Culture Crisis: A Critical Study of D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*

Muhammad Kashif Jan[1]

ABSTRACT

The concept of Culture Crisis refers to when a culture is unable to fully utilize its potential due to the presence of excessive misery, injustice, and conflict. This paper explores and analyzes the culture crisis depicted in the novel Women in Love by D.H. Lawrence (1920). It covers various relevant issues, including cultural change, the relationship between culture and civilization, socio-economic change and its impact on culture crisis, the theoretical foundations of culture, and emotional bankruptcy. Through a discussion and analysis of the perspectives put forth by Rader (1947), Bidney (1946), and Sveiceris (1989), the paper reveals significant cultural crises at the socio-economic, interpersonal, spiritual, and emotional levels. The findings of this study attribute the causes and complexities of culture crisis to factors such as a lack of underlying ideological cohesion, failure to harness or adapt to cultural potentialities, and the erosion of values such as creativity, spontaneity, originality, and humanism in favor of imitation, repetition, mass production, and profit-oriented endeavors. Furthermore, the paper contends that these dynamics often result in unrest, conflict, and spiritual and emotional bankruptcy at both individual and societal levels.

Keywords: Culture crisis, civilization, creativity, imitation, emotional bankruptcy.

INTRODUCTION

Women in Love (Lawrence, 1920) is a novel rooted in 19th-century realism. Its story takes place in various settings such as a mining township, a mine owner's house, a feudal country-house, and avant-garde London. The novel explores the theme of modernizing the mining industry through the character Gerald Crich. There are two main protagonists with contrasting outcomes: Gerald, an ambitious man in a relationship with Gudrun, meets a tragic end, while Rupert Birkin, an intellectual man who represents the author to some extent, has a more optimistic ending with his partner Ursula.

[1] Assistant Professor of English, GPGC Mandian Abbottabad**, Corresponding Author's Email:** mkashifjan11@gmail.com

Cultural crisis refers to dysfunction within a particular culture that leads to wastefulness and disharmony. It occurs when resources, both natural and human, are underutilized or misused (Rader, 1947, p. 278). Natural crises bring people together regardless of their backgrounds, but cultural crises create division and hostility among different cultural groups, hindering progress and causing suffering. The term "culture" in this context refers to the entire range of a culture's activities, although not every crisis affects all aspects of society (Rader, 1947, p. 262). It is important to note that crisis does not necessarily mean rapid change; in fact, rapid transition resulting from goodwill and foresight is a positive sign (Rader, 1947, p. 263). Imbalanced expansion can be observed through the overdevelopment of certain traits at the expense of others, as well as the disproportionate development of privileged classes (Rader, 1947, p. 278).

Culture can be contrasted with civilization by their characteristics. Culture is characterized by creativity and spontaneity, while civilization lacks these qualities and fails to create enduring value (Donskis, 2009). Culture is constantly developing and renewing itself through creative activity, whereas civilization tends to become stagnant (Asakaviciute, 2018, pp. 76-77). In civilization, technology often fulfills tasks that don't require individuals to think, imagine, or use their intellect (Šveiceris, 1989, p. 46). The creativity of culture is marked by novelty, originality, and uniqueness, while civilization primarily relies on imitation, repetition, and interpretation of existing forms, ideas, and symbols. This can lead to a depreciation or distortion of culture, religion, and art (Asakaviciute, 2018, pp. 75-77). Civilization represents the decline of genuine culture and the question of whether culture can avoid this fate has a negative answer, as civilization is seen as an unavoidable outcome (Asakaviciute, 2018, p. 77).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology for this paper is based on the perspective of Cultural Crisis as advocated by Rader (1947), Bidney (1946), and Sveiceris (1989). The data for analysis is mainly collected from chapter XVII, 'The Industrial Magnate' of *Women in Love* (Lawrence, 1920). The quintessential feature of the cultural crisis is "the fettering of a culture's potentialities so that it is wasting or misdirecting its creative capacities ... when the amount of misery, injustice, and conflict is no longer reasonably well adjusted to the potentialities of the economy" (Rader, 1947, pp. 263-264).

