Lecture 164: Saint Jerome Revisited - Edited Version

IN THE COURSE OF THE PAPER on `The Journey to Il Convento' which I read to you a few weeks ago I spoke of our being drawn to one image or symbol rather than another, often without understanding why, and by way of illustration I described how in the course of my journey to Italy in 1966 I was myself drawn by two images. One of these was the image of St Jerome. Since I described him at some length in the paper, and moreover tried to explain why the image of St Jerome - especially St Jerome in his study, translating the Bible into Latin - should have been of significance to me at that time, I was under the impression that for the time being at least I was finished with that particular image and could forget all about it. But this did not turn out to be the case. Within a few days of reading the paper I found myself thinking about St Jerome quite a lot, and the more I thought about him the more significant the image of the old man bending over his desk in his cell, or study, or cave, seemed to be. It was as though an archetype-image, once activated, possesses a life of its own, and forces itself upon your attention, so to speak, whether you like it or not, and insists on continuing the conversation which, so far as you are concerned, is finished. I therefore decided that the best thing I could do would be to write another paper, devoted exclusively to the image of St Jerome, in the hope that once I had written it, and perhaps read it, I really would be finished with this particular image for the time being.

At first I thought I would write the paper when I was back at Padmaloka, and comfortably settled in my own study again. At Padmaloka I have all my books, and I would be able to look up all sorts of references to St Jerome, as well as to the various images and symbols with which the figure of the saint is traditionally associated. In the end, however, I decided to write the paper here at Il Convento, partly because the image of St Jerome refused to leave me in peace and partly because the thought occurred to me that it might, in fact, actually be an advantage if I was not able to look up any references, since then I would have to rely entirely on my memory and my imagination, which might mean that my imagination would be able to play a more active part in the writing of the paper than otherwise would have been possible. True, I might make mistakes, e.g. mistakes in matters of historical fact, but that would not matter very much. There are one or two mistakes in `The Journey to Il Convento'. After writing the paper I realized that although in my short story I had described the figure of God the Father stepping down from the fresco of the Last Judgement I had not, in fact, seen any such fresco. In all the frescoes of the Last Judgement which I had seen the judge was not God the Father but Christ, in accordance with the words of the Apostle's Creed, `From whence he (i.e. Christ) shall come to judge the quick and the dead.' Similarly, after I had read the paper one of you questioned whether Il Convento di Santa Croce was originally occupied by Franciscan friars or Augustinian canons, since he had seen a reference to Augustinian canons on the back of one of the present-day Il Convento's opera programmes. Whether God the Father or Christ should have been described as stepping down from the fresco, and whether Il Convento was originally occupied by Franciscans or Augustinians, does not of course affect the validity of the points I was trying to make, so that so far as the paper itself is concerned the `mistakes' have no significance. They may, however, have a psychological, or even a spiritual, significance of their own, but that is a matter into which I do not propose to enter on the present occasion. Instead, now that those of you who made the journey to Il Convento in the hope of being ordained have had your hope fulfilled, let us go back over some of the ground that we have already covered and examine it more thoroughly. Let us revisit St Jerome.

As I mentioned last time, St Jerome is usually represented either in the desert or in his cell - that is to say, when he is represented in his own right, so to speak, and not simply as one saint among many in an altarpiece or predella - and it is in his cell, or study, that we shall be visiting him. Before doing so, however, let us pay a short visit to St Jerome in the desert. Paintings of St Jerome in the desert exhibit a much greater variety than do paintings of St Jerome in his study, almost as though the traditional iconography was not so definitely fixed and the artist had greater freedom, at least in certain respects. Paintings of this sort sometimes represent, according to the title, not St Jerome in the desert but St Jerome performing penance. What they all really represent, however, is simply St Jerome in a landscape, and this is in fact the best and most accurate way of describing them. Since the landscape was, of course, that of the Holy Land, to which St Jerome had retired from Rome, what the artists of the Italian Renaissance should have depicted was, presumably, the kind of landscape that Holman Hunt depicts in The Scapegoat - a dreary expanse of salt marshland with the bottle-green streak of the Dead Sea in the distance backed by a low range of weirdly glowing pink and mauve foothills. In order to paint this landscape the Pre-Raphaelite artist had to make a journey to the Holy Land, but the artists of the Italian Renaissance made no such journey, and never thought of making it. They simply painted whatever landscape lay nearest to hand. The result is that, more often than not, St Jerome is seen not in the desert, or what the King James Bible calls the wilderness, but in the midst of an extremely beautiful, typically Tuscan or Umbrian landscape, with plenty of luxuriant Mediterranean vegetation and an abundance of picturesque

rock formations. The landscape is, of course, not cultivated but wild, but it is wild with the wildness not of the desert but of Paradise before the Fall. Sometimes St Jerome is shown actually performing penance. In such cases he is dressed in a sort of loincloth, often tattered, and either kneels before, or clasps, a rude crucifix. Sometimes, again, he sits on a rock, his head resting on his hand, as though deep in meditation. More often than not, his faithful lion can be seen somewhere in the picture, usually fast asleep, though in some of the more naive representations of the scene he appears to be sharing in St Jerome's devotions. In quite a number of paintings of what I have termed `St Jerome in a landscape' the figure of the saint was, I noticed, quite tiny in comparison with the rest of the picture. In a few such cases it actually took one a minute or two to find the figure of St Jerome, which in relation to the surrounding countryside then appeared not only tiny but insignificant. What the artists had in fact depicted was not St Jerome in the desert, or St Jerome doing penance, or even St Jerome in a landscape, but simply man in the midst of nature, and in these paintings, I further noticed, nature, in her richness and abundance and beauty, appeared serenely indifferent to the existential anguish of man - an anguish which she was, in fact, incapable of comprehending. Man and nature were strangers to each other. Though he lived in the midst of her, he was not of her. She knew him, if she knew him at all, only as a physical body, and as a physical body he was infinitely smaller than she was, and infinitely less powerful. What these representations of man in the midst of nature seemed to be saying was that viewed from the outside, or simply as a material object among material objects, man is a very insignificant creature. In order to appreciate his greatness, or what an Italian Renaissance philosopher calls `the dignity of man', it is necessary to view him from the inside, from within, as a spiritual being among other spiritual beings, or at least among objects of spiritual significance. In other words, it is necessary to turn from St Jerome in the desert to St Jerome in his study.

