

WARTON LECTURE ON ENGLISH POETRY
SPENSER AND THE ALLEGORISTS

By J. F. KERMODE

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THERE is no 'Spenser controversy', Spenser has been 'dislodged' with no fuss at all. Why? What follows hints at one possible answer.

Spenser is a known maker of allegories. If you believe, as many people appear to, that allegory is necessarily superficial, *The Faerie Queene* is dull in so far as it is simple, and a failure in so far as it is difficult. Coleridge, perhaps, first specified that allegory was a mode inferior to 'symbolism', and this is now commonplace. Blake's distinction between Vision and Allegory—which is 'formed by the Daughters of Memory'—was accepted, for instance, by Yeats, who blames Spenser and Bunyan for the unhappy vogue of allegory in England. A German Symbolist friend of his—probably Dauthendey, the man who hated verbs—won Yeats's approval by observing that 'Allegory said things which could be said as well, or better, in another way'.¹ As such views gain ground, Spenser's fortunes wilt; and in our own day we may find a critic of distinction, Professor Yvor Winters, willing to dismiss *The Faerie Queene* in a few derisive words.² From Hazlitt reading the poem in 'voluptuous indolence', we progress easily to Winters not reading it at all.

On the other hand, though we tend to associate allegory with grey abstraction, we are all fascinated by what Goethe called 'the green and golden archetype'.³ There are the archetypes of Miss Bodkin, which are Jungian, and those of Professors Wheelwright and Frye, which are not. There is a general and an increasing interest in the exposure of radical myth-structures in works of literature. But Spenser does not come well out of this. The interpreters of Melville and Hawthorne and Kafka welcome every new subtlety of method; but Spenser seems fated to suffer at best a criticism of reduction, a dubious salvation by archetypes.

It is pointless to discuss criticism which, in the teeth of scholarly

¹ *A Book of Images* drawn by W. T. Horton and introduced by W. B. Yeats, London, 1898, p. 8. (Partially reprinted in *Ideas of Good and Evil*, 1903, and in *Essays and Introductions*, 1961.)

² *The Function of Criticism*, 1957, p. 44.

³ Quoted in Philip Wheelwright, *The Burning Fountain*, 1954, p. 89.

evidence, finds Spenser too simple. My concern is with reductive criticism, which works by the abolition of contexts, by the sacrifice of the poem's *presence* to its radical myths and types. These are, of course, to be found in the poem, and at the present moment they confer prestige; but much damage may be done in the process of isolating them in their primitive glory. *The Faerie Queene* is, after all, an heroic poem, extremely conscious of its peculiar relation to history—to 'now and England'. To reduce it to a 'Biblical quest-romance',¹ as Northrop Frye does, is, however brilliant the work, not to glorify but to impoverish it. The mistake, in short, is 'to be led away into exploring the possible significance the myths used may be thought to possess in themselves, into infinite speculations about their archetypal patterns and analogies, instead of the realized meaning of the work itself'. It is not without interest that the excellent book from which I borrow these words² is not about Spenser but about Joyce; whose work, it may be thought, deliberately invites such speculations, whereas Spenser's does not.

Perhaps there will always be enmity between those who believe symbols and archetypes to have value in themselves, and those who think it obvious that the value of a symbol, however much traditional significance it may accrete, is finally determined by its context; much as the meaning of redness in a sign varies from 'hot water' to 'stop!' or 'Manchester United'. For example, the most superficial inquiry into the history of the principal figures of the book of Revelation will reveal that for all their antiquity they alter their meanings with their contexts. Professor E. H. Gombrich has more than once castigated the 'mystical anti-quarianism' which treats images as if they were possessed of inalienable meanings. To do so is to abandon a complex civility in favour of a dubious *sapientia veterum*. Now the context in which Spenser's archetypes acquire value is not easy to describe; but I think we may gather something of the importance of the attempt if we can find a group of images used in his own way by Spenser and in a revealingly different way by a modern author. Such are the apocalyptic images used by Spenser in the first book of *The Faerie Queene*; and I shall first speak of the use to which Spenser puts them. Later I shall look at the contexts provided by a well-thought-of twentieth-century writer, D. H. Lawrence.

Spenser would have been happy to call the book of Revelation 'a continued Allegory, or darke conceit'. Like his own poem, it

¹ *Anatomy of Criticism*, 1957, p. 194.

² S. L. Goldberg, *The Classical Temper*, 1961, pp. 201-2.

has a spiritual as well as an historical aspect; for if, according to St. Augustine, it is an allegory of the soul's escape from bonds of sin,¹ it is also, by weight of tradition, a prophecy to be fulfilled by events in time. Spenser's first book has intentions closely parallel to these, for it proceeds on the old assumption that the history of mankind is the history of man's soul writ large. Book I might fairly be designated a Tudor Apocalypse.

Upton first observed the frequent allusions to Revelation (and Warton, I am sorry to say, was shocked by them). Little was added to the subject until recently, when Mrs. J. W. Bennett and Professor J. E. Hankins looked into it again and transformed it. Mrs. Bennett² noticed that the use made of Revelation by Reform theologians was very relevant to Spenser's purposes; and Mr. Hankins brought to bear the patristic commentaries.³ Certain identifications are now, I suppose, beyond dispute. St. George and Arthur share qualities of the Christ of Revelation—a point made vivid by those medieval Apocalypses which show the Knight 'faithful and true' bearing, in his battle with the demonic host, a white shield with a cross *gules*.⁴ Una is the 'woman clothed with the sun' of Rev. xii. 1, traditionally identified with the true church, which Tertullian called *integram . . . incorruptam virginem*,⁵ to be echoed down the centuries to Newton.⁶ Another glance at some illuminated Apocalypse that shows the Woman with her glory of sunshine will help to explain why Spenser, at the climax of the book, speaks of

The blazing brightness of her beauties beame,
And glorious light of her sunshyny face.