Moreover, the cultural crisis is "marked by an era of civilization which has nothing in common with authentic culture and a vital power of human creative activity" (Asakaviciute, 2018, pp. 75-77). The data is analyzed in line with Belsey's (2011) analytical tools of textual analysis and New Criticism/Close Reading. Belsey explores a culture-critical approach which she defines as "systematic analysis, including interpretation, exposition, and commentary" (Belsey, 2011, p. xii). She analyzes how textual features point to cultural significance in fiction and connect our "real, biological, organic" (Belsey, 2011, p. 110) existence to symbolic and contextual meanings and to consciousness. Similarly, new critics try to formulate a cultural assertion rather than to establish a critical ideology (Murfin & Ray, 1998).

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RESULTS

With regard to the causes and complexities of cultural crisis in the novel under study, this paper reveals some pragmatic implications. Firstly, for example, a 'national psychosis' may cause a socio-economic crisis. In the text, it occurs during the time of Gerald's father, whose humanitarian principles in the coal-mining industry eradicate the rampant misery of the workers who had "starved and suffered" for generations. The newly acquired self-sufficiency, knowledge of business, production, and profiteering lead the workers to make unnecessary comparisons with owners and demand higher wages. The new ideology of equality, not in input but in results, enters the collective consciousness of the community who are now willing to destroy the age-old order altogether and impose a state of chaos.

Furthermore, a lack of a systematic theoretical binding force to channelize the practices and perceptions of the community in the face of change may cause a cultural crisis. Authentic culture is based on compassion, individual creativity, and spontaneity, which Gerald, the protagonist of the story, brings to an end, replacing it with a civilization of mass production, profiteering, and material comforts in the mining industry. Such a civilization inflicts social and moral stagnation as it is based on imitation and repetition, precipitated by importing the latest scientific and technological equipment of coal mining from America. Thus, the miners are reduced to mere mechanical instruments which they are unable to persist with in the longer run. This new culture with new ideas, lacking in underlying ideological binding force, causes the closure of the mines, thus causing a crisis.

Another cause of the crisis, revealed by this paper, is that undermining the 'accompanying pleasure' of socio-economic uplift may serve as the fetters "holding the potentialities in check" (Rader, 1947, p. 264). In line with this finding, a crisis is caused in the text as despite satisfying most of the financial wants of the workers, their accompanying pleasure is ignored.

A culture crisis may also be caused by a lack of equilibrium that needs something larger for real meaning and relief in the lives of its members. Such equilibrium is occasionally provided by Gerald's academic, truth-seeker friend, Birkin who takes Gerald's fear away by something "which seemed to contain the quintessence of faith" (Lawrence, 1920, p. 269). It is more like religion that he finds relief in, but "the world of work and material life" (Lawrence, 1920, p. 269) has so engulfed Gerald that he has to go back to it. Hence, he goes for mass production, money-making, and outer expansion at the cost of personal and spiritual growth which are the fruit of authentic culture. Eventually, he himself realizes that the equilibrium from the new culture has disappeared.Another cause of cultural crisis is the abandonment of the human aspect in theory and practice, resulting in social and moral alienation and emotional bankruptcy. Gerald also abandons the human aspect in his introduction of the new civilization and becomes a victim of social and moral alienation. Consequently, Gerald suffers from emotional bankruptcy, which becomes so poignant that he loses his will and all interest in his own existence, choosing to freeze himself to death.

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DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

A discussion and analysis of a selected text from Chapter XVII, "The Industrial Magnate," of the novel Women in Love (Lawrence, 1920) is conducted from a cultural critical analysis perspective. The occurrence of a cultural crisis in contemporary societies is largely attributed to the rapidity of cultural and social change. While this change is progressive in terms of technology and science, it tends to have regressive effects on social, interpersonal, and inter-societal aspects of life (Bidney, 1946, p. 541). The following discussion reveals how the writer constructs the issues of cultural crisis and explores its implications for the characters in the novel under study.