St Jerome's study, or cell, is of course often depicted as a cave. The mouth of this cave can sometimes be seen in paintings of St Jerome in the desert, or performing penance, either situated quite near at hand or up on the mountainside, depending on the scale of the painting. This cave constitutes a kind of link between the two different representations of St Jerome or, one might even say, between the two different images of St Jerome, i.e. St Jerome in the desert, or performing penance, and St Jerome in his study translating the Bible. Now I have said that in order to appreciate the greatness of man it is necessary to view him from the inside, from within, as a spiritual being among spiritual beings. But it is only man himself who can view man in this way. Nature cannot do it. She is able to view him, if she views him at all, only from the outside: she sees him only as a physical body. In order to see himself as a spiritual being man has to stop viewing himself only as a physical body, as nature does, and enter into the cave of the heart. To begin with the heart will appear to him as an object, even as a physical object or physical organ. That is why in paintings of St Jerome in the desert the cave can be seen, but it is seen from the outside, since there it is part of nature, part of the material universe. When man, as represented by the figure of St Jerome in a landscape, enters the cave, the cave is no longer object but subject. Man has turned himself inside out, as it were. St Jerome is no longer in the desert. He is in his study, and we are there in his study with him.

The first thing we notice about the study is that except for a few spiritually significant items such as a red hat, an hourglass, and a human skull, it is completely bare. (I am speaking of what may be termed the `typical' representation of St Jerome's study in Italian Renaissance art.) In particular, it does not contain - apart from one important exception, which I shall mention in a minute - any natural object. There are no flowers in vases, for instance, and no food - not so much as a crust of bread or a cruse of wine. Moreover there are no windows and therefore no view, so that St Jerome cannot look out at the surrounding desert when he gets tired of translating the Bible and the Greek and Hebrew characters start dancing in front of his eyes. In the cave of the heart man cannot see nature, and nature cannot see man. There must, of course, be a door, but it cannot be open, for no sunlight streams through it into the cave, which is filled with a mysterious glow of its own. (Sometimes St Jerome is depicted working by the light of a candle.) What the typical representation of St Jerome in his study really gives us is a cross-section of an inner world. In this inner world man is not insignificant, as he is when viewed from the outside, as part of the material universe, and this is why in paintings of St Jerome in his study the figure of St Jerome himself looms extremely large. Indeed, it sometimes practically fills the entire painting. If in the case of St Jerome in a landscape, or in the midst of nature, there is hardly room for St Jerome, in the case of St Jerome in his study there is hardly room for nature. As I have already said, with one exception St Jerome's study, or cell, does not contain any natural object, that is to say, any living natural object, for presumably his desk is made of wood that was once part of a tree and the pages of the Bible he is translating of parchment that was once part of a sheep. One might even say that St Jerome's study contains nothing but St Jerome, for every one of the spiritually significant items, as I have called them, is in a sense an extension of the saint's own personality - as is even the one natural object that the study contains.

This natural object is the lion. He is always with St Jerome in his cell, or study, just as he is nearly always with him in the desert, or when he is doing penance. Like the cave, he is a kind of link between the desert

and the study, the objective world and the subjective world, matter and spirit. How St Jerome came to be associated with the lion, or the lion with St Jerome, I do not recollect ever reading. Tucked away in an obscure corner of the legendary life of the saint there is, in all probability, an episode of the type made familiar to us by the story of Androcles and the Lion - an episode, that is to say, in which St Jerome removes a thorn from the paw of a lion who, out of gratitude, thereafter stays with him as his attendant. Even if there is such an episode, however, the artists of the Italian Renaissance do not seem to have represented it in any way. It is as though they felt that the lion's presence in the painting - whether of St Jerome in the desert or St Jerome in his study - needed no explanation. He was simply there, and he was there not for biographical reasons but for psychological and spiritual reasons that were perfectly obvious to anyone in whom the imaginal faculty was awake and who could understand the language of images and symbols. Translated from the language of images and symbols into the language of concepts the significance of the lion is not difficult to appreciate. The lion is the king of beasts. Apart from man, who in reality belongs to a different order of existence, the lion is the highest of all natural objects. Just as the vegetable kingdom is higher than the mineral kingdom, so the animal kingdom is higher than the vegetable kingdom, and in the animal kingdom the lion is supreme. In the lion, therefore, all the energies and powers of the natural world are gathered together and given their highest and most perfect embodiment. Thus the lion is nature par excellence, which in fact means that the lion represents not so much nature herself as nature as she exists in man. The lion accompanies St Jerome because he is part of St Jerome. He is St Jerome's lower nature, so to speak. He is the Lower Evolution as taken up into, and incorporated with, the Higher Evolution. Thus the lion not only stays with St Jerome in the desert, where he is a natural object among natural objects, but also follows him into the cave - the cave of the heart - where he is a natural object among spiritual objects, or rather a natural object among objects of spiritual significance, and stays with him there.

In paintings of St Jerome in the desert the figure of the lion is often as tiny and as insignificant as that of St Jerome. Indeed, sometimes he disappears altogether, as though merged into the landscape, for since he represents nature, albeit nature par excellence, it is hardly necessary for him to be present in his individual capacity. In paintings of St Jerome in his study, however, the figure of the lion looms almost as large as that of the saint. True, as depicted in medieval Italian art he often looks more like a large yellow dog than a lion, but as depicted by the artists of the Italian Renaissance, who often studied him from life (Italian princes of the period like to keep lions in their menageries), he is in both form and feature the king of beasts indeed. Usually he is curled up quite close to St Jerome. When the figure of St Jerome threatens to fill the entire painting such proximity is a practical necessity, and the artist has to have recourse to some ingenious foreshortening to get them both in. Sometimes, indeed, the lion lies stretched out beneath St Jerome's desk, so that the saint is able to use him as a foot-warmer. Sometimes his eyes are wide open, and regard the spectator with a steady, level stare, but more often they are closed in sleep. But howsoever he is depicted, whether as more like a large yellow dog or more like a real lion, whether curled up or stretched out, awake or asleep, St Jerome's lion represents not only nature as a part of man but also nature as a part of man that has been tamed. Because he has been tamed the lion does not disturb St Jerome in his work of translation, and how important it is that St Jerome should not be disturbed we shall be able to appreciate only when we have a better understanding of the true nature of that work.