Duessa, though she is all doubleness and multiplicity, all

¹ *De Civitate Dei*, xx. vii.

² *The Evolution of The Faerie Queene*, 1942, cap. ix.

³ 'Spenser and the Revelation of St. John', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, lx (1945), 364-81.

⁴ See, for example, M. R. James ed., *The Apocalypse in Latin*, MS. 10 in the collection of Dyson Perrins, 1927, plate 81; or the corresponding plate in *L'Apocalypse en Français au XIII^e siècle* (Bib. Nat. fr. 403), ed. L. Delisle et P. Meyer, 1900. According to the influential commentary of Beatus, the horse is the body of Christ, the rider 'Dominus maiestatis . . . verbum patris altissimi . . . id est, divinitas incarnata'. (*Beati in Apocalypsin Libri X*, ed. H. A. Sanders, 1930, p. 591.)

⁵ As quoted by Jewel, *Apologia Ecclesiae Anglicanae*, 1562, pars vi, cap. xvi, div. 1; in *The Works of John Jewel* (Parker Society), 1848, iii. 41.

⁶ Sir Isaac Newton, *Observations upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John*, 1733, p. 279: 'the woman . . . clothed with the sun, before she flies into the wilderness, represents the primitive Church catholick. . . .'

departures from a primal integrity, is also the Whore of Babylon; and Spenser's Eighth Canto is perfectly illustrated in medieval illustrations of Rev. xvii. 4.¹ Archimago is associated with anti-christ, a person who does not occur in Revelation, but was early attracted into its ambience from the Epistles of John. According to that source there were many antichrists, and the list of historical characters so named by their enemies must be very long; it is a common error, which Mrs. Bennett repeats, that Wyclif first applied the term to a pope. In any case, the application of the word to the papacy in general is the important one for our purposes; this was the work of Luther.² Archimago is antichrist in this sense. He is also the false prophet and the beast from the land. Arthur has traits of the knight *fidelis et verax*, but the first account of him is a development in chivalric terms of the angel in Rev. xviii. He wears the seal of the spouse (Cant. viii. 6) and shares the angel's satisfaction at the catastrophic prospects of Babylon, which is Rome.

Many minor allusions to Revelation I here ignore; the structural resemblances are sufficient to establish the point. When Red Cross deserts Una, Spenser is remembering Rev. ii. 4: 'for thou hast left thy first love'.³ He means that England deserted the true catholic church. Una lost is the woman clothed with the sun who suffers forty-two months in the wilderness (the primary reference is to the typical wanderings of the Israelites). The overthrow of the dragon is closely associated with the battle of Christ against Satan, and so with the Passion, the Resurrection, and the Harrowing of Hell.⁴ The tree and the water which refresh Red Cross during the three-day battle are from Rev. xxii, and signify the two sacraments of the Reformed Church. The book presented by Red Cross to Arthur, the Babylonian House of Pride, the two Jerusalems—Cleopolis, and the city of Red Cross's vision—are further instances.⁵

¹ The beast she rides on has seven heads, standing for the deadly sins, and ten horns, representing—according to Hugh of St. Victor—the violated commandments (Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, cxcvi. 799; quoted by M. W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, 1952, p. 85).

² *Preface to the Revelation of St. John* (1545); in *Works of Martin Luther*, 1932, vi. 479–88. This is Luther's second Preface to the book; in his first (1522) he had found it 'neither apostolic nor prophetic' (*ibid.*, p. 488). The second Preface had much influence. See E. L. Tuveson, *Millennium and Utopia*, 1949, pp. 24 ff.

³ Hankins (*loc. cit.*) relates this episode to Cant. viii.

⁴ As Hankins (*loc. cit.*) suggests.

⁵ Hankins relates the House of Coelia to the Earthly Jerusalem.

Spenser was evidently conscious of iconographic and exegetical traditions; it is part of his method to telescope significations by glancing back at them: thus Red Cross, not only England but a saint imitating Christ, dissolves into the object of his imitation. Nevertheless, it remains clear that Mrs. Bennett was right in thinking that his use of apocalyptic material was strongly coloured by recent anti-Romanist versions of Revelation. But her emphasis on extreme Protestantism is itself extreme. The apologists of the English settlement give the whole matter a new Anglican interest; and to leave Foxe and Jewel out of account is to miss what is most important to Spenser. I think it is part of the same mistake that Mrs. Bennett discourages attempts to give the allegory a clear historical application. I do not mean that we ought to go back to calling Una Anne Boleyn; only that Scott was near the truth when he argued that the adventures of Red Cross 'bear a peculiar and obvious, though not a uniform, reference to the history of the Church of England'.¹ Not, be it noted, to the events of the English Reformation; but more broadly, so that the destruction of Error suggests to Scott the early Church purging itself of such heresies as Arianism, and the victory over Sansfoy Constantine's defeat of paganism.² The only commentator to develop Scott's suggestion was Thomas Keightley almost a century ago; and the *Variorum* editors report his views without approval.³

I do not agree with Keightley's detailed interpretation; but that there is in the text of the First Book a body of allusion to the history of the Church seems to me inescapable, though it requires a detailed demonstration which this hour will not contain. The poem is addressed to the 'only supreme governor' of the Church; this title in itself required historical justification, and so did the claim that English Christianity was older than the Roman church. In fact all the apologists of the Settlement made the appeal to history as a matter of course. And whoever agreed that the English was the true primitive catholic church had to think of her history as beginning, not with the convulsions of Henry VIII's reign, but, as Jewel put it, 'after the first creation of the world'⁴ or, more practically, with the arrival in England

¹ Quoted in *The Works of Spenser: a Variorum Edition*, ed. E. Greenlaw, C. G. Osgood, F. M. Padelford, and R. Heffner, i (1932), 450.

