble people have absolute power over everything in the society. In the novel, there is a character that represents the upper class. The character is Louth, King Charles' Head of the family.

If you are motoring to Bonsall Head tomorrow, Lucille, I wish you would take a message from me to Lady Louth”.

‘Oh!’ said Lucille, giving a queen look across the table at the sightless old woman. Lady Louth was King Charles’ Head of the family, invariably produced by Granny for the benefit of visitors. ‘Very well (p. 18)

From the quotation above, the reader can see that Mater adores Lady Louth who belongs to the noble people. As an old woman who lives in the Victorian age when the King's family and relatives took control of the society, the Mater keeps considering the noble people as the most important people in the society.

b) The Middle-class or the bourgeoisie

In the novel, almost all of the characters represent middle-class people, except Lady Louth and the gypsy family. The vicar rector and her family, the little Jewes and Mr. Eastwood, the friends of Yvette and Lucille, all are middle-class people. Those characters can be included in the middle class because they are not members of the King's family but politically, they hold an important position in society and economically, they are considered rich people. They can have good food, clothes, houses, education, and entertainment. The middle people are well-educated. They can educate themselves. In the novel, the rector was known as a bookish man and his children can have a good education at a good school.

Lucille was now nearly twenty-one, and Yvette nineteen. They had been to a good girl’s school, and had a finishing year in Lausanne, and.... (p. 10)

Another characteristic of the middle-class people that are described in the novel is how the characters in the novel spent their time to get amusement. They went to parties and dances in good places or make a trip in their cars.

She was always out to parties and dances, friends came for her in their motor cars, and off she went to the city, to the afternoon dance in the chief hotel, or in the gorgeous new Palais de Dance, called the pally (p. 12)

In the previous discussion, it is stated that middle-class people in Britain are mostly Christian people. Sunday becomes a special day for them to express their belief. In the novel, it is also clearly described people usually join the activities at church on Sunday.

Choir on Sundays, and I hate mixed choirs...And Sunday school and Girls' friendly, and socials, all the dear old souls that inquire after Granny (p 10).

c) The lower class

The working class or lower-class people are economically poor. They are disabled to give themselves good food and clothes. They also do not have a house to stay. In the novel, the urban people or the gypsy and his family represent the working-class people, As the working-class people, the gypsy is considered poor. As a poor man, he cannot educate his children, he cannot buy himself a car or a house to stay in, and he cannot choose what kind of entertainment he likes to have. He has to live from one place to another in his cart and caravan because he does not have a house to stay. With very limited facilities, the gypsy family has to stay alive. The cart and caravan are the most appropriate thing for living from one place to the other they can afford.

Ahead was a light cart, driven by a man, and trudging along at the side was a woman, sturdy and elderly, with a pack on her back (p.22)"

"The girls saw for the first time a deep recess in the side of the road, and two caravans smoking. Yvette got quickly down. They had suddenly come upon a disused quarry, cut into the slope of the roadside, and in this sudden lair, almost like a cave, were their

caravans, dismantled for the winter. There was also deep at the back, a shelter built of boughs, The lower-class people are economically weak. as a stable for the horse (p. 12)

They are not educated, people. They have to work physically as servants or laborers. In the novel, the gypsy has to work all day to make money for his family to fulfill their daily needs. He makes things with his hand and sells them to people at every place he arrives. That is why a caravan becomes the most suitable house and transportation for the gypsy.

Have you made anything new and nice?’ she asks innocently, looking at his chopper things. ‘I don’t think,’ he said, glancing back at her (p. 76)

1. The Rise of the Bourgeoisie

The story of *The Virgin and the Gipsy* is a story that describes the life of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie is the middle-class people. Most of the characters show the characteristic and the lifestyle of middle-class people. Though middle-class people are considered rich people, not all the bourgeoisie are rich. People do not have to be rich to be the bourgeoisie. They can be the bourgeoisie because of their position in society. The main character in the novel, Yvette, was a young girl who comes from a middle-class family and environment. She was a daughter of a vicar or a rector.