Meanwhile, we have by no means finished with the lion, or exhausted the significance of his association with St Jerome. When I first found myself thinking about St Jerome, shortly after reading my last paper, I did not pay much attention to the lion. But after I had decided that we should revisit St Jerome I found myself thinking about the lion almost as much as about St Jerome himself. Nor was that all. As I thought about St Jerome and the lion I found that I was thinking of other instances of close association between man and lion and that their images too were forcing themselves upon my attention. These instances came from both the Judaeo-Christian and the Classical traditions and involved images belonging to ancient myth and legend that were no less familiar to me, from art and literature, than the image of St Jerome himself, and imbued with hardly less significance. To begin with there were images of Samson slaying the lion and Daniel in the lion's den. Both these images came from the Bible, from the Old Testament, and I encountered them for the first time when, at the age of four or five or even earlier, I started spelling my way through Grandmother's Bible. This was a massive, leather-bound volume with huge gilt clasps that my father had inherited from his maternal grandmother. In the front it contained the names and dates of birth (and in some cases dates of death) of great-grandmother's and great-grandfather's children and grandchildren, to which, I believe, my father had added the names and dates of birth of myself and my sister. It also contained numerous full-page illustrations, all printed in the most vivid colours imaginable. Apart from Moses breaking the Tablets of the Law, the ones I remember most clearly are those of Samson slaying the lion and Daniel in the lion's den. In the first, a bright pink Samson wrestled with a bright yellow lion against an emerald green background. In the second, a Daniel in a deep blue robe knelt in prayer while a pale yellow light streamed down on to his head from the open heavens. Around him were strewn human skulls and bones (I particularly remember a set of ribs), while an enormous grey lion

regarded him from the shadows. From the Classical tradition came the image of Hercules and the Nemean lion. The strangling of this enormous lion was the first of the famous Twelve Labours of Hercules, and after killing it the hero wore its skin as a sort of cloak, with the head forming a rough hood, and the paws dangling down in front like empty sleeves. In the case of all three images - Samson slaying the lion, Daniel in the lion's den, and Hercules and the Nemean lion - there is an association between a man and a lion, and in each case the man tames or subdues the lion. Samson tears the lion's jaws apart, Daniel renders the lion powerless by virtue of his faith in God, and Hercules strangles the lion to death. Thus in each case there is a close parallel with the association between St Jerome and the lion. At the same time, there are differences. In Samson's case, he actually destroys the lion. Daniel manages to keep the lion at bay. Hercules kills the lion and wears its skin. The three heroes may therefore be regarded as representing the three different attitudes which it is possible for man to adopt towards his own lower nature. He can destroy it, i.e. repress it completely, he can keep it at a safe distance, i.e. suppress it by religious and other means, or he can tame it and turn it into a companion, i.e. integrate it into his higher nature. The third possibility is represented by St Jerome and the lion, as well as by Hercules who, having strangled the Nemean lion, wears its skin on his shoulders. In all four cases, however, the lion is subdued. Man's lower nature is not allowed to disturb him as he pursues his distinctively human activities.

Once images of lions, and men in association with lions, had started forcing themselves on my attention in this way, there seemed to be no stopping them. Since we still have to consider the significance of the various items contained in St Jerome's study there is time for no more than a brief reference to a few of these images, with some of which you will already be familiar, though you may not have attached to them the kind of significance with which we are at present concerned. These more insistent images come from even farther afield than the images of men and lions which we have so far encountered. They come not from the Judaeo-Christian and Classical traditions but, originally, from the treasury of Indian Buddhist culture. The first such image is that of the Teaching Buddha and the two, sometimes four, lions which support his throne in the same way that elephants support the throne of the Earth-Touching Buddha and peacocks the throne of the Meditating Buddha, and so on. There are, of course, biographical and doctrinal reasons why the throne of the Teaching Buddha should be supported by lions rather than by animals of any other kind, but at present all I want to do is to draw attention to the association, in this case, between Enlightened Man and lion and to suggest that, on its own much higher level, it has the same general significance as the association between St Jerome and the lion or, for the matter of that, between the heroes of the Old Testament and of Classical legend and their respective lions. From the Buddha and his lions to Manjusri, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, and his, is no more than a short step. Lions support the throne of Manjusri in exactly the same manner that they support the throne of the Teaching Buddha (those of you who are acquainted with the symbolism of the Five Buddhas will know the reason for this), but the best known and most typical example of the association between Manjusri and the lion is that which represents the great Bodhisattva as using a single lion as his vehicle or mount. Such representatations seem to have been particularly abundant in Buddhist China, where Manjusri was known as Monju-shi-li and where the Manchu or Ching dynasty - the last of the dynasties of China - supposedly took its name from him. In China, however, either there were no lions or Chinese artists did not care to study them from life, for in Chinese Buddhist art Manjusri is represented as riding on an animal that looks much more like an enormous dog than like a lion. Indeed, under Manchu dynasty the Chinese actually succeeded in breeding a dog that looked like a lion. This was the famous `lion-dog', in the West better known as the Pekingese, after its place of origin. These dogs were semi-sacred, and could be kept only by the emperor, who was regarded as an emanation of Manjusri in much the same way that the Dalai Lama was regarded as an emanation of Avalokitesvara. When the lion-dogs died their skins were made into chair-coverings for the imperial apartments, and I remember my father telling me that his step-father, who was present at the sack of the Summer Palace, had brought several of these chair-coverings back to England with him as souvenirs. Two or three decades earlier, however, the first pair of lion-dogs to be seen in the West had been sent - I believe by the celebrated Dowager Empress - as a present to Queen Victoria.