² This last idea is all the more probable in the light of the report that Constantine owed his victory to British troops (Foxe, *Acts and Monuments of the Church*, ed. M. H. Seymour, 1838, p. 76).

³ *Variorum*, i. 454-5.

⁴ Ed. cit. iii. 49.

of Joseph of Arimathea. For Christianity came here not from Rome, but from the East; and Una is descended from kings and queens whose 'scepters stretch from East to Western shore' (i. 5). 'Neither did the east and the west, nor distance of place, divide the church', says Foxe; but 'this catholic unity did not long continue.'¹ Thanks, of course, to the papacy; and Foxe enables us to recognize in Spenser's text the features of certain especially guilty popes, who were the progenitors of Duessa. Her father has the West under his rule, 'And high hath set his throne where *Tiberis* doth pas' (ii. 22). Rome has divided the world and exiled the catholic church. Who will restore and re-establish it?

The answer is, of course, the Supreme Governor and her agents. But by what right does she undertake to do so? To answer that, one has only to recall that the most insistent of all complaints against the papal antichrist is, probably, that which concerns the usurpation of temporal authority. Thus Foxe, like Luther,² is always on the emperor's side against the pope, and, like Jewel, holds that the emperor has the power to call General Councils and the right to exact temporal obedience from the Bishop of Rome; an argument of great importance to the English. The self-aggrandizement of that bishop—helped by various donations, genuine and false—led not only to the humiliation of emperors but to persistent interference in the English state; the presumption of Gregory VII, the schemes of Becket, the ordeal of John, the need for such measures as the statutes of Praemunire and Provisors, were all chronicled and noted. The right and duty of restoring the Church to her pre-Hildebrandine purity (Canterbury independent of Rome, the sacrament administered in both kinds to the laity, no transubstantiation, proper respect for Romans xiii) belonged to the heiress of Empire, to Elizabeth, whom Spenser in the dedication of his poem calls 'most high, mightie and magnificent Empresse'.

In throwing off the yoke of the papacy, runs the argument, the English had not only reasserted the primitive values of the Church but restored the authority of the Empire. Satan is still loose for a season; the struggle against the false prophet and the wounded beast will go on. But in England there will be a proper balance of spiritual and temporal power. This is like enough to the situation of Spenser's poem; and neither the poem nor the

¹ Foxe, p. 168.

² For Luther, the third woe of Rev. xiii is the papal assumption of temporal power in the Bull *Unam sanctam* of Boniface VIII (1302). See *Works of Luther*, vi. 484, and F. Saxl, 'Reformation Pamphlets', in *Lectures*, 1957, i. 255 ff.

political realities of the time could have been quite as they were, Foxe could not have spoken of 'the whole church of Christ, namely . . . the church of England',¹ had not the queen inherited the imperial authority.

Miss Frances Yates has connected the revival of chivalry at court (which is clearly relevant to Spenser's procedures in his poem) with a rather elaborate emperor-cult of Elizabeth.² This is not an easy matter. Somewhere in the cult there is a nucleus of serious political theory; hence the appearance in lists of early Reformers of such names as Marsilius of Padua and Dante, who called upon the emperor to reform the Church and gave him a certain authority over the pope. But other elements of the cult are harder to define. Miss Yates connects the image of Elizabeth as Astraea with the return of England to 'Constantinian imperial Christianity'; the Virgin returns to the Empire, as Virgil prophesied.³ Thus the Queen, after the example of her predecessor, had united Church and Empire; and the astrological associations of the Astraea figure were available and ingeniously used for imperial propaganda, as, for example, in *Faerie Queene* V.

Similar cults of Charles V, Henri III, and Henri IV and others, indicate that the political value of this theme had been noticed elsewhere. It is expounded not only by Foxe but in the Preface to Erasmus's paraphrases on the New Testament, both books ordered to be placed in English churches. Elizabeth is not likely to have overlooked the special propriety of the theme to herself. 'Let Virgo come from heaven, the glorious star. . . . Let her reduce the Golden Age again', says a character in *The Misfortunes of Arthur*, prophesying the reign of Elizabeth, though in 1588. It is even possible that the eirenic implications of the myth could have helped to conciliate the remaining English Romanists, much as the historians' proof of the ancient liberties of the English church seems to have contented them, at least before the arrival of the Jesuit missions.⁴ However that may be, we must obviously allow for the pressure of such a cult on Spenser's poem. The myth of the queen as Astraeian empress is inseparable

¹ *Acts and Monuments*, p. 998.

² 'Queen Elizabeth as Astraea', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, x (1947), 27-82.

³ Constantine officially recognized this application of *iam redit et Virgo*; see Harold Mattingly, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, x (1947), 19. It is worth observing that the Woman of Revelation can be related, in terms of Johannine astrology, to the zodiacal Virgo (see Austin Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images*, 1949, pp. 202-3).

⁴ M. Powicke, *The Reformation in England*, 1961, p. 143.

from the use of apocalyptic figures with historical significations, and itself involves a strong sense that the whole history of the Empire, from Aeneas to Constantine, from Charlemagne to Elizabeth, culminated in the present moment.

