ALLEGORY AND COURTESY IN SPENSER

A Chinese View

BY
H. C. CHANG

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PREFACE

SOME introduction to the following studies is necessary. Books about ideas and people tend to reveal more about the authors themselves than their subjects. Biography too often becomes autobiography. Likewise with literary criticism, which much of the time is a projection of one's own aesthetic ideals through the medium of another's poetry. Half of the following studies led the present writer to a recognition of this; the other half proceeded from this recognition and are an attempt to interpret certain ideals in Spenser's moral philosophy and at the same time to analyze the interpreter's own reactions to this philosophy. For the study of a poet, undertaken historically or otherwise, results inevitably in one man's impressions of him. Thus each critic has his own Spenser. In the present case, it were as well not to pretend that the writer's impressions would be identical with those of an English reader. Nor can he claim to express a view representative of that of other Chinese students of English. To admit English or any European poetry into his scheme of values requires on the part of the Chinese many serious adjustments of his sensibilities, so many that he tends to keep this wealth of new poetic experience in some separate mansion of his mind, apart from his store of experience in traditional poetry. His experience of English poetry may be thin and diluted, but it is relatively unmixed with his experience of traditional Chinese literature. This is the more reason why one man's synthesis need not be that of another.

Historical study removes much of this personal element. A view of any subject from some detached point is a valuable exercise and, in so far as it rids us of our many assumptions regarding the nature and purpose of the work of some great poet of the past, historical study is the beginning of all honest inquiry. But historical study has also its dangers. It challenges traditional interpretation, but does not itself interpret. Thus it sweeps away the superstructure of moral and aesthetic interpretation erected upon the works of some poet in a hundred (in the case of Chinese literature, often a thousand) years only to leave a vacuum too often filled in turn by the latest and least tested assumptions, the pet theories of the day. It is possible to

recreate, for purposes of study, the Elizabethan world in its external aspects. It is possible even to re-create the frame within which the Elizabethan mind moved, its pictures of the universe and man's place in it. But these by themselves tell us little, and emphasis on such details is a reflection on our own age: it aims at satisfying our visual type of curiosity, our passion for classification and for exactness. Yet even the enthusiast may hesitate to choose the documentary film as a truthful representation of this age to some future generation. Likewise, present-day cosmologies and psycho-analysis may provide a clue to twentieth century vocabulary and figures of speech, but are far from being definitive explanations of our life. For the Elizabethan mind at work we must turn, not to their conclusions, but to the living pages of Ralegh, Sidney, Bacon, discounting our original assumptions as well as our latest specific discoveries, though in the process of reading our own minds will still be at work. For feelings in the Elizabethans we must turn to their lyrics and to the characters of Shakespeare and the dramatists, but our own feelings will colour our reading of theirs. Though historical study may check, it cannot eliminate personal evaluation.

The attempt here made is to unravel the allegory in two Books of *The Faerie Queene*, 'The Legend of Temperance' and 'The Legend of Courtesy'. In this, the writer is confronted with many difficulties, being, as it were, twice removed from the poet and his age—in chronology and in tradition. Like other students of Spenser, he tried to exercise his historical imagination, to see the poem as Spenser's contemporaries regarded it, as Spenser himself intended it to be read. This implied, among other things, some acquaintance with contemporary affairs and with immediate literary precedents of the poem. From this point of view Book II is relatively well-mapped, and his modest efforts are directed towards Book VI, towards explaining this Book in the light of the chivalric and pastoral romances and of Spenser's Irish experiences. But the story of Timias begins well before Book VI and its interpretation leads inevitably to earlier Books. A little study, in fact, found Timias to be the obvious subject for an exercise in the pursuit of the historical allegory. Hence also the essay on Timias and Sir Walter Ralegh.