Socio-Economic Grounds

The textual features of selected passages from the narrative indicate a grave cultural crisis, particularly at the socio-economic level, subverting the basic principles of human existence. To begin with, the guiding principle for Gerald's father, in the mining industry, was to put men first; produce plenty for them, and benefit them above everything else. It discouraged extracting money from the owners only to make them filthy rich and give them limitless power, as is the case in most modern corporate sectors. The text states that "Gerald's father... had thought only of the men... to benefit the men every time," (Lawrence, 1920, p. 260) and to extract "as much money from the earth as would make the owners comfortably rich, would allow the workmen sufficient wages and good conditions, and would increase the wealth of the country altogether" (Lawrence, 1920, p. 260). It reflects Rousseau's (1895) theory of the social contract, a philosophy based on the inclusiveness of all stakeholders in the industry – the owners, the workers, and the overall national interest – which contributes to an integrated social culture. This culture brought sufficiency and prosperity into workers' lives, who found themselves "richer than they might have expected, felt glad and triumphant" (Lawrence, 1920, p. 260). The rampant misery of the poor working classes was eradicated, providing for their basic material needs that were previously denied to their fathers who had "starved and suffered." Now, they expected a promising future for the coming generations. Consequently, they were full of gratitude to the owners and were enjoying the bounties and prosperity that such a culture offered.

However, the taste of sufficiency also gave them knowledge of business, production, and profiteering. They started questioning the 'out-of-all-proportion' profit of the owners, making comparisons with the owners and, unconsciously, their "gratitude to their owners passed on to murmuring" (Lawrence, 1920, p. 260). Their dissatisfaction urged them to demand higher wages and legitimize their demands with slogans for 'religious equality' as their birthright, which they would accomplish at all costs. This inspired them to fight for their rights until the end, starting agitation, causing the closure of the mines, and consequently, "riots broke out" (Lawrence, 1920, p. 262). The burning of the mines resulted in calling for law enforcement agencies. Skirmishes followed; firing took place; "the mob was dispersed, one man was shot dead, the fire was put out" (Lawrence, 1920, p. 262). The riots were stopped, and "the men went back to work," (Lawrence, 1920, p. 262) but the culture was changed altogether.

A new culture with new ideas was created, that of the so-called universal equality. This was the beginning of a cultural crisis. Edwards (2018) also places the blame for the culture crisis on modern liberalism, which stands on two legs: the first leg being 'radical egalitarianism' that emphasizes equal results rather than equal opportunities, and the second being 'radical individualism' that allows for unlimited personal gratification. Radical egalitarianism leads to tyranny, while radical individualism leads to hedonism. Similarly, the desire for mechanical equality in both functions and outcomes is not practical. Just as in a mechanical process, where one part must inevitably be subordinate to another, this is a natural condition of existence (Lawrence, 1920, p. 262). However, the new idea of equality, not in terms of opportunities but in terms of results, entered the collective consciousness of the community, and they were willing to destroy the long-held order and create chaos in pursuit of the ideology of equality.

Thus, the discrepancy in the collective will of the community may be one of the causes of this self-imposed crisis. "Sometimes a society becomes deranged: a 'national psychosis' may develop in frustrated and defeated people. The standards that were once applicable to such a society are no longer useful in defining the misuse of resources" (Rader, 1947, p. 273-274). A 'national psychosis' can render social standards obsolete, meaning that instead of consolidating sufficiency and reaching higher levels of prosperity, there is still an imbalance in social factors, preventing the realization of potential achievements.

Ideological Foundations

Another reason for the ensuing crisis may be that there was no systematic theoretical binding force behind the socio-economic uplift to channel the consequent practices and perceptions of the community. An ideological foundation for cultural change is not just a background, academic, sensible description of practical observations but is itself a factor in establishing the data collection, analysis, and application into significant outcomes. Theory and practice must correlate, as a problem in practice sometimes leads to dissatisfaction with existing theory or philosophy, particularly on the part of vocal scholars, or contrarily, some major change in theory challenges established social practices. This is evident from the argument that in non-democratic societies, for example, regimes operate different forms of "thought control" to make certain that no subversive ideas penetrate the social mind, thereby admitting, implicitly, that ideas do have a significant power to influence and initiate cultural change (Bidney, 1946, p. 540).

Such a correlation is also evident in the text as Gerald feels that the mines are run on an obsolete idea that cannot cope with modern socio-economic demands. Gerald inherits a mining fortune at a relatively young age but, unfortunately, he believes that he "did not inherit an established order and a living idea" (Lawrence, 1920, p. 256) to run the firm on his desired modern productive principle. The more Marxist or mild socialist ideas, in operation in the industry, do not appeal "to a mind like his, curious and cold," (Lawrence, 1920, p. 258) but appear rather superficial and just "mental amusement." As an educated and sufficiently traveled young man, Gerald does not want to operate such a huge

enterprise, with "so many wagons, bearing his initial, running all over the country," (Lawrence, 1920, p. 258) in a random, haphazard manner.