And there is, I believe, another tradition of Empire to be considered. Constantine was venerated as a Messianic king, and after him—such was the potency of Apocalypse and the Sibylline Books—Christians imagined, for more than a thousand years, that ‘the figure of the warrior-Christ was doubled by another, that of the Emperor of the Last Days’.¹

The Church, influenced by Augustine, had in 431 condemned chiliastic interpretation of Apocalypse. So far as learned writers are concerned, it then lay dormant until it was adapted by Joachim and in the pseudo-Joachite writings. Foxe and his contemporaries took the Augustinian view, and Spenser seems to have shared it. He had no feeling for the earthly rule of the saints, for all that he writes of the Golden Age; mutability will end only with the great Sabbath. There was to be a remarkable revival of millennial sentiment in the next century; but Spenser’s learned contemporaries seem not to have given it much thought. There is, however, a more popular tradition, which we should no more ignore than we ignore the popular versions of the St. George legend. It is part of the material which the great epic includes and subdues to its purposes.

Here St. John joins forces with Sibylla, a witness of sufficient authority to be classed, in the *Dies irae*, with David. After Constantine, the Sibylline writings repeatedly identify the emperor with the warrior *fidelis et verax*. Thus, after the murder of Constans I, the *Tiburtina* foretold the reign of another Constans, who would bring back the Age of Gold, reunite the Empire—divided by the Arian Constantius—destroy heresy, and convert the Jews.² Thenceforth the Emperor of the Last Days was an imperial archetype to which heroes might strive to conform. His enemy, antichrist, was readily identified with the current pope.

Professor Cohn, from whose remarkable book I derive many of these facts, shows that certain social and economic conditions favour the rise of such eschatological fantasies. The aspirations of the medieval urban poor—whose social conditions were not so different from those obtaining in the great towns of England in Spenser’s time—seem spontaneously to have assumed sibylline-apocalyptic form. The *prophetæ*, leading hordes in quest of

¹ Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, 1962, p. 209.

² *Ibid.*, p. 16.

the holy city, called every large town Jerusalem and saw the Heavenly Jerusalem in the sky.¹ The whole terrible story—the popular emperor-cults, the massacres, the crazy anti-Semitism—testifies not only to the power, but also to the durability of these images. Cohn can explicitly connect the Brethren of the Free Spirit with modern Nietzschean primitivism, and explain the Nazi revival of a chiliast known as the Revolutionary of the Upper Rhine.² One other element in medieval millennialism I will mention now because it also has modern counterparts, to which I shall allude later: sexual naturalism, sometimes involving secret 'Adamite' modes of intercourse. We know that Spenser shared the official horror of sects suspected of libertinism—Anabaptists, for instance, and the Family of Love—but he cannot have been insensitive to this popular apocalypticism, so closely related to the images he himself was using. Whether he wrote of Apocalypse, of Arthur, or of the St. George all knew from folk-play and pageant, he was dealing with cultural and historical forces of much vaster scope than academic commentary on the Bible.

I mean that his Arthur is not merely a Tudor ancestor, not merely a mirror of that chivalry which preserves the virtues in a troubled time, but also a Tudor version of that ancient eschatological dream, the emperor of the Last Days. Arthur's relation to Charlemagne is well known,³ and Charlemagne made possible the identification of the eschatological warrior with the emperor of the West, and united the myth of the returning emperor with that of the great champion against Islam. But perhaps we should also see behind him all those eschatological emperors, sometimes mere fanatics, sometimes real emperors assuming the role, sometimes kings, like Louis VII of France, forced into it. And, of course, Arthur here does duty for the queen, whose sex is one cause of the extreme diversity of allegorical method in Spenser's poem. When we think of this aspect of Spenser's imperial myth, we might do worse, I think, than to remember the rough side of it: those marches of flagellants and paupers, those inspired impostors. These fantastic eschatological archetypes were not confined to poems; they could be expressed in action.

¹ See also Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans. W. R. Trask, Bollingen Series, xlvi, 1954, p. 8.

² Ruth Kestenberg-Gladstein argues that the expression 'Third Reich' is a translation of the Joachite *tertius status* (*Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, xviii (1955), 245-95).

³ E. K. Chambers, *Arthur of Britain*, 1927, p. 56. For the confusion of the coming of Arthur with the Second Coming of Christ, see Lord Raglan, *The Hero*, 1949, p. 41.

Now it must be confessed that Spenser *complies* with the archetypes. If the archetype of the hero insists that he fight a dragon, Spenser obliges. Mircea Eliade, arguing from many instances, calls this 'the conversion of event into myth',¹ part of the means by which 'archaic humanity . . . defended itself . . . against all the novelty and irreversibility of history'.² And perhaps all the apocalyptic material I have mentioned could be related to this archaic retreat from event into fantasies of perpetual renewal which defeat the terrors of history, or provide an escape from history into myth. If Spenser sacrifices actuality, contemporaneity, to the archetypes; if, celebrating his Astraea, his *renovatio mundi*, he sinks out of history into sibylline fantasy; then he deserves all the reductive criticism he gets. But to believe that, one would have to forget the whole effort of imagination and reason which conferred upon archetypes complex interrelated meanings for that poem and for that time. The achievement of Spenser in that heroic First Book is not to have dived into the archetypes, but to have given them a context of Virgilian security—to have used them in the expression of an actual, unique, critical moment of a nation's culture and history. He looks backward only to achieve ways of registering the density of the central situation: the reign of Elizabeth. *Iam redit et Virgo*. He does not convert event into myth, but myth into event. His mood is acceptance; he welcomes history, not seeking to lose his own time in some transhistorical pattern. Such patterns of course exist; but only the unique and present moment can validate them. As to that moment, Apocalypse prophesied and history foreshadowed it; the mind of Europe—not merely that of Virgil and Constantine, Dante and Marsilius, Ariosto and Foxe, but of the people—expected its coming. Spenser celebrates the Elizabethan *renovatio* with something of Virgil's sober exaltation. It is a phase of no temporal cycle but a once-for-all historical event, like the Incarnation itself—however cruel the claims of Mutability and the certainty of suffering in the Last Days.