Topical allusion and literary sources are discovered through ingenuity and industry. Moral ideals may also be referred to their sources, but their interpretation (if they still possess meaning in the present) is dependent on sympathetic understanding. For this writer,

Castiglione fails to justify Book VI, but Aristotle is sufficient explanation for Book II. But exposition of an allegory revolves ultimately around certain concepts and certain images, which have different associations for each reader. In the face of this, the writer abandoned a more ambitious plan for the interpretation of the allegory of the entire *Faerie Queene* and was led to examine allegory itself as a mode of expression and the mentality which it presupposes in the reader. He thus undertook the translation of the Chinese allegory (with an almost slavish literalness) not only as a parallel study in the ideal of virtue to Book II, but also with the object of discovering the relationship between the mental outlook and the moral ideal. His reflections on the subject are recorded in the comparison of the two allegories on Temperance, which purports also to be an interpretation of Book II. The Chinese allegory, however, is entitled to consideration in its own right, and the introduction to the translation should correct any errors in perspective occasioned by an enforced comparison of this work with Spenser's allegory. It is to be hoped also that this work, which heads the following studies, will be read for its own sake.

Finally, the essay on Courtesy is a personal interpretation with no pretensions to making discoveries. It was long in writing and could not be written until the writer's doubts and uncertainties as to whether he writes as a Spenserian devotee or a distinct Chinese personality have been dispelled by conclusions reached in the comparative study regarding the relationship between mentality and moral ideal and allegory. It represents perhaps rather a considered statement of the writer's own views on conduct than a scrupulous interpretation of Spenser's ideal of Courtesy.

The writer's critical vocabulary is limited, and for this he craves indulgence—not because English is to him a foreign tongue but because, to his mind, to adopt the terms of another, a man must also think like another. The use of any set of terms implies acceptance of certain established or hypothetical distinctions, which for him would sometimes be an artificial process. He has thus generally preferred to be loose rather than rigid in his use of critical terms, and if loose terms indicate loose thinking, he must confess to the fault on many an occasion. A few abbreviated terms, however, need not be ambiguous: Chivalry has reference to that of the romances of chivalry. Confucius is the Confucius revealed in the *Analects*, and the same with other Chinese philosophers, who speak through works bearing their names. Chinese, in the following pages, is to be equated to the

traditional Chinese mentality known to the writer and still part of himself. Its orthodox aspect is well represented in the so-called scriptural (and invaluable) translations of the Chinese classics and philosophers. For the writer, a truer or more acceptable meaning is sometimes found in more critical interpretations of these texts. And so in the study of the traditional Chinese attitude towards vices and temptation, the translations of Dr Legge have consistently been used, but in the study of Courtesy and ritual, passages from the *Analects* are taken from Dr Waley's critical translation. The writer endorses these and other translations in each instance, for his thesis is not usually dependent on any particular interpretation of particular passages in the Chinese classics.

To Professor W. L. Renwick the writer is most deeply indebted for guidance and inspiration throughout his work. In its different stages he has also received treasured advice from Dr M. M. Rossi and Professor A. D. Ritchie, and from Dr A. D. Waley and Professor J. J. L. Duyvendak. He wishes to thank the Librarian of the School of Oriental Studies, University of London, and the officials of the Oriental Students' Reading Room and the Department of Coins and Medals, British Museum, for courtesy, and Dr C. W. Somerville of Edinburgh for the view of his collection of Chinese coins. He wishes also to thank all kind friends who have been induced to read the manuscript of the translation from the Chinese and whom it would be presumptuous of him to name. The writer is grateful to his other teachers in Edinburgh for much kindness; in particular, it is impossible to be a student of English at Edinburgh without coming under the benign influence of Dr A. Melville Clark. Finally, he wishes to thank his friends in the National Library of Scotland, and particularly in Edinburgh University Library, in the incomparable freedom of whose noble upper hall he has been privileged to spend half of his waking hours in his six years in Edinburgh.

The above was written in September 1953; the writer has since had access to the rich Chinese collection in Cambridge University Library. He wishes further to express his indebtedness to Mr John Purves for sympathetic and penetrating criticism of his work, and to Dr A. F. P. Hulsewé for many suggestions and for a number of references and corrections which have been incorporated in the notes to the translation.

