

INTRODUCTION

Man is a thought-adventurer.

Man is a great venture in consciousness.

(“Books”. Phoenix, 731).

The prevalent view of D. H. Lawrence as a critic of culture needs to be reviewed and reassessed in the context of currently competing critical modes of our times. A glance at the history of Lawrence criticism shows the chequered appreciation Lawrence has received as a critic of culture over the decades since F. R. Leavis’ seminal defence of Lawrence’s stance. In Thought, Words and Creativity, Leavis says that the aim of Lawrence in his Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious is “to enforce his criticism of our civilization and culture by showing what the human individual in his wholeness, his living integrity as the actual presence of life, must be realized to be” (21). Leavis’ partial and strategic reading of Lawrence has centrally seen Lawrence as the arch-proponent of ‘Life’ against the mechanization and dehumanization set off by Christian- democratic culture. Leavis’ ‘moral formalism’¹ has paved the way for other such ideological interpretations. In her “Introduction” to D. H. Lawrence: A Collection of Critical Essays, Mark Spilka’s observation about Lawrence’s “fierce engagement with wasteland culture, his urgent sense of the modern death-drift and his creative attempts to transcend it” (12) corroborates Leavis’s view. This “ideological chimera”, as Peter Widdowson (2) terms it, has kept the Lawrence critics bewitched in the sixties for its rejection of collective political thought and action. But ironically this “ideological chimera” that challenges all cultural hegemonies, is looked upon by Marxists and early second-wave feminists as the “ideological veil of patriarchy and bourgeois cultural hegemony” (Widdowson: 6). After 1968, Lawrence the representative icon of humanist individualism has been transformed into “pro-fascist mythologiser of cultural politics” (Widdowson: 10). Mariana Trogovnik has rightly said that “Lawrence pushes his critics into starkly polarized positions: they either ritualistically rehearse his views or they reject him out of hand” (Fernihough: 1). The reification of Lawrence the critic of culture is closely followed by the demolition of the idol of the prophet of life as the focus

changes even within the broad area of ideology. Critics of Lawrence read him partially, selectively and eclectically to suit the need of the dominant critical mode of their own times. Our study of Lawrence the critic of culture in the context of the critical mode of our times draws its strength and inspiration from such diametrically opposite views about Lawrence's stance as a critic of culture.

Our study focuses specifically on the non-fictional writings of Lawrence in the belief that the dominant ideas of Lawrence the critic of culture are available more directly in his non-fiction than in his fictions. The entire area of Lawrence's non-fiction forms a huge bulk of his writings. Lawrence's Phoenix, Phoenix II, Fantasia of the Unconscious and Psychoanalysis of the Unconscious, Apocalypse, The Symbolic Meaning, Studies in Classic American Literature are the major works among them. In these volumes of non-fictional writings, Lawrence the critic of culture indulges in thought adventure. We have taken the idea of "thought adventure" from Lawrence's own writing. In his short essay titled "Books", collected in Phoenix, Lawrence says, "Man is a thought adventurer. He has thought his way down the ages" (Phoenix: 731). Lawrence is a thought adventurer and the sites of his adventure are variegated and diverse. This study treats Lawrence as a thought adventurer rather than as a cultural figure committed to the cause of 'Life', crusading against the cause of the cultural-spiritual collapse of his own times. It is a concern greater than a cause—a critical concern or concerns that align him with the leading contemporary thinkers. The aim of this study is to review the ideas of Lawrence the critic of culture in an attempt to liberate them from the "enclosed specialism"² of Lawrence study both of Leavis tradition and that of the Marxists and early second wave feminists. This study will explore the "radical indeterminacy"³ in Lawrence's criticism of culture in the light of contemporary critical modes.