This acceptance of history—this reduction of dream to providential event—is very remote from the popular chiliasm, which, in Eliade's formula, amounts to a prohibition of history 'through a reintegration of human societies within the horizon of archetypes and their repetition'.³ One might say that Spenser, like Virgil, celebrates the end of the need for such subterfuge: there will be no *ekpyrosis*, the city is eternal. The consequences are not

¹ *Eternal Return*, p. 39.

² *Ibid.*, p. 48.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

all gay. At the end of Eliade's book the dilemma is projected as a dialogue between archaic and modern man; the passage bears a striking though unconscious resemblance to the *Mutabilitie* cantos, and ends with a choice between Christianity and despair which echoes Spenser's fragmentary last stanzas. To reject the archetypes is to live in the existential complexity of a hard world.

We have experienced in our own times a tendency for the archetypes and cycles to reassert their attractiveness. Cohn records the rebirth of the medieval eschatological fantasies, for instance in Nietzscheanism and Nazism, where, among other symptoms, there was the kind of anti-Semitism which identifies the Jews as the demonic host which must be destroyed in the Last Days before the *tertius status* or thousand-year Reich. Eliade also notices this panic flight into archaism. In literature, as I have argued elsewhere, it is especially evident that the old patterns recur; Yeats, for example, has his archetypes and cycles, his eschatological fantasies of violence upon horses in the Last Days, his harsh masculine millennium of princes and viziers, his numerological speculations about the year 1927. (The bewilderment he felt, in common with Æ, at the failure of that year to be sufficiently catastrophic has many medieval parallels.) Yeats speaks of his systematized fantasy, in a famous phrase, as an attempt 'to hold in a single thought reality and justice';¹ it is a saying much more relevant to *The Faerie Queene* than to *A Vision*, that headlong flight into archetype and cycle (though it applies to some of the poems). Joyce borrowed his cycles from Mme Blavatsky.² Henry Miller testifies to the continuance of these tendencies in the *avant-garde* of our own time.

I remember at this point the character Lebedev in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*. In his view, the European railway system was a disastrous consequence of the fall of 'the star called Wormwood' (Rev. viii. 11). 'The whole spirit of the last few centuries, taken as a whole, sir, in its scientific and practical application, is perhaps really damned, sir!' But as Lebedev, comic expositor of antichrist, proceeds, the fun dies away. Things, we feel the message coming through, really are falling apart. In *War and Peace*, on the other hand, apocalyptic prophecy is only a whimsical trick of characterization. Now, in the books which pour out to prove that the great English poets were all 'adepts' of the 'tradition', we hear the voice of Lebedev, not that of Tolstoy. And in

¹ *A Vision*, 1961, p. 25.

² See Clive Hart, *Structure and Motif in Finnegans Wake*, 1962, especially cap. 2.

seminal works of modernist poetry, in *The Waste Land* and *The Cantos*, we find ourselves comfortably close to the archetypes.

This is a position very unfavourable to Spenser. His poem is not a decorated anteroom through which initiates pass on their way to some inner chamber where they will find the archetypes, or Mr. Joseph Campbell's 'monomyth'.¹ Professor Frye, acting on his belief that 'myths explain the structural principles behind familiar literary facts',² provides a brief and brilliant account of *Faerie Queene* I. There is, I think, little to be said against it, considered as part of his classification of the world of literature in terms of a physics of archetype; but in so far as this is all he will say about the work, there is a huge, indeed fatal, reduction of the work's actual complexity, its 'presence'. My objection is very similar to that brought by Miss Helen Gardner against Dr. Austin Farrer's archetypal reduction of St. Mark's Gospel: she says that it 'evaporates St. Mark's sense of what we mean by historical reality'.³ In Spenser this is equally a sense of the uniqueness of the moment celebrated; it acquires a timeless and unrepeatable quality, and the event transcends the archetype.

In the last part of this paper I will try to sharpen the contrast between Spenser's acceptance of history, and the modern rejection of it in favour of the archetypes, by returning to the themes of Apocalypse and their use by a single eminent modern author who was obsessed by them, namely D. H. Lawrence.

Lawrence's interest in the theme, as he observes in his last book, *Apocalypse*,⁴ was lifelong. It began with the chapel hymns of his childhood. During the war the language of apocalypse colours his constant lamentation, which has a strong flavour of seventeenth-century puritanism: the world is in a rapid decline; it will be renewed; God's Englishmen will have much to do with the *renovatio* that follows the disasters of the Last Days.⁵ In a letter to Bertrand Russell he is positive about the coming resurrection.⁶ As for himself, he is 'drowning swiftly', he informs Lady Ottoline Morrell, 'under this last wave of time, this bursten flood'.⁷ In the Irish Rebellion of 1916 he hears 'the passing bell of this present death'.⁸

¹ *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 1949; and see E. Honig, *Dark Conceit*, 1960, especially cap. 3.

² *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 215.