I had intended that these images of lions, and images of men in association with lions, should be the last that I would allow into this paper, but even as I was writing about them yet another image, from a completely different culture, positively forced itself upon my attention and insisted on finding a place here. Since it is high time we returned to St Jerome's study, and started considering the significance of the red hat hanging on the wall there, I shall do no more than mention this final instance of close association between man and lion. The image in question does not come from so far afield as the images from Indian and Chinese Buddhist culture, but it comes from a culture perhaps more alien in spirit. It is an image belonging to the myths and legends of ancient Assyria, as illustrated by the bas-reliefs preserved in the British Museum and elsewhere. The image is that of a powerfully built man, either a hero or a king, who stands with both arms extended to their full length, so that his body forms a Latin cross. In either hand he grasps a lion by the hind legs, so that it hangs down head foremost with its whiskers almost touching the ground. Once again man and lion are in close association, and once again man has subdued the lion. The

red hat hanging on the wall of St Jerome's study is a cardinal's hat, that is to say, it is a round red hat with a broad brim over which red tassels hang down on either side. In more than one painting of St Jerome in his study it contributes a splash of vivid colour to what would otherwise be a sombre scene, sometimes piercing through the gloom with a rich ruby gleam. As I mentioned in the previous paper, due to his association with the reigning pope of his day, St Jerome was traditionally regarded as a cardinal, and when depicted in alterpieces and predellas along with other saints he usually wears not only his red cardinal's hat but also his red cardinal's robes, so that what with these and his long white or grey beard and the large, richly bound volume he holds clasped beneath one arm, he is a colourful and picturesque figure. In his study, however, St Jerome puts aside his cardinal's hat and robes. Indeed, the robes are nowhere to be seen. Only the red hat hangs there on the wall, where the warmth of its colour harmonizes with the warm orange-tawny hues of the lion asleep at St Jerome's feet, as though to suggest that there is some kind of connection between the two. A connection, indeed, there is. In the same way that the lion represents nature, or the natural order, so the red cardinal's hat represents human society, or the social order. This social order has not actually followed St Jerome into his cell, or study, or cave, as the lion has followed him, because unlike the lion it is not really part of St Jerome and it is possible for St Jerome to separate himself from it in a way that he cannot separate himself from the lion. But though St Jerome has separated himself from the social order - though he has left Rome and come to Bethlehem, to the desert - there is a sense in which the social order, while not exactly a part of him, is nevertheless present in him. It is present in him as his capacity to function within the social order - a capacity which he continues to possess even when he does not actually exercise it. It is his social self, or even his group self. The red hat represents not so much human society, or the social order, as it is in itself, as this social self. For the time being it hangs on the wall. St Jerome hung it there when he entered his study, or cell, or cave, and he can put it on again whenever he chooses to leave his study and resume his rightful place in the world.

Originally, a cardinal was a priest in charge of one of the Roman churches who, as well as running his own church, assisted the Bishop of Rome, i.e. the pope, in the administration of his diocese. (At that time, of course, the titles of cardinal and pope were unknown.) Later, when the pope had become the ruler of the whole Western Church, the cardinals assisted him in the administration of his vast ecclesiastical empire and, though they were no longer responsible for the running of the Roman churches, on his appointment every cardinal was attached to one of these churches in a titular capacity - a practice which I believe still exists. Thus the cardinals were `princes of the Church'. With few exceptions they lived in sumptuous style, in magnificent palaces, possessed great personal wealth, and wielded enormous political influence. Most important of all, it was they who elected the pope, and they usually elected him from among themselves. By the time the artists of the Italian Renaissance came to represent St Jerome in his study a cardinal was a very important person indeed, so that to be presented with a red hat by the pope was the eventual aim of every ambitious cleric in Christendom. All that was well understood by the artists of the Italian Renaissance, and sometimes the red hat on the wall of St Jerome's study seems to glow with a sinister and lurid splendour. In theory the deep crimson of a cardinal's hat and robes symbolized his readiness to shed his blood in the service of the Church, but only too often it symbolized the blood he had had to shed in order to become a cardinal - not to speak of all the blood shed by the Church in the furtherance of its interests and the establishment of its power. Seen in the light of these developments, the red hat hanging on the wall of St Jerome's study represents not just human society, or the social order, not just St Jerome's social self. It represents the worldly ambition whose realization the social order makes possible. When he withdraws into the cave, when he devotes himself to the work of translating the Bible, or to bringing what was hidden in the depths up to the surface, or from darkness into light, St Jerome not only separates himself from the social order and keeps his social self in abeyance. He also renounces all worldly ambition, especially ambition which wears the cloak of religion and professes to sacrifice self for others when in reality it is sacrificing others to self. He renounces all thought of doing evil that good may come of it (the image of St Jerome as I see it does not necessarily correspond at all points with the Jerome of history), or seeking to achieve spiritual ends by worldly or unspiritual means. In other words, the red hat hanging on the wall of St Jerome's study represents the fact that having subdued his lower nature so that it does not disturb him as he pursues his distinctively human activities man separates himself from the social order and its temptations, at least for the time being, in order to pursue those activities in ever higher and more refined forms.

After the red hat come the hourglass and the human skull. These usually occupy a small shelf along the wall from the hat, though sometimes one or both of them stand on the top of St Jerome's desk, which is not a modern desk with a flat top but a sort of reading desk or lectern. According to the dictionary, an hourglass is a device consisting of two transparent chambers linked by a narrow channel, containing a quantity of sand that takes a specified time to trickle to one chamber from the other. When the chamber is empty and the lower chamber full the hourglass is reversed and the whole process is repeated. The significance of the hourglass is obvious. It represents time, just as the skull represents death. St Jerome is translating the Bible. The Bible is a very big book, and St Jerome is a very old man, and he has no time

to lose if the work is to be finished before his death. Perhaps he has set himself to translate so many lines of Greek or Hebrew text for every reversal of the hourglass. Be that as it may, when I started thinking of the image of the hourglass, as it stands on a shelf in St Jerome's study, I found that images of hourglasses from other cultures were far from forcing themselves upon my attention in the way that images of the lion had done. The only images that came to mind were the semi-human hourglass in one of Hieronymus Bosch's paintings of hell and the vague and shadowy figure of Father Time - complete with hourglass and scythe - in various allegorical paintings by artists whose names I could not remember. This relative paucity of images may have been due to the fact that in modern times the hourglass has been replaced by the clock, so that we are familiar with it only in the miniature form of the eggtimer, which measures not the passing of the hours but the two or three minutes it takes to boil an egg. Or it may have been due to the fact that the hourglass was not really ubiquitous in the traditions and cultures of the world (in many cultures its place was taken by the clepsydra or water clock) and that it was therefore not a universal image. Since it was not universal, and to that extent not truly an image, it was unlikely that images would arise when I reflected upon its significance.