It is partly true that, Lawrence belongs to the anti-mechanistic tradition of Coleridge, Carlyle, Arnold and Ruskin. But this affiliation does not fully account for the provisional nature of Lawrence's criticism of culture. As a critic of culture Lawrence cannot be fully identified with the anti-mechanistic tradition: the dominant ideas of Lawrence sometimes have psychological as well as philosophical significance. This study seeks to free Lawrence from the idealistic readings on the

basis of Lawrence's own denunciation of idealism of any sort. It treats Lawrence as a critic of culture—a thinker, to whom thinking is an adventure. The dominant ideas of Lawrence the critic of culture do not contribute to the build-up of any prophetic voice in Lawrence. They do not carry any absolute value or truth or meaning. In Lawrentian schema, 'thought' or 'concept' in Deleuvian⁴ sense, does only have a functional value. The whole bulk of Lawrence's criticism of culture is interspersed with his comments denouncing form, stability and fixity. But even this strong disapproval is never absolute: "Man must wrap himself in a vision, make a house of apparent form and stability, and fixity. In his terror of chaos he begins by putting up an umbrella between himself and the everlasting whirl" (Phoenix, 255). This 'apparent' form, stability and fixity, and above all, the 'vision' Lawrence speaks of here have cast a spell on the critics of Leavis tradition. Again, this mistaking of the thought adventurer in Lawrence for a prophet with a 'vision' has elicited strong disapproval from the Marxists and the early second-wave feminists. Lawrentian thought, as he emphasizes on most occasions, is 'dynamic'⁵. We may define Lawrence's thought from what he says about it in his "Preface" to his Pansies, a collection of his poems. True thought, as he defines it, "comes from the heart and the genitals as from the head" (Phoenix: 279). Thought in Lawrence is liberated from any fixity as he says about thought in the same "Preface" that "it is an independent creature...with its small head and tail, trotting down its own little way, then curling to sleep."(Phoenix: 279).

Lawrence's criticism of culture is not grounded on idealism with a fixed set of emphases. His stance as a critic of culture does not mark a shift of loyalty from the mechanistic and spiritually collapsing Judeo-Christian culture to humanist individualism. His criticism of culture is an exploration of the various ways that disrupt the monolith of Judeo-Christian culture and celebrate indeterminacy, inconclusiveness and provisionality. In Lawrence's schema, all pursuits of knowledge are to be submitted to the unknown after pursuing them to their furthest limit⁶. The fixity he denounces is mistakenly tagged on to him by the generations of Lawrence critics. The concept of 'centre', 'identity', 'truth', and 'meaning'—the favourite haunts of contemporary critical modes—are always put into question by Lawrence by privileging the 'other' against the 'self', 'difference' against 'identity',

'fluidity' against 'fixity', 'body' against 'mind', 'becoming' against 'being', the 'unconscious' against the Cartesian ego and the 'in-human' against the 'human'. Even the apparently strong and stable individualism of Lawrence dissolves into an illusion in ultimate analysis. This destabilization of the critical figure of Lawrence occurs when Lawrence "is removed from behind the dominant image manufactured by Leavis" (Widdowson, 17). Our study seeks to liberate Lawrence the critic of culture from what the critical gaze up to 1990s have made of him and situate his cultural criticism within the context of currently competing critical ideas.

This study draws heavily on the new critical approaches to Lawrence that started in 1990s. Writings on Lawrence in our times produce a sense of disjunction and disorientation for the critics. The contesting views about Lawrence provide us a strong argument for the radical indeterminacy in Lawrence. Peter Widdowson puts forward an emphatic question: "Can there really be, simultaneously, the phallocrat/misogynist and liberating writer of the phallic imagination?"(18). Lawrence's refusal of 'settlement' has already been pointed out by critics like Raymond Williams (Widdowson: 19-20). Widmer likewise has found "conflicted awareness" of Lawrence (Widmer: 163). Gamini Salgado finds Women in Love "not merely a novel that accommodates contradictory readings, it positively invites and even compels them" (1991: 20). This novel is, according to the same critic, shot through with a continuous "tension between the necessity of articulation of vision and a sense of its impossibility, and sometimes undesirability (1991. 20). This tension between the articulation of vision and a sense of its meaninglessness flows beneath the surface of Lawrence's non-fictional writings. Widdowson underlines ambivalence, contradiction and self-cancellation in Lawrence's discourse. He has rightly observed:

the vast, and vastly differentiated, cultural reproduction of Lawrence's work means that we can make less and less sense of it in an absolute way—as its contradictory, heteroglossic, polyvocal discourse deconstructs beneath, and because of, our transfixed critical gaze. All we can do is to reconstruct it, temporarily and partially, in our own image and for our own ends (Widdowson. 24).