The vicar, now the rector, fetched up his old mother and his sister, and a brother from the city (p. 5)

A vicar or a rector was a person who worked as an administrative officer in the church. This kind of job was considered a respectable job or at least a person who handles this position was considered a good person since most people in the society are Christians.

The society in the novel is the society of middle-class people. At the beginning of the novel, Lawrence describes the society of middle-class

people. The vicar's family is middle-class people. The scandal of the vicar's wife arouses the attention of the neighbors.

Only the pious said she was a bad woman. While some of the good women kept silent. They knew...the vicar, who was somewhat distinguished as an essayist and a controversialist, and whose case had aroused sympathy among the bookish men. Received the living of Papplewick (p.5)

People around the vicar's family who give sympathy to the vicar are people who belong to the same level, the middle-class people. It shows that close relationships only happen among people from some classes. The rumor spreads out and gets the attention of the people who know and have a relationship with the vicar's family. Yvette, the main character, and her sister could have good education since they were in a good school. Only the children of rich people can have a good quality of their education. As a member of middle-class people, the vicar family sends their children to a good school. It is one of the characteristics of middle-class people.

Lucille was now nearly twenty-one, and Yvette nineteen. They had been to a good girls' school, and had a finishing year in Lausanne, and were quite the usual thing, tall young creatures with fresh, sensitive faces and bobbed hair and young-manly, deuce-take-it manners (p. 10).

Another characteristic of middle-class people is shown by the activities of the daughters of the vicar family. Yvette and Lucille, like the other boys and girls, usually spent their time outside the school by following the Sunday school, church choir, girls' friendship, and social meetings.

It was as the girls had known: they went back into the choir; they helped in the parish. But Yvette struck absolutely against Sunday School, the Band of Hope, the Girls' Friendlies... (p.12).

The friend of Yvette and Lucille are also middle-class young fellows. Usually, they come from rich people as farmers or businessmen. They are

joining together in their activities like parties and dances. The activities only belong to the people who have money.

So, as the months went by Gerry Somercotes was still an adorer. There were others, too, sons of farmers or mills-owners. Yvette really ought to have a good time. She was always out to parties and dances, friends came for her in their motor cars, and off she went to the city, to the afternoon dance in the chief hotel, or in the gorgeous Palais de Danse, called the Pally. (p. 6)

The motor cars, dancing halls, and hotels belong to the rich community, the middle class, and the upper class. They show the style of life of an exclusive community that understands modernity and technology. They also tell that middle-class people are capable to have the same standard of life which belongs to the nobility or the upper class. Seeing that Lawrence uses middle-class people for most of the characters in the novel, we can understand that he wants to show how middle-class people are dominant in society.

2. The Loss of the Nobility's Power

The rise of the bourgeoisie brings an impact on the existence of the noble people or the king's family. The middle-class people take over control of society. They are economically strong and they can have things that in the past only belong to noble people.

If you are motoring to Bonsall Head tomorrow, Lucille, I wish you would take a message from me to Lady Louth."

"Oh!" said Lucille, giving a queer look across the table at the sightless old woman. Lady Louth was King Charles' Head of family, invariably produced by Granny for the benefit of visitors.

"Very well!"

'She was so very kind last week. She sent her chauffeur over with a Cross-word Puzzle book for me.'

But you thanked her then, 'cried, Yvette.

'I should like to send her a note.'

'We can post it, 'cried Lucille.'

'Oh no! I should like you to take it. When Lady Louth called last time....'
The young ones sat like a shoal of young fishes dumbly mouthing at the surface of the water, while Granny went on about Lady Louth (p. 17-18)

The argument between Granny and Yvette-Lucille describes how people in the society have two different views about the nobility. Granny like the old generation considers Lady Louth as a person who should be respected because she was a noblewoman who comes from the king's family. Granny saw that it was an honor to be a friend of a woman who came from the king's family and a special person who had a bigger power than Granny herself. Posting a note was not enough to show her respect to Lady Louth so Granny insisted Lucille take the note. On the other hand, Yvette and Lucille as the young generation did not see Lady Louth as a special person. They understand who Lady Louth is exactly. She was truly a noblewoman but she did not affect the relationship with people who were directly involved in their daily life, no matter who they were. Lucille's refusal and the rector's reaction to refusal show how nobility loses its position in society.