But if images did not arise ideas certainly did, and I was soon made aware that if the artists had not often depicted Time in their paintings the poets had often alluded to him in their poems. Within a matter of seconds half a dozen well known quotations from the English poets alone had floated into my mind. The first to come were the pathetic and haunting lines from Marvell's `To His Coy Mistress', where after pointing out to the lady at some length that if they only had more time at their disposal her coyness would be less reprehensible, he exclaims:

But at my back I always hear Time's winged chariot hurrying near,

thus conveying in an unforgettable manner the feeling we get, especially as we grow older, that time is actually overtaking us. This was followed by Shakespeare's memorable couplet:

Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore, So do our minutes hasten to their end.

and by Raleigh's solemn lines, supposedly written on the eve of his execution:

Even such is Time, which takes in trust Our youth, our joys, and all we have, And pays us but with age and dust; Who in the dark and silent grave, When we have wandered all our ways, Shuts up the story of our days.

After a brief interval came the lines in which the young Milton gives touching expression to the mingled surprise and regret with which he realizes that he is now twenty-three:

How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth, Stoln on its wing my three and twentieth year.

From a much lesser poet, but one whom Dr Johnson esteemed highly enough to recommend his inclusion in the series of English Poets for which he was writing his `little prefaces', came the verse:

Time, like an ever rolling stream, Bears all its sons away; They fly forgotten, as a dream Dies with the opening day.

This is, of course, a verse from the well known hymn, `Oh God Our Help in Ages Past', by Isaac Watts, which I remember singing as a boy at school in morning assemblies. It might be interesting to speculate to what extent this verse helped to instil into me the Buddhist idea of universal impermanence.

No doubt many more quotations would have come if I had let them, and no doubt I would have tracked down still more, and not from the English poets alone, if this paper had been written at Padmaloka and I had been able to consult my books. But even the half dozen quotations which floated into my mind when I started thinking of the image of the hourglass, all but one of which I have reproduced here, should be sufficient to illustrate the extent to which allusions to death occur in the works of the poets. It will be noticed, however, that in two, possibly three, of the quotations I have given time seems to be personified or semipersonified, while in the two others he is compared with water in motion. Marvell imagines him as borne in a chariot equipped with wings instead of wheels, Milton as being himself a winged creature of some kind (at this point the image of a winged hourglass I have seen somewhere flashes into my mind), Raleigh as an invisible presence that takes everything from us and gives us nothing. As for Shakespeare and Watts, the one compares the minutes of which time consists to waves that come surging up the shingle, the other to a river in constant flow. (Though Watts's hymn is, I believe, a version of one of the

Psalms, in the verse I have quoted there may be a submerged reference to the Cronos of Greek mythology, who devoured his own children as soon as they were born.)

Thus we find in these quotations not only ideas but also images. True, the images are not so vivid or so concrete as they would be if represented in painting, but that is because of the nature of time itself. According to Plato, time is the moving image of eternity, and it is because time is something that moves that it is impossible to depict it in painting in a satisfactory manner. The best the artist can do is to represent time as a winged old man with an hourglass and scythe; but the wings do not actually beat the air, the sands in the hourglass do not actually trickle down, and the scythe does not actually mow anything. What has been depicted is not time so much as the objects that symbolize time. In the case of poetry, however, the poet not only describes time as winged, or as borne in a winged chariot, but, in so describing it, makes use of syllables and words that are not simultaneous, like the different parts of a painting, but themselves successive. In other words, the poem itself moves with the movement it is describing. Thus Marvell's `winged chariot hurrying near' actually does hurry: it is not merely depicted in a state of arrested motion. Moreover, with the word `near' we actually hear the downward beat of its wings and feel their wind on the back of our necks. In the same way, though perhaps less successfully, Milton's `subtle thief of youth' actually does perform the act of silently filching the poet's twenty-third year: he is not merely depicted frozen in the posture of performing it. Much the same is the case with Shakespeare's waves and Isaac Watts's stream, which actually make towards the pebbled shore, or actually rolls ever on, in accordance with the movement of the verse itself.

From these examples it should be clear that poetry is better adapted to the representation of movement than is the sister art of painting, and therefore better adapted to the representation of time. Perhaps the reason why so few images came to me when I started thinking of the image of the hourglass was that I expected them to come from the visual arts rather than from the performing arts or those arts which exist in time rather than in space and which include literature considered as that which is not only written but also read, whether aloud or to oneself. Such being the case, it was not surprising that following on the quotations from the English poets there should come into my mind ideas about time from Buddhist literature rather than images of time from the Buddhist visual arts. It indeed would appear that in the Buddhist visual arts images of time hardly exist (the demon who grasps the Tibetan Wheel of Life represents impermanence rather than time), and that in Buddhist culture time has not been personified even to the extent that it has been personified in the Classical and Judaeo-Christian cultures of the West. The only really noteworthy personification of time that came to me from Eastern sources came not from Buddhism at all but from Hinduism. It came from the twelfth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, in the course of which S'ri Krishna reveals himself to Arjuna as Time the All-Destroyer, down whose flaming gullet disappears not only the entire human race but everything in the universe. But however deficient Buddhism may be in images of time it is certainly not lacking in ideas about time. Buddhism itself could be described as a meditation on time, or on impermanence (it could perhaps be argued that in Buddhism these two concepts are not distinguished in quite the same way that they are in the West), or as a reflection on the shortness and preciousness of human life. Allusions to time occur even more frequently in Buddhist literature, both canonical and non- canonical, than they do in English poetry, and if I was to reproduce here all the quotations that came to me from this source as I thought of the image of the hourglass they would take up a quite disproportionate amount of space in this paper. Let me therefore quote just one passage, as an example of the kind of ideas to which I refer. It is a passage from the Sutra of Forty-Two Sections, renowned as the first Buddhist scripture to be rendered into Chinese.

The Buddha said to a novice, `How long is the span of a man's life?' `It is but a few days,' was the answer. The Buddha said `You have not understood,' and asked another novice, who replied, `It is (like) the time taken to eat (a single meal).' To this the Buddha replied in the same way and asked a third: `How long is the span of a man's life?' `It is like the time taken by a (single) breath,' was the reply. `Excellent,' said the Buddha, `You understand the Way.'