For Gerald, the central issue of human existence is the constant struggle between two opposite but equal elements, the inanimate matter and the human will as he believes that "the history of mankind [is] just the history of the conquest of the one by the other" (Lawrence, 1920, p. 265). He correlates theory and practice by translating the abstract idea of 'harmony' into the practical concept of 'organization' to "subjugate ... the resistant matter of the earth [to] his will" (Lawrence, 1920, p. 264). He subsequently wants to turn it into an 'infinite' resource by the instrumentality of mankind in a harmonious "pure machine-principle that may be called productive spinning." This theory of harmony in human instrumentality and the machine principle is the one that enables him in the conquest of the 'eternal' matter for the 'infinite' production which would generate a condition of sufficiency; everybody would be paid according to their utility and let the ensuing culture take care of the rest of the matters. This, according to him, is what humanity has struggled for since its creation and this is what can bring salvation to socio-economic crises. Therefore, Gerald sets aside the existing humanitarian philosophy as not comprehensive enough to provide for his ambition of productivity.

Spiritual and Emotional Bankruptcy

The choice between these two socio-economic theories - humanitarianism and human instrumentality - reflects the cultural values that accompany them. In due course of time, we get a glimpse of how Gerald, after taking over the coal mining firm, practically implements his philosophy, which is "convulsion of death [running] through the old system" (Lawrence, 1920, p. 265) and overtakes the entire firm like a 'virus'. His philosophy of 'human instrumentality' and 'mechanical productivity' is purely data-driven, devoid of any emotions, causing 'cruel eruptions', and decides on a huge turnover of the old and inefficient managers and workers, giving them no more consideration than just useless lumber, replacing them with efficient substitutes.

This is in total contrast to his father's traditional humanitarian theory based on compassion towards the workers, putting them before production and profit-making. After Gerald's takeover of the firm, his father would appeal to him in favor of an ousted old worker, "it is not the allowance that he wants, poor man. He feels it very much, that he is superannuated." However, Gerald is bent on changing the humanitarian culture into a professionally productive one, for which he introduces the latest scientific and technological equipment of coal mining from America. Hence, "everything was run on the most accurate and delicate scientific method. Educated and expert men were in control everywhere, the miners were reduced to mere mechanical instruments" (Lawrence, 1920, p. 267). This is the foundation of a civilization of mass production, profiteering, and material comforts; a civilization that brings mechanical, and statistical competition into play, that everybody has to work harder to prove his professional value by enacting the principle of 'the survival of the fittest.' Nonetheless, it is the end of an authentic culture of compassion individual creativity, and spontaneity, inflicting social and moral stagnation.

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Hard as it is, the new culture's mechanization takes all the joy and hope out of the workers' lives. Initially, the workers are annoyed with Gerald; however, soon they accept the new culture with religious contentment. His father's humanitarianism and compassion are turned over into a new culture of human instrumentality. It changes the entire culture: "There was a new world, a new order, strict, terrible, inhuman, but satisfying in its very destructiveness" (Lawrence, 1920, p. 267). It may bring them some material triumph, but it is also bound to bring chaos, as "it was pure organic disintegration and pure mechanical organization. This is the first and finest state of chaos" (Lawrence, 1920, p. 267). This transition is a reflection of the danger of the socialist philosophy going nuts and ending in capitalism.

The new culture of mechanical productivity definitely converts the 'eternal' matter of coal into 'infinite' production, but in its 'entirety,' it not only makes the lives of the workers miserable but also inflicts "a strange fear" upon Gerald himself. It is so overpowering for him that he does not "know what to do" (Lawrence, 1920, p. 268). The very change that he has caused seems fake and artificial to him. It is his own brainchild, "yet somehow, it was not real, it was a mask." He might survive, but it can burst any moment like a meaningless bubble, leaving behind mere emptiness. It turns out to be the monster of Frankenstein (Shelley, 1831) who, when given life, fails to follow the principles of its creation because it lacks the human element and is destruction and chaos. Similarly, the culture Gerald introduces might seem successful outwardly; it is devoid of true emotional fulfillment. As "he felt, with faint, small but final sterile horror, that his mystic reason was breaking, giving way now, at this crisis" (Lawrence, 1920, p. 269). He fails to comprehend that material wealth is for man and not vice versa; hence he goes for mass production, money-making, and outer expansion at the cost of personal and spiritual growth.