H. C. C.

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DNB	*Dictionary of National Biography*
E.E.T.S.	Early English Text Society
ELH	*ELH: A Journal of English Literary History*
MLR	*Modern Language Review*
MP	*Modern Philology*
PMLA	*Publications of the Modern Language Associations of America*
PQ	*Philological Quarterly*
RES	*Review of English Studies*
SP	*Studies in Philology*
VPSI	*View of the Present State of Ireland*, ed. W. L. Renwick

Quotations from Spenser's poems are from the three-volume edition by J. C. Smith and E. de Selincourt. The Variorum edition referred to is the *Works* of Spenser issued by the Johns Hopkins Press.

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PART I

'THE STORMING OF THE PASSES OF THE FOUR VICES'

I

INTRODUCTION

THE translator need not apologize for attempting to translate this allegory, which forms structurally the climax of the popular Chinese romance, loved alike by young and old, *Ching Hua Yüan*, Romance (or Predestined History) of the Flowers in the Mirror. The romance is known to English readers in a single episode, translated by Giles in his *History of Chinese Literature* (316–22) and entitled 'The Country of Gentlemen'. The entire romance indeed does not invite translation, for, though on the surface an adventure story telling of the fortunes of many talented girls, its style and its wit, bristling with allusions, are a great part of its charm. Where the narrative is of no interest in itself, therefore, translation becomes a difficult and thankless task. Its numerous digressions, containing matter which forms the very core of traditional Chinese literary culture, also make translation impossible. These digressions, occupying a large part of the book, are in the form of incursions into the problems of classical texts and their commentaries, of philology and phonetics, of rhetoric and poetry, of astrology and medicine and arithmetic, of music and calligraphy and painting, of gardening and of chess and parlour games. This allegory itself, which stands out from the rest of the romance, is not free from these digressions. But like the work of every Chinese author who lived before this century, even this extract will reveal much of the traditional mentality which created it and read it with appreciation, and so the translator submits it to the English reader as one more specimen of Chinese literature.

It is a faithful translation. The two ideals before the translator have been that of literalness and also that of a yet higher degree of exactness, which is in this case fidelity to the translator's

own feeling regarding what is at once appropriate to Chinese traditions and the English language. The attempt has been to follow now the one, now the other ideal, but the standard for either is relative: literalness gives one a sense of security, but it is only exactness within narrow limits. The many uncertainties confronted by the translator could hardly have improved the allegory in translation. How much instead it has suffered in the process, the reader will know who finds any part of it dull or unintelligible, for in the original the author has provided the reader with a signpost at every turning in his allegorical world. For the many allusions, which are an integral part of the allegory, notes have been supplied where relevant, mainly from Chinese sources, in order that the reader may form a clearer view of the author's intention. Still, even without the aid of the notes, something of the satire and the allegory should shine through: the wit and the incantation may be expected to charm and to move the reader even in a translation. Or else, the allegory must remain the picture of manners which is sometimes all that literature in a strange tradition can mean to the reader of any country, east or west. To present a picture of manners, however, is still a worthy task.

The romance itself is indeed of the stuff of which allegory is made, being an account of the 'Flowers in the Mirror'. With the word 'mirror' one steps at once into the world of enchantment. The reader is thus warned not to look too curiously, and so warned he sees history merging into fiction, and events, supernatural and natural, taking place side by side; for it is a tale of divine natures struggling through life in human forms to regain their lost fairyhood. It will be noticed, above all, that the tone throughout the romance is matter-of-fact. The reader, having been told to suspend disbelief, must accept all as a part of the story. And it is this also which characterizes our allegory and which is the source of its power. There is no attempt to create the illusion of verisimilitude through detailed and precise descriptions which convey the visual images the English reader expects. The Vices are not draped in scarlet: the raiment is here no clue to the character, as in the allegory of the West. In fact

the Vices do not appear at all, for the lesson that is driven home is that our vices are within us and are subtler, being invisible, than our aspirations to virtue.