So, the young people set off on their jaunt, trying to be very full of beans. They could do as they like. And so, of course, there was nothing to do but sit in the car and talk a lot of criticism of other people, and silly flirty gallantry that was rather a bore. If there had only been a few 'strict orders' to be disobeyed! But nothing: beyond the refusal to carry the message to Lady Louth, of which the rector would approve because he didn't encourage King Charles's Head either (p. 19).

3. The Influence of Position on Social Status

A specific position, which a person holds in social structure, might contribute to receiving the social status in society. A person might be evaluated with respect in the way he carries out the duties of his position, that is performs his role. A person might become a respectable man not

only by his economic power or hereditary but also by his esteems and reputes in holding his position in society. Because of his position in society, he may include in a certain social class. In the novel, the rector was not so rich. He was able to give his children good education but his family did not have an exclusive style of life that rich people have such as cars, nice houses, or spending money on expensive trips.

The rectory was a rather ugly stone house down by the river Papple before you come into village.... (p. 5)

I wish Daddy would get a car. I suppose we shall have to drag out the old bikes out. Wouldn't you like to get up to Tansy Moor (p. 11)?

From the quotation above, we can see that the rector's family is not so rich but they can still build a relationship with rich people in society because they have respect from society. The importance of the rector is that the character shows how a certain position that is held by a person can affect people in seeing his existence. The society, Christian society, respects the rector because he is an administrative officer of a church.

D.H Lawrence, through *The Virgin and the Gypsy*, criticizes the society in Britain in the early twentieth century. Using the characters in his novel he shows that industrialization causes a gap between rich and poor people. It causes a problem, especially in people's relationships. Lawrence also criticizes the rich people or the middle-class people by exposing the bad things done by the upper-class people, such as scandals, family divorce, bad appreciation of the existence of the poor people, and pressure done by the authorities. Lawrence also shows that there is a change in how people see their existence in society. Women begin to stand up for their happiness. To raise the poor, Lawrence uses the main character, Yvette, to show that money is not everything in a person's life. Poor Gipsy can give her happiness. Because he can share what he has in a better way in life.

Conclusion

There are four characteristics of the social condition of British society in the early twentieth century that is seen in the novel. They are the existence of class distinction, the rise of the bourgeoisie, the loss of the nobility's power, and the influence of position on social status. The existence of class distinction brings a big gap between the rich and the poor. People are grouped into classes based on economic power, position in society, and hereditary. The classes are the upper class, the middle class, and the lower class.

The second condition is the rise of the bourgeoisie or the middle class. The bourgeoisie exists as the industry grows. Economically, they control every important position in the government and the business affair. They become the most powerful group in society. They replace the position of the noble people or the King's family. They can have a good education, food, and entertainment. They can make a big party in a luxurious hall and they can buy expensive clothes and they also can make a vacation by traveling everywhere they want. In the novel, it is seen how middle-class people become the main focus. Most of the characters come from middle-class people.

The third condition is the loss of nobility's power in society. As the most powerful group in the past, the noble people are still respected by society. They can get the best thing they want but they are no longer in control. In the novel, Lady Louth is the representation of the noble person. The Mater who is a middle-class woman respects her. It shows that the nobility still exists.

The last condition is how a certain position influences people's social status. Educated people are considered the middle class though they are not very rich. A certain position that is held by a person, especially in the military, education, or religion can rise his status. Those conditions play a great influence on people's life. Each class has its own rules and way of life. Each class has its pride so the members of a group usually only socialize with the other people who are in the same class. Rich people cannot associate with poor people because it is considered

a humiliation to their class. They see themselves as special and respectable people. Money is very important for those people but they are easy to waste it. Meanwhile, poor people have to work all day to survive.

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