Moreover, the organicist imagery in Lawrence's literary and cultural criticism has misled the critics into taking it to be an organic form. In her Introduction to The Cambridge Companion to D.H. Lawrence, Anne Fernihough has pointed out^{that} "Lawrence's very hybridity, which has always made him difficult to pigeonhole, gave him a new found legitimacy as an object of study" (6). Lawrence is a cultural critic in the sense in which today's cultural critics are—eclectic in their approach to reading and writing. Lawrence criticism, she points out, gets a new fillip and direction on new lines with the opening up of feminism into a broad-based and more flexible concept of gender studies. All these contemporary studies open up new horizons of Lawrence criticism and for us, a new approach to Lawrence as a critic of culture.

Many of Lawrence's important pieces appear periodically after his death. This phoenix-like reappearance of his writings is accompanied by the publication of the hitherto unpublished versions of his already published text. Many and divergent versions of his texts underline the provisionality of Lawrence's writings. These texts, according to Eggert, suggest contingency, change and variation, and belie the idea of organic growth to some predestined goal of literary perfection (Fernihough: 7). According to Fernihough again, in his discursive writing, Lawrence is as insistent as he is inconsistent. While this 'insistence' of Lawrence has been taken literally by critics until the onset of "hopeless and horizonless"⁷ postmodern aesthetics, it is time we also reckon with his 'inconsistency' that suggests fluidity. John Worthen and Rick Rylance have emphasized Lawrence's use of "multiple consciousness" (Fernihough: 7). All such postmodern orientations of Lawrence criticism have inspired us to study the dominant ideas of Lawrence's criticism of culture in the light of postmodern productive indeterminacy.

In his Studies in Classic American Literature, Lawrence has said "Never trust the artist. Trust the tale."⁸ This has now become a classic dictum and resonates with the postmodern emphasis on the death of an author. Following him, we can say that we need not discover a visionary or a prophet in him. We need rather emphasize the creative and provisional nature of his ideas as a critic of culture. Lawrence's pursuit of knowledge by way of destabilizing it continuously also underlines the

provisionality of his discourse as a critic of culture. This provisionality is not a symptom of weakness but the strength of his discourse that always invites new readings of his ideas. It is a further proof of Lawrence's love of life's liveliness as against the abstractness of ideas about life. Reading such as the one we have taken up here is supported by the provisionality of Lawrentian thought that always leaves room for further new readings. We here offer to reread the dominant ideas in Lawrence's criticism of culture such as his concept of the body in the light of contemporary thought in the first chapter, explore their correspondence with contemporary feminism in the second, review his concept of gender in the critical context of our times in the third, reorient his ideas of ethics and aesthetics in the fourth and in the fifth chapter we shall make an overall exploration of Lawrentian thought adventure in the light of postmodern thought.

NOTES

1. The term is Mark Spilka's. In her Introduction to D. H. Lawrence: A Collection of Critical Essays, Spilka writes, "If, as [Eliseo] Vivas holds, that vision enables us to grasp 'the specific process of disintegration of which we are the victims', it may also help us, individually if not collectively, to reverse that process. The moral formalists, those who have rescued Lawrence from comparative oblivion, suggest that it will" (12).
2. Paul Eggert has used the term "enclosed specialism" to mean the predictability of methods and terminology of Lawrence studies in the essay "Opening up the Text: the case of *Sons and Lovers*" (Brown ed.: 38).
3. Gamini Salgado applies the term "radical indeterminacy" to the "principal effect" of Women in Love achieved through language. He says, "There seems to me to be the three aspects of Lawrence's language which point to the radical indeterminacy which is the novel's principal object" (Widdowson ed. 138). Widdowson similarly points to the "radically unstable discourse" of Lawrence (19-20).
4. Giles Deleuze, the French philosopher. We'll discuss the points of affinity between Deleuze and Lawrence in the chapters that follow.
5. Throughout his Fantasia of the Unconscious and Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious, Lawrence contrasts "dynamic" thought with the "fixed" one. The emphasis on "dynamic" thought also figures prominently in his other major nonfictional writings.
6. The central arguments of our study draw heavily on Lawrence's emphasis on the paradoxical notion that man must know in order to learn how not to know.
7. Sandra Gilbert's term which she has used to deny Lawrence's ahistorical affiliation of postmodern thought (Fernihough: 236).
8. Page. 8.