Translating this idea into the language of the images and symbols of St Jerome's study, one could say that the span of human life is not a few days, nor even like the time taken by the sands to trickle to one chamber of the hourglass from the other, but like the time taken by the falling of a single grain of sand. Man therefore has no time to waste. It is not enough for him to pursue his distinctively human activities, not enough for him to pursue them in ever higher and more refined forms. He must pursue them with full awareness that time is passing, and in the knowledge that unless he works unremittingly he will not be able to bring them to a successful conclusion. If the hourglass is not a universal image the skull most certainly is. With its empty eye-sockets and its grinning jaw it is indeed one of the most universal and most powerfully evocative of all images, and its significance can be understood immediately. Having come from Rome to Bethlehem, to the desert, and having taken up the work of translating the Bible into the vulgar tongue at a comparatively advanced age, St Jerome is not only acutely aware of the passing of time but

also aware of the fact that, for mortal men, the passing of time inevitably brings death. Time and death are inseparable, and for this reason hourglass and skull usually stand side by side on the shelf in St Jerome's study, where he can see them all the time and from whence they admonish him, in the words of one of those Classical authors that he loved too well, that art is long, and human life short: ars longa, vita brevis.

Since the image of the skull is so universal, it was natural that when I thought of it as it stands in St Jerome's study, where it is depicted with such grim realism by the artists of the Italian Renaissance, there should have come to my mind images of skulls and skeletons of every kind, from the skeletons that decorate Christian tombs to the garlands of skulls that hang round the necks of Buddhist Tantric divinities, and from complex images such as that of the medieval Dance of Death, Holbein's woodcuts of which I knew and admired as a boy, wherein death in the form of a skeleton dances with lord and with lady, with prince and with prelate, and even with the very pope himself - indeed, with all sorts and conditions of men, to simple images such as those of the pairs of dancing skeletons depicted on Tibetan temple banners and the pyramids of skulls heaped on battlefields by conquerors like Tamerlane and at the feet of bloodthirsty gods by the priests of pre-Columbian Mexico. So many images of skulls and skeletons in fact came crowding into my mind from the different traditions and cultures of the world that it is quite impossible for me to describe them all, or even to enumerate more than a fraction of them. Instead, I shall describe just one image, and this can be taken as representing the rest. The image in question came from the fourteenth-century frescoes in the Campo Santo in Pisa, which I saw two months ago in the course of my journey to Il Convento. One of these frescoes, which is by an unknown master, depicts the Triumph of Death, who is represented as a kind of female devil with a scythe which she directs against a group of young men and women sitting in a grove, while ignoring the pleas of those who regard death as a deliverer. More interesting still, in the bottom left hand corner of the fresco a party of fashionably dressed men and women on horseback, out for a ride in the forest, suddenly come upon three open coffins, containing the bodies of three kings, one of whom has just died, one of whom is in an advanced state of decomposition, and one of whom is no more than a skeleton. Beside the coffin stands the figure of St Macarius the Hermit who, pointing to a long scroll, reads the party a lesson on the vanity of earthly existence. One cannot but be reminded, in the most forcible manner, of the well known story of how the youthful Buddha-to-be, on driving out from his palace in his chariot accompanied by his faithful charioteer, was successively confronted by an old man, a sick man, a corpse, and, finally, by a saintly ascetic. As if to underline the resemblance, above the figure of St Macarius other hermits are shown living among rocks and trees, in caves and cottages, occupying themselves with simple daily tasks, spiritual exercises, and religious discussion. The significance of the `Four Sights' seen by the Buddha-to-be, as of the corpses of the three kings and the figure of St Macarius, is the same as that of the skull in St Jerome's study. Confronted by the fact of inevitable death, man has no alternative but to devote himself wholeheartedly to the pursuit of his distinctively human activities in their purest form.

From the fact that St Jerome's study contains an object symbolizing time and an object symbolizing death, one might have thought that it would also contain an object symbolizing human suffering, and in a sense it does. It contains a crucifix. As we have already seen, when depicted in the desert, or as performing penance, St Jerome is often represented as kneeling before, or clasping, a rude crucifix. But when at the hands of the artists of the Italian Renaissance the desert turns into a pleasant Tuscan or Umbrian landscape, and the figure of St Jerome shrinks into insignificance, the crucifix either becomes so small as to be unrecognizable or else disappears completely. It is as though the artists who depicted St Jerome's anguish as he performs his penance in the midst of the countryside, or man's existential anguish in the midst of an uncomprehending and indifferent nature, felt that this anguish was enough, and that it did not really need to be duplicated by the anguish of the figure on the cross. When St Jerome is depicted in his study, however, the scale of the painting changes, and to the extent that the figure of St Jerome becomes more prominent the crucifix becomes more prominent too. Nevertheless, the artists rarely give it the degree of prominence they might have done, considering the central importance of the Crucifixion in the Christian scheme of salvation, and sometimes they do not depict it at all. Again it is as though they were trying to universalize the image of St Jerome in his study, and therefore wanted to universalize the various images and symbols with which he is traditionally associated. When they do actually depict the crucifix, which usually either stands on the top of St Jerome's desk, or hangs on the wall facing him, what confronts the saint's gaze, when he lifts his eyes from the volume that lies before him, is not so much a representation of the crucified Saviour as an image of suffering humanity. In withdrawing into his cave, or study, St Jerome has in fact taken the sufferings of humanity with him, and it is in order to help alleviate those sufferings that he is translating the volume that lies before him. Even though man may separate himself from the social order and its temptations, and even though he may devote himself to the wholehearted pursuit of his distinctively human activities in their highest and most refined, as well as in their purest, form, it is impossible for him to forget the problem of human suffering. Indeed, it is to solve the problem of human suffering that man withdraws from the social order in the first place.

The volume that lies before St Jerome and which he is translating is, of course, the Bible, and together with the figure of St Jerome himself, as he leans over it with slightly knitted brows, it naturally constitutes the centre of interest of paintings of St Jerome in his study of every type. As depicted by the artists of the Italian Renaissance it is no mere pocket volume but an enormous folio of practically the same dimensions as the desk on which, or against which, it rests. Sometimes it is closed, as though St Jerome was on the point of opening it and beginning his day's work, or even as though he would never be able to open it and that it was, in fact, impossible to translate. Much more usually, however, it lies wide open, and we can see on either page the double columns of black text enclosed, more often than not, within a colourful border of interlacing foliage, flowers, and fruit, from which peep out strange figures of animals and men; we can see the illuminated capital letters, some of them of burnished gold; we can see the figures of prophets, saints, and angels. In short, from the size of the volume, and the extent to which it has been decorated, we can see its importance. `What you love, you adorn,' a very wise friend of mine once said to me, many years ago (he was referring to my literary style, which some of my more austere friends considered much too `flowery'), and the fact that the artists of the Italian Renaissance adorned the volume that lies on St Jerome's desk shows that they loved it. But what did they love? Technically, of course, the volume is the Christian Bible, beginning with the Book of Genesis and ending with the Revelation of St John the Divine, for it is the Christian Bible that St Jerome is translating. But the word `bible' (from Byblos, the city where the papyrus used by the Greeks for the manufacture of books came from), means book, so that The Bible simply means The Book. What the artists of the Italian Renaissance depicted - what they loved and adorned - was therefore not so much the traditional Christian Bible as the Bible in a more universal sense. The volume that lies on St Jerome's desk is in reality the book par excellence. It is the archetypal book. But what is a book?