³ *The Limits of Literary Criticism*, 1956, p. 33.

⁴ 1932.
⁵ See the sermon-like letter to Lady Cynthia Asquith in *Collected Letters*, ed. H. T. Moore, 1962, p. 342; and the predictions of doom in another to the same correspondent, p. 378.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 346.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 378.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 451.

I ought to explain that I am here concerned with what I consider to be the shabbiest aspect of Lawrence's mind, its dark side; and I hope I may ask you to assume that I have a proper respect for him when, in his true vein, he celebrates life and quickness. Yet, as Frederick Carter observes, occultism is 'an important and significant side of his genius',¹ however it may be glossed over by some expositors. And the fact is that he was more susceptible to than critical of ideas, especially if they were anti-scientific; for instance, the passages on archaic sculpture in *Women in Love* are very early, very close to Hulme and Worringer. He moved easily in the current of such ideas. But at that very time he was writing to Gordon Campbell about Celtic and Latin symbolism in a way that makes it clear that he was becoming an adept of the archetypes.² Had he been able to bring himself to it, he would have found congenial some such brotherhood as the Golden Dawn. He studied Jane Harrison, Frazer, and G. R. S. Mead; he read in Theosophy: 'the esoteric doctrines are marvellously illuminating, historically',³ he says, thinking probably of the cyclical doctrines. And from Mme Blavatsky and James Pryse and others, especially the painter Frederick Carter, he developed, in the early 1920's, a new interest in the occult meanings of Revelation.

Mme Blavatsky taught that the author of this work was 'a Jewish kabalist *pur sang*, with all the hatred inherited by him from his forefathers towards the Mysteries', and that this distinguished him from the Apostle John, whom Jesus himself had initiated into the 'Pythagoreo-Essenian mysteries'.⁴ I suppose this is the key to Lawrence's theory that Revelation as we have it is deformed by successive Jewish and Christian sophistications, and that the original text described a Mystery ritual: he could have found support in G. R. S. Mead.⁵ In the remaining years of his life the need to understand the ur-Apocalypse grew more and more urgent, and he sought the help of Carter.

Lawrence did not, in Carter's view, have a complete grasp of the occult material;⁶ but he worked over it restlessly, and in a

¹ *D. H. Lawrence and the Body Mystical*, 1932, p. 5.

² *Collected Letters*, pp. 302-4; see, for 'non-human' sculpture, an earlier letter to Campbell, p. 291.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 519.

⁴ *Isis Unveiled*, 1950, ii. 91, 147. The assumption of separate authorship is common; Farrer questions it in *Rebirth of Images*, pp. 22 ff.

⁵ See, for example, *Fragments of a Forgotten Faith*, 1900, p. 431. He also borrowed Dupuis's *Religion Universelle* from Carter; this takes Revelation to be an account of Mithraic initiations.

⁶ *D. H. Lawrence and the Body Mystical*, pp. 17, 60.

long letter to Carter in 1923 began to offer detailed interpretations of Revelation.¹ In 1924 he wrote some articles about it. His special interest in apocalyptic symbolism colours *The Plumed Serpent* (1926). He was much taken with such matters as the relation of the zodiac to the Great Year, and the heavenly macrocosm, the Man in the Sky, which is a planetary version of the seven seals of consciousness or sequence of ganglia.² He began to read commentaries on the book, including the commentary of Loisy,³ and the authoritative two-volume work of Archdeacon Charles,⁴ whom he derided for suggesting that the Kaiser was antichrist. The text of the work as it stands he hated, because it was 'Jewy' and 'chapel' and offered an underdog's view of religion; but behind the corruptions, the 'Judeo-Roman screen' concealing the myths, he had to admit that Revelation gave him what he could not find in Ezekiel or Daniel or the apocryphal apocalypses: an indispensable pagan document, a guide to the life of image-thinking, to 'a kind of Golden Age', as Carter says, 'his Hesperidean garden with girls and apples and the dragon all complete'.⁵

As early as 1923 he was saying that the Seals are the sympathetic ganglia and the vials 'the corresponding voluntary ganglia' of which Sagittarius stands for the 'most secret, and the most potent . . . the first and last'.⁶ Revelation was, when you got down to the real Mystery ritual, a guide to 'emotional-passional knowledge'.⁷ Eventually Lawrence gave the theme full treatment in *Apocalypse*.

Richard Aldington, in his preface to that book, affirms incorrectly that Lawrence really cared little for this kind of thing, but adds, rightly, that like the Etruscans, Revelation offered Lawrence another way of saying something he believed to be of extreme importance, something he had often tried to express before: this was the hostility between modern man and the

¹ *Collected Letters*, pp. 744 ff.

² Learnt, perhaps, from James Pryse; the notion is fully expounded in his *A New Presentation of the Prometheus Unbound of Aischylos*, 1925; see especially p. 100.

³ *L'Apocalypse de Jean*, 1923.

⁴ R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Revelation of St. John*, 1920.

⁵ *D. H. Lawrence and the Body Mystical*, p. 56.

⁶ *Collected Letters*, pp. 745-6. Lawrence at this stage was more certain of the truth than of the details of the sevenfold system, which he had learnt from the Vedantists. For a clear exposition, see Carter, pp. 20 ff.

⁷ *Collected Letters*, p. 749.