The story is essentially one of temptation. Its great merit is that it is a story of ordinary life temptations which occur from day to day. Though our ancestors saw gods and goblins in the mountains and in the clouds, the latter-day man can only see the devil in the midst of men and in himself. The message of the story is indeed merely conventional. It is possible to read through the allegory quickly, following only the plot, in order to come to an end of the story in the romance, and the modern Chinese student, having rid himself of the four traditional vices without even being tempted, tends perhaps invariably to do so in reading *Ching Hua Yüan*, for whereas the allegory seems to him mere pedantry, the romance itself is witty and contains much sound criticism of Chinese morality. But the lover of allegorical literature knows that the value of allegory consists not in the moral, which is only the text which it illustrates and interprets, but in the allegorization, which is the illustration and interpretation. The true allegory defines for the reader afresh, and perhaps for all time, the evils, and the good corresponding to them, which beset our way in life, and transforms formal virtues and vices into living objects, of significance in the life of each reader. It so embodies these virtues and vices in characters, scenes, incidents that their appellations, which sound conventional enough at other times, become unmistakable and inevitable. If the allegorist made us see for but one moment, in crystal clarity, one of the many evils within us, he would have accomplished his task. It is from this point of view that the translator regards this extract as allegory, and allegory of a high order.

Indeed to do full justice to the author, the allegory should be read apart from the romance, with an even greater degree of care than is demanded by most other parts of *Ching Hua Yüan*. And it is then that one realises that in the more than ten years which our author Li Ju-Chen[1] (*c.* 1763–*c.* 1830), scholar and phonetician,

[1] See *Hu Shih Wen Ts'un*, II. iv, 119–68; III, vi, 859–70; and biography in A. W. Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*, by Tu Lien-Chê.

gave to the writing of this romance of a hundred chapters, the four or five chapters of allegory (Chapters 96–100) coming at the end, must have occupied him many good months. They do in fact embody some of his maturest thought and his ripest wit. Li Ju-Chen was a man of encyclopaedic learning who served as an official for only about eight years. He was particularly accomplished in the study of 'sounds and rime', i.e. philology, prosody and phonetics, and his work on phonetics, completed in 1805, is unique for its stress on living sounds rather than the written characters. He seems to have retired from public life in about 1808, in his forties, and, having published his work on phonetics in 1810, to have devoted all his time to the writing of *Ching Hua Yüan*, which was probably completed in 1820. At least, from about this time, the work was copied and circulated in manuscript. A printed edition is known to have appeared in 1828, though whether there were earlier editions is not known. The romance with its hundred and more characters is meticulously finished in nearly all its details, so that one is inclined to infer that Li Ju-Chen probably went on reshaping and polishing the work until the actual printing.

The setting of the romance is historical, being laid in the reign of the Empress Wu (Wu Hou) of T'ang dynasty. Wu Hou was a woman of great talents. She reigned from A.D. 684–705 and attempted to found a new dynasty by changing in 690 the dynastic title from T'ang to Chou. Though her reign was a peaceful and prosperous one, in the eyes of the orthodox there was something unnatural in the reign of a woman, which was without historical precedent. In 684, when she deposed her own son, the Emperor Chung Tsung, rebellion broke out against her, led by officials of the Emperor's faction, Hsü Ching-Yeh and Lo Pin-Wang, the latter a celebrated poet, who were aided by their friends Wei Ssŭ-Wen and Hsieh Chung-Chang. The Empress sent an army of three hundred thousand men under Li Hsiao-I, and the rebellion was crushed. Hsü Ching-Yeh and the others were put to death, and Lo Pin-Wang probably perished with them. Throughout the reign of the Empress there were efforts on the part of loyal officials to restore the Emperor, but it was only towards the very

end of her life, when she was eighty-two and very ill, that this was accomplished. Wu Hou was forced to abdicate, her favourites, the brothers Chang I-Chih and Chang Ch'ang-Tsung were put to death, and the loyal Chang Chien-Chih placed the timid Chung Tsung on the throne again. It is around these historical events that the story of the romance takes place.