The answer to this question can be found, at least by implication, in an image or symbol with which you are all familiar: the image of the Wheel of Life, particularly as depicted in Tibetan Buddhist art. The Wheel of Life consists of four concentric circles, the third of which (reckoning from the hub outwards) is divided into five or six segments, one for each of the five or six principal classes of sentient beings. In each segment there appears a Buddha of a certain colour, who bears in his hands an object that is of special significance to the things of that class or `world'. The Buddha who appears among the animals, or in the animal world, is light blue in colour, and bears in his hands a book. This book is not a Western-style volume but one of the Indo-Tibetan type, that is to say, it consists of a stack of loose oblong sheets held between two wooden boards of roughly the same dimensions. Sometimes the sheets are connected by strings passed through holes punched at either end, two or three inches from the edge. These details are not visible in actual paintings of the Wheel of Life, but the object the light blue Buddha bears in his hands is clearly a book of the Indo-Tibetan type just described, and he is clearly offering it to the different kinds of animals by whom he is surrounded. The book symbolizes knowledge, both sacred and profane, for it is knowledge that distinguishes man from the animals, so that if animals want to become human beings they must acquire knowledge. Here by `animals' is meant not only animals in the literal sense but also those animal-like human beings whose interests are confined to food, sex, and sleep, and who are devoid of knowledge in the sense of having no consciousness other than that of the sense-objects that confront them in the present moment. The reason why it is the book that symbolizes knowledge, rather than any other object, is that it is by means of the book - which is essentially a device for the preservation and transmission of information - that we are enabled to extend our consciousness far beyond the limits imposed by our own individual experience. By means of the book we are enabled to transcend time and space and to communicate with human beings living in other ages and other climes, many of whom are far more highly developed than we are. We are enabled to enter into their experiences, and to share their knowledge. Thus the book is the golden key to the treasury of human culture. The book makes us more truly human. Hence it is not surprising that the object which the light blue Buddha offers to the animals should be a book, as representing the means by which they will rise to the human level and enter the human world. Similarly, it is not surprising that the mighty volume that lies on St Jerome's desk should be not so much the traditional Christian Bible as the Bible in a more universal sense, and not surprising that the artists of the Italian Renaissance, when depicting St Jerome in his study, should have adorned it to the best of their ability.

But if the volume that lies on St Jerome's desk is, in reality, the book par excellence, or the archetypal book, what is it that St Jerome is translating? In what sense can he be said to translate at all? According to Christian tradition, which in this case is based on the facts of history, St Jerome is translating the Bible, and on this level there is no difficulty. St Jerome is translating the Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament into the Latin of what came to be known as the Vulgate. But if the Bible means The Book, and if The Book symbolizes knowledge, what is it that St Jerome translates, or in what sense does he translate? In other words, how does one translate knowledge? What does one translate it into? Obviously, knowledge can be translated only into knowledge, just as one language can be translated only into another language, so that if knowledge is to be translated there must be another knowledge for

it to be translated into, just as if a language, i.e. a text in one language, is to be translated there must be another language for it to be translated into. Thus translation implies plurality, whether of languages or of knowledges, and to speak of translating knowledge is therefore to speak of different kinds of knowledge. These kinds can be differentiated either horizontally or vertically. Differentiated horizontally, knowledge is either conceptual or symbolic, i.e. either a knowledge of concepts or a knowledge of symbols or images. Differentiated vertically, it consists of a knowledge of sense-objects, a knowledge of ideas or mental objects, a knowledge of archetypes, and a knowledge of ultimate spiritual realities. Knowledge of the highest kind is identical with its object. From all this it is clear that knowledge is translated either from one mode to another, as when what was expressed in terms of symbols and images is expressed in terms of concepts, or vice versa, or when it is translated from one degree to another, as when knowledge of ultimate spiritual realities is translated into knowledge of archetypes, or knowledge of archetypes into knowledge of ideas or mental objects. Since the Bible on St Jerome's desk is the book par excellence, it follows that the knowledge which it symbolizes will be knowledge par excellence, i.e. knowledge of ultimate spiritual realities. Thus St Jerome is translating in the sense that he is translating knowledge of ultimate spiritual realities into knowledge of the archetypes, and knowledge of the archetypes into knowledge of ideas or mental objects, so that those who have risen no higher than the level of ideas or mental objects will be given at least some intimation of the existence of those archetypes and those ultimate spiritual realities and be inspired to orient themselves accordingly.

To be a translator in this sense is to be more than a translator. It is to be an interpreter: an interpreter of one degree of knowledge, or one level of reality, to another. It is to be, even, a mediator between different planes of existence or different worlds. A parallel to the figure of St Jerome as translator in this more exalted sense is to be found within the Buddhist tradition in the slightly earlier figure of the great sage Nagarjuna, the Second Founder of Buddhism, who after retrieving the `Perfection of Wisdom' Sutra from the kingdom of the nagas, where the Buddha had deposited it, not only propagated it far and wide but also expounded its teaching in numerous works of his own, thus inaugurating a new era in the history of Buddhism. According to Buddhist tradition, the kingdom of the nagas is situated in the depths of the ocean, and Tibetan Buddhist art loves to depict the saffron-robed figure of Nagarjuna, wearing the pointed cap of a master of the Tripitaka or `Three Collections' of Buddhist scriptures, seated on a raft in mid-ocean and receiving the massive Indo-Tibetan type volume of the `Perfection of Wisdom Sutra' from the hands of the mermaid-like naga princess who has brought it up to him from the palace of the naga king, where it has lain concealed for more than a thousand years (according to modern historical research, more than five hundred years). Since the ocean symbolizes deeper levels of knowledge (what is seen externally as `higher' is seen internally as `deeper'), the kingdom of the nagas symbolizes the realm of ultimate spiritual realities, and the significance of Nagarjuna's achievement consists in the fact that he has made the knowledge of those realities accessible to ordinary human consciousness by `translating' it into knowledge of ideas or mental objects - at least to the extent that the limitations of that kind of knowledge permit. Thus Nagarjuna is an interpreter of one degree of knowledge, or one level of reality, to another. He is a mediator between the plane or world of the nagas and the human plane or world, or between the world of the Buddhas and the world of ordinary, unenlightened men and women. He is a human - as distinct from an archetypal - Bodhisattva, mysteriously hovering between the transcendental and the mundane.