Cosmos in the Christian era, and especially since the Reformation, when Protestants 'substituted the non-vital universe of force and mechanistic order, and the long slow death of the human being set in'.¹ So, under the veil of the Christian, power-envying, logic-loving sophistries of the present text, he found a mystery ritual, a *katabasis*, a Magna Mater split by the meddling editors into two: the woman clothed with the sun and the Scarlet Woman (for under the bad dispensation 'the colour of life becomes the colour of abomination').² The first half of Revelation is the great text of archaic sense-knowledge, a set of images associated not by logic but by intuition. Some such text he had been seeking from his earliest days; he told Jessie Chambers there would never be another Shakespeare because his was an integrated age, whereas 'Things are split up now';³ and this is a view given its ultimate and most elaborate expression in the 'Introduction to his Paintings' of 1929.⁴

I do not deride *Apocalypse*—it is in some ways a beautiful performance, alive and thoroughly Lawrentian both in its assault on the modern failure to 'connect' and in its final celebration of 'quickness'. My purpose is historical description. In any case, as I have said, Lawrence was not unique in this flight from actuality into the primitive. But he was, perhaps, unique in the thoroughness with which he developed his views and gave himself to them. He sometimes behaved more like a medieval *propheta* than a man of his time, irresistible to disciples, willing to seek the New Jerusalem; even, like those tortured visionaries, advocating sexual practices of an archaic or Adamite character.⁵

This aspect of the matter suggests a final confrontation between the first book of *The Faerie Queene* and the only modern work of fiction known to me which also comments upon the state of the nation in terms of Apocalypse. This is *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, first

¹ *Apocalypse*, p. 54.

² *Ibid.*, p. 175.

³ Quoted in H. T. Moore, *The Intelligent Heart*, 1960, p. 94.

⁴ In *A Propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover*, 1962, pp. 13 ff.

⁵ The Brethren of the Free Spirit claimed to possess 'modum specialem coeundi, non tamen contra naturam', identical with that of Adam in Paradise. According to Wilhelm Fränger's study of Bosch's connexion with this sect (*The Millennium of Hieronymus Bosch*, 1952, p. 129) this *modus specialis* was the practice of *coitus reservatus*, which has persisted in later sects, and now enjoys the advocacy of Mr. Aldous Huxley. But in the 'Hell' part of Bosch's triptych there is, according to Fränger, an attack on rival sects in which the Adamite doctrines had degenerated, and he leaves us in little doubt as to the nature of their secret sexual practices.

published in 1928, when Lawrence was in the midst of his apocalyptic studies, though only recently made available for mature consideration. It is clear enough that the novel echoes those earlier Cypriatic prophecies of Lawrence about the rottenness and death of England, the world of the new logos, of 'mechanised greed'. 'Our old show will come flop', as Dukes puts it;¹ and Mellors himself, 'There's a bad time coming, boys, there's a bad time coming!'² It is equally clear that the famous passage about red trousers means little without reference to Lawrence on apocalyptic red.³ (Lawrence could hardly be expected to believe that the value of symbols is determined by context, and he believed red to be the life-colour.) What is less obvious—yet it follows from his belief in using symbols that are not only archaic but veiled—is the direct relation between the amorous action of *Lady Chatterley* and Lawrence's exposition of the Opening of the Seals. These seals, he held, were the seven centres or gates of 'dynamic consciousness'. The old Adam dies in seven stages; at the climactic seventh he is also reborn.⁴ Lawrence develops this idea in terms of initiation ritual: the opening of the last seal is compared to 'a stark flame . . . clothed anew' in Hades.⁵ 'Then the final flame-point of the eternal self of a man emerges from hell';⁶ and, finally, this moment is related to the emergence of the initiate from the goddess's temple, dazed and ecstatic. 'The cycle of individual initiation is fulfilled. . . . The initiate is dead, and alive again in a new body.'⁷ Then there is a silence in heaven.

The seals stand for the ganglia, and this rite represents the 'awakening' of a human body; which, as expert witnesses asserted, is a theme in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Lady Chatterley dies into life. Indeed, the parallels between her association with Mellors and the Opening of the Seals are very close. There are seven significant sexual encounters in the novel (the eighth occurs during a brief reunion in London, out of series; there has been a pause in heaven). I am glad to have my counting confirmed by the Warden of All Souls, who also observes that the seventh is 'for his purposes', as it is for mine, 'the significant episode'.⁸ For reasons made clear by Warden Sparrow, this encounter is different from its predecessors: 'the reckless, shameless sensuality

¹ Ed. of 1960, p. 77.

² *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, p. 315.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 229; *Apocalypse*, p. 175.

⁴ *Apocalypse*, pp. 108–9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 119–20.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁸ 'Regina v. Penguin Books', *Encounter*, 101, February 1962, pp. 35–43.

shook her to her foundations, stripped her to the very last, and made a different woman of her . . . burning the soul to tinder . . . the passion licked round her, consuming, and when the sensual flame of it pressed through her bowels and her breast, she really thought she was dying: yet a poignant, marvellous death'. She has the 'deep organic shame' burnt out, and reaches 'the core of the physical jungle'.¹ The act is anal, Adamite. All this is surely concerned with the seventh seal, the secret, potent Sagittarius, Governor of the organs of Generation, by means of which the sacred fire is stolen.² The astrology of this may be, to the eye of the profane, obscure. What is beyond doubt is that the seventh stage of the process represents the mystic descent into Hades.³ Connie, like the postulant of the Mysteries, must die in this seventh stage. She dies into life, is initiated. The Mysteries, we remember, represented this rebirth by a sexual act. So the modern Dragon, the dirty-white Dragon of the modern Logos, as Lawrence calls it, which reduces the human consciousness and nervous system to a condition of death, is defeated. Connie, whom the vulgar may call a Scarlet Woman, is really the Woman clothed with the sun.