Despite Gerald's undisputed material success, he knows that the equilibrium from the new culture has disappeared; the equilibrium that needs something larger for real meaning and relief in the lives of its members. It is occasionally provided by Gerald's academic, truth-seeker friend, Birkin, who has the potential to take Gerald's fear away; it is something "which seemed to contain the quintessence of faith" (Lawrence, 1920, p. 269). It is more like religion that he finds relief in, but "the world of work and material life" has so much engulfed Gerald that he has to go back to it from the world of spiritual and emotional fulfillment. Consequently, this makes him feel "as if the very middle of him were a vacuum, and outside were an awful tension" (Lawrence, 1920, p. 269).

This is also supported by the theoretical framework of the study that "cultural crises among modern societies … while progressive on its technological and scientific side, tend to be regressive on its social, interpersonal, and intersocietal side" (Bidney, 1946, p. 541). Gerald, likewise, introduces new scientific technology on a war footing which, though brings material progress, and undermines the above-mentioned human values. Rader (1947) also opines that currently a serious global crisis has been caused by a combination of diverse phenomena: by a fast advancement in outstanding mechanical output without a parallel development in social and moral values.

Increase in factual information without a corresponding development in synthesis and humanities; the massive growth in productivity without a sufficient change in class distinctions and property ownership; the incredible advancement in modern means of global communication and transportation without adequate transformation of state institutions. The consequence has been a great inconsistency between the potentialities and the achievements. Rader (1947) also urges that we should understand that society is a single whole: there should be a connection and harmony in the parts; there should be an individual character attached to the entire community; and each individual should work for and be supervised by the overall social structure. Such a unity yields more efficiency and higher achievements, less confusion, and wastage. However, because of the lack of such an approach, our incredible modern resources are, unfortunately, connected to promoting techniques of imitation rather than arts of creativity.

Similarly, the new culture not only makes the lives of workers miserable but also engulfs Gerald himself in a strange horror, making him lose any meaning in life. He becomes a victim of emotional bankruptcy from which his material success cannot provide him any relief. To fill the emotional void, he desperately seeks emotional fulfillment from Gudrun, the girl he loves, but unfortunately, she refuses to oblige him. Instead of acquiescing to him with all his material success, she opts for a mediocre but emotionally vital German artist. Gerald's emotional bankruptcy becomes so poignant that it makes him lose his will and all his interest in his existence. He, who was once so ambitious as to conquer the eternal matter (coal) by the power of his will, now, in his disappointment, surrenders to another matter, the snow of the Alps, in which he willfully freezes himself to death.

The parallelism between the two types of matter, coal, and snow, also explains his journey from vitality to emotional bankruptcy: the one he aspires to subjugate, coal, is black and is a source of fire, whereas the other, snow, with which he kills himself, is white and chills energy with cold; coal is procured by human effort from beneath the surface, whereas snow comes from above the heavens by natural forces down to the surface of the earth; the former, as a source of fire, signifies his youthful energy and his will to dominate, whereas the latter signifies his becoming petrified, with no emotional warmth to sustain his vital self and finally conceding to snow to be subjugated by it. Thus, in his historic struggle, because of severing his human connection, his will is ultimately defeated by the inanimate matter. Edwards (2018) also concludes that a civilization cannot long prevent the annihilation of a doctrine in a transcendent direction that engendered the culture.

CONCLUSION

The discussion reveals that man is not satisfied with mere self-conservation in the material or biological sense but eagerly desires to maintain his cultural self, which is manifested in his social, spiritual, and scientific aspirations. A life devoid of cultural values and practices is not considered worth living and is therefore strongly resisted by most human beings. When a society, or even an individual like Gerald, is faced with socio-economic forces that it cannot control, it may feel embarrassed and frustrated to give up its desire to live a life that is intolerable for it. In the current cultural crisis, a serious effort

should be made to achieve social justice and to develop a humanitarian approach with public planning and intellectual harmony at individual, national, and international levels, so that the massive capacities of our civilization can be consolidated into sustained human welfare.

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