Besides providing a parallel to the figure of St Jerome, the more remote and legendary figure of Nagarjuna as the retriever and propagator of the `Perfection of Wisdom Sutra' enables us to appreciate, perhaps more deeply than would otherwise have been possible, the significance of the image of St Jerome as the translator not simply of the Bible in the traditional Christian sense but as the `translator' - or the interpreter - of one degree of knowledge, or one level of reality, into another. There are, of course, within the Buddhist tradition, other parallels to the figure of St Jerome as translator in the more exalted sense with which we are at present concerned. There is the figure of Kumarajiva, who was almost the exact contemporary of St Jerome, and the figure of Yuan Chwang, who lived about two hundred years later, both of whom in addition to translating Buddhist scriptures from Sanskrit into Chinese explained them in Chinese for the benefit of Chinese audiences. To the best of my knowledge, the figure of Yuan Chwang in his study, after his return from India, is not depicted by the artists of the T'ang and Sung dynasties with nearly the same frequency that the image of St Jerome in his study, after his retirement from Rome to Bethlehem, is depicted by the artists of the Italian Renaissance. I did, however, once see a block print (as I think it was) of Yuan Chwang seated cross-legged behind a low desk across which lies a long scroll on which, with brush poised and a thoughtful expression on his face, he is inscribing row after vertical row of Chinese characters - presumably the text of one of the sutras he has translated. Paintings of Yuan Chwang on his way back to China are fortunately more common. One of the best of them depicts the great translator in the guise of a pilgrim, with robes girt to the knee, and a staff in his hand. His whole body is bent forward, partly because of the weight of all the books and images he is carrying on his back, and partly because of his eagerness to complete his journey. Neither the block print of Yuan Chwang `in his study' nor even the best of the paintings of Yuan Chwang as pilgrim give us, however, any reason to

suppose that the artists of the T'ang and Sung dynasties ever saw in either of these figures anything that would have enabled them to transcend the facts of the immediate historical situation and to transform the figure of Yuan Chwang into an image of universal significance. Whether they ever saw anything in any of the other famous figures in Chinese Buddhist history that would have enabled them to transform them in this way, by concentrating on one crucial and representative episode in their career, it would be interesting to inquire.

But perhaps we have strayed too far away from the image of St Jerome in his study, or cell, or cave, as depicted by the artists of the Italian Renaissance, and in any case it is time we started drawing together the main threads of this investigation. Before we do so, however, there is one more point on which I would like to touch. Speaking of the different kinds of knowledge, I said that knowledge of the highest kind was identical with its object. By knowledge of the highest kind I meant, of course, knowledge of ultimate spiritual realities or, in other words, knowledge of nirva-na or knowledge of Enlightenment, which is identical with its `object' because, at this level of reality, the difference between subject and object no longer obtains. But all knowledge is, in a sense, identical with its object, since otherwise knowledge would in fact be impossible. Thus when one `translates' knowledge of one degree into knowledge of another degree, as when one translates knowledge of archetypes into knowledge of ideas or mental objects, one is not only `translating' the archetypes as, so to speak, objects completely distinct and separate from oneself. One is also translating them as, to some extent, identical with oneself. In other words, one is translating what one has experienced on one level of consciousness into terms appropriate to another level of consciousness. One brings what one has experienced on the mountain top down into the valley or, to change the metaphor, one brings what one has experienced in the depths up to the surface, from darkness into light. It is in this bringing down, or bringing up, of what one has experienced on the heights, or in the depths, of one's own being, and giving it concrete form, as St Jerome does when be produces the Vulgate, that the essence of creativity consists. St Jerome is therefore not only the Translator and Interpreter but also the Creator and Artist, and because he is the Creator and Artist he is the Individual, that is to say, the True Individual; for the corollary of the fact that all knowledge is, in a sense, identical with its object, and that what one translates is one level of one's own being into another, is that all `translation' is essentially an individual activity and, in a sense, even a solitary activity.

It is because the Translator is also the Individual, as well as the Interpreter and the Creator, that the artists of the Italian Renaissance, in depicting St Jerome in his study, depict him as having no companion except the lion, who in any case represents his own lower nature. The fact that they depict him in this way is all the more significant in that it is at variance with both ecclesiastical tradition and the facts of history. When St Jerome left Rome and went to live in the Holy Land he did not go alone but accompanied by a number of disciples, prominent among whom were a devout Roman matron and her daughter who, between them, were responsible for the construction of the small monastic establishment in Bethlehem where St Jerome eventually settled and where he translated the Bible. It would not have been difficult, therefore, for the artists of the Italian Renaissance to depict St Jerome with these two ladies, thanks to whose generosity he was able to carry on his work, as well as with the various personal attendants, research assistants, and amanuenses upon whose services he was likewise dependent. Yet they never did so. Instead, they chose to depict him in a study that, except for a few significant items such as a red hat, an hourglass, and a human skull, was completely bare, and they chose to depict him alone. From this it is obvious that in depicting the figure of St Jerome what they - or perhaps they and their patrons - were in fact doing was working, whether consciously or unconsciously, towards the creation of an image of universal significance. What the artists of the Italian Renaissance depict is, therefore, not so much St Jerome in his study, translating the Bible, as man in the cave of his own heart where, having subdued his lower nature and separated himself from the social order, he devotes himself to the pursuit of his distinctively human activities. What they depict is man as Interpreter and Creator, bringing up into consciousness what he has experienced in the depths of his own being and giving it appropriate expression for the benefit of all. What they depict, and what I have tried in this paper to show them as depicting, is man as a spiritual being who, in the shadow of time and death, strives to fathom the mystery of existence.