In one respect, at any rate, Lawrence's method here resembles Spenser's; for it is surely obvious that although the allegory is a spiritual allegory, dealing with the regeneration of one woman, it is also historical, and prophesies, or prays for, the regeneration of England. England, he explains in *A Propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover*, knows only bad or 'white' sex, 'the nervous, personal, disintegrative sort'⁴—the sort, in fact, that Lady Chatterley knew before she met Mellors. 'We can have no hope of the regeneration of England from such sort of sex. . . . And the other, the warm blood-sex that establishes the living and revitalising connexion between man and woman, how are we to get that back? I don't know. Yet get it back we must . . . or we are lost.' And he goes on to speak of this necessary regeneration of

¹ *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, pp. 258-9.

² Pryse, *Prometheus*, pp. 100-1.

³ Clearly explained by Carter, p. 21 and p. 31 (discussing the physiological facts).

⁴ p. 115. One may note that Lawrence's preoccupation with 'bad' sex also echoes that of the Brethren of the Free Spirit. Lawrence would have understood Fränger's explanation of the man buried upside down to his waist in Bosch's 'Hell' (*The Millennium of Hieronymus Bosch*, p. 119). The triptych has many other emblems of sterile or egotistic sexuality, consequence of the divorce of 'spirit and instinct' which 'causes a withering of the vegetation forces and an over-development of the brain' (Fränger, p. 101).

England, the religious restoration of 'the ancient seven-cycle' and so on.¹ The two ideas—of personal and national rebirth—melt into each other, in the commentary as in the novel itself. Connie is England and Mellors is Lawrence's Arthur, emperor of the Last Days.

Quoting a passage from *Apocalypse* on the old familiar theme—'We are unnaturally resisting our connection with the cosmos, etc.'—Helen Corke remarks: 'The passage changes into the singular as I read it.'² This is shrewd; and it must count against Lawrence in this comparison that his apocalyptic researches and applications are secret, 'isolate' to use a favourite word of his, and very remote from the main goings-on of the world. It is a well-known observation of Mr. Eliot's that 'a man does not join himself with the Universe so long as he has anything else to join himself with',³ and it applies closely to Lawrence. But we must not forget that in some ways, as I suggested earlier, Lawrence simply develops *à outrance* tendencies of some importance in the literary culture not only of his own time but of ours. He is not alone in that garden of archetypes; not only poets but even as Miss Gardner observed, theologians are to be found there. For example, Dr. Farrer treats Revelation⁴ very much in the fashion reprehended by Miss Gardner in his study of Mark, and asks us to think of the book as made up of images which 'live the life of images, not of concepts' and obey 'imagery laws', not 'the principles of conceptual system'—such images being 'the stuff of revelation' with which theology and metaphysics meddle in vain; they are sealed within the horizon of archetypes, inaccessible to reason.⁵ Such a view certainly seems to entail a total rejection of history, and Lawrence would have found it more to his taste than Archdeacon Charles. Even in *Lady Chatterley*, where it has its place, history becomes part of a private myth. This is despair and flight and unreason; Spenser is hope, acceptance, and intellect.

It is clear, then, that a Lawrentian sacrifice of *presence to type* is no way to approach *The Faerie Queene*. Hence we mistakenly assume that the poem is allegorical in the sense of superficial, or, in uprooting the archetypes, we destroy its texture. Lawrence himself, as it happens, mentions *Faerie Queene* I at the beginning

¹ pp. 116–17.

² *Lawrence and Apocalypse*, 1933, pp. 127–8.

³ *Selected Essays*, 1932, p. 131.

⁴ *The Rebirth of Images*, 1949.

⁵ *The Glass of Vision*, 1948, pp. 45, 51.

of *Apocalypse*. 'I hated, even as a child, allegory: people having the names of mere qualities, like this somebody on a white horse, called "Faithful and True". . . . When as a small boy I learned from Euclid that "The whole is greater than the part", I immediately knew that that solved the problem of allegory for me. A man is more than mere Faithfulness and Truth. . . . Though as a young man I almost loved Spenser and his *Faerie Queene*, I had to gulp at his allegory.'¹ This has very little to do with Spenser; but we may be sure that had Lawrence studied *The Faerie Queene* in detail it would have been by some method akin to that which he used on Revelation, a peeling away of Christian and imperial sophistications to reach the valuable mystery beneath. Such is Lawrence's horror of allegory that he cannot bring himself to say right out what the symbols of *Apocalypse* mean, though in fact they had rather precise significance for him: 'Symbols mean something: yet they mean something different to every man. Fix the meaning of the symbol, and you have fallen into the commonplace of allegory.'² Yet this is the place where he needs to show that 'The book . . . of seven seals . . . is the body of man'.³

The warrior 'faithfull true' means more in Spenser than Lawrence could conceive; and in making of him what he did, Spenser assumed that men can keep their heads above the tide of time, and find in the present moment senses which are enriched, but not absorbed, by the ancient images. We need a better understanding of this sober and confident humanity, of the methods by which Spenser provided contexts in which the archetypes find a present meaning. Such an understanding requires a double effort—we must study the causes of Spenser's exclusion from our serious reading as well as the texts and contexts of *The Faerie Queene* itself. Since I have used Lawrence as typical of beliefs and attitudes I deplore, I may well end with one sentence in *Apocalypse* which my argument endorses: 'The Apocalypse is still a book to conjure with.'⁴ Perhaps the spirit of Spenser will one day consent to be called.

¹ *Apocalypse*, p. 7.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

² *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 297.