Wu Hou was conscious of her own unique destiny. Whereas many of her ministers thought her reign unnatural, she herself regarded it as a great marvel in history, and thus she delighted in all that was marvellous in natural phenomena as symbolic of her reign. She would cause flowers to bloom artificially, ostensibly at her command, in order to impress her court with her power over nature. Once when some peonies did not instantly bloom when commanded, she banished the peony from the capital and prohibited its cultivation. The blooming of the flowers at Wu Hou's command is indeed the thread out of which the plot of *Ching Hua Yüan* is woven, for, in the romance, when in mid-winter the Empress suddenly issued her edict that all flowers be in bloom the following morning, the fairies of the flowers decided, after some hesitation, to obey the sovereign of the earth. The next morning all the flowers, though out of season, were in full bloom. For this, however, the Fairy of the Hundred Flowers and her ninety-nine followers, including the reluctant Fairy of the Peony, were banished from heaven, to be re-incarnated. And thus the Flowers became the hundred talented girls, the heroines of the romance.

Many of these girls are born into the families of Hsü Ching-Yeh and the other rebels, and live in exile in strange lands. A number of years later, T'ang Ao, a successful candidate of the official examination who is degraded again because of his previous association with Hsü Ching-Yeh and Lo Pin-Wang, suddenly decides to leave wife and family, to set out on an ocean voyage with his brother-in-law, the merchant Lin Chih-Yang. While visiting many kingdoms abroad they meet a number of the talented girls and bring them back to China to take part in the official examination for girls which the Empress has just instituted. All hundred talented girls are united at the examination in the

capital, Ch'ang An, and all of them pass with first class honours. Together they spend many days in festivity. Then while they return to their homes and get married, their brothers and husbands, sons of the rebels and other officials loyal to the Emperor, plan an uprising for his restoration. They await only a propitious moment, but many years pass before the star of Wu Hou finally shows signs of waning. Then the young gentlemen—for the English reader must tolerate this expression, 'young gentlemen', which recurs in the allegory—begin their campaign.

Their way to the capital, Ch'ang An, however, is barred by four steep passes, guarded by the Wu brothers, nephews of the Empress. The pass in the north is called Pass of Yu-Water (Wine) and is guarded by Wu Four-Thought; the pass in the west is called Pass of Pa-Knife (Lust) and is guarded by Wu Five-Thought; the pass in the east is called Pass of Ts'ai-Shell (Riches) and is guarded by Wu Six-Thought; the pass in the south is called Pass of No-Fire (Anger) and is guarded by Wu Seven-Thought. The Wu brothers are all skilled in sorcery and have set before each pass a maze designed to bewilder the soul of the unwary, though outwardly merely a 'formation', a stratagem in ancient Chinese warfare. When, at the beginning of the romance (Chapter 3), our author first mentions these passes, he gives an elaborate and ingenious explanation of the geographical and other origins of their names in a deliberate attempt to disguise their allegorical significance, which, however, cannot fail to be obvious. The characters Yu and Water together form the character for Wine (Chiu); Pa and Knife together form the character for Beauty or Lust (Sê); Ts'ai and Shell together form the character for Riches (Ts'ai); No and Fire (strictly Chi and Fire) together form the character for Temper or Anger (Ch'i). The young gentlemen decide that the Passes of Wine and Anger are the easier ones to capture and resolve to take the passes in this order: Yu-Water, No-Fire, Pa-Knife, Ts'ai-Shell, leaving the Pass of Riches, as the most strongly fortified, to the last. After much difficulty they capture all four passes and advance to Ch'ang An, whereupon the restoration of the Emperor is effected. It is the storming of these four passes which forms the allegory here presented.