



Apocalypse

D.H. Lawrence , Mara Kalnins (Annotations)

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Written during the winter of 1929-30 and his last major work, *Apocalypse* is Lawrence's radical criticism of the political, religious and social structures that have shaped Western civilization. In his view the perpetual conflict within man, in which emotion, instinct and the senses vie with the intellect and reason, has resulted in society's increasing alienation from the natural world. Yet Lawrence's belief in humanity's power to regain the imaginative and spiritual values which alone can revitalize our world also makes *Apocalypse* a powerful statement of hope. Presenting his thoughts on psychology, science, politics, art, God and man, and including a fierce protest against Christianity, *Apocalypse* is Lawrence's last testament, his final attempt to convey his vision of man and of the cosmos.

Apocalypse Details

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From Reader Review Apocalypse for online ebook

Sarah Magdalene says

This is a hard book to review, because it's quite short and yet every single paragraph is bristling with ideas. He's already reduced what he has to say to a sweet perfection. This is one of his trademarks. Technically so concise and yet so poetic.

Basically he is discussing the anomaly that is the Book of Revelations, and how poorly it fits into what purports to be a Christian gospel. He traces the pagan roots of all the symbolism and discusses the mind set of it's authors and of it's audience.

In doing so he presents a consummate critique of Christianity and of our modern democratic system. He nails (so to speak) the reason why Christianity has come so far from being a religion of love. In fact he considers Christ and his doctrines to be purely relevant for the actuated individual (who is a rare freak), and completely inappropriate for the collective as a whole, who he considers as a collection of fragments. As soon as Christianity became a collective entity it started to degenerate. And the writings of the Apocalypse predict and describe what it has become. Really it is all very much connected to our inability to live sustainably on the earth. Our mass suicidal tendencies, our half dead existences, it's all explained so cleverly. It's a relief to realize you were quite right to feel this all instinctively. That someone else has noticed.

I love his use of symbolism. The narrative of human history told through various coloured dragons especially. But so much inspiration. I don't think any book has ever inspired me more.

Hotspur says

Oh D.H. Lawrence! What a man. An author who put his soul into his books--his anger and bile; his egotism; his flaws; his sexuality; his acute perception; his mother issues; his father issues; his issues with women; and so on...

This is a second reading years later. On this reading, I felt like I was hearing an angry sick man ranting at me with at times second rate Nietzschean ideas. Lawrence's analysis of the actual work of the apocalypse in the last chapters is rather weak, and obviously they are ravings.

Yet...they are incredibly interesting ravings, in which he makes many excellent points that stir the stomach (or the solar plexus in homage to Lawrence) and the soul, deep down into ones subconscious. I put this down, and I felt an energy--a sense of freedom, and that irascible pagan spirit of Lawrence. He was dying and flawed, but free and alive to the very end, embodying all of life's paradoxes. Again, what a man and an author. Every time I read his work (and even his ravings), I feel a different perspective of life.

Ronald Wise says

This was definitely not what I expected of a book by D. H. Lawrence, but thanks to a lengthy and informative introduction by Richard Aldington, I could appreciate the significance of this final work, as the author was suffering declining health before his death in 1930. The introduction was written by British writer and poet Aldington as a letter to Lawrence's widow Frieda for the 1932 edition of the book, in which he

recalls their friendship, the harassment the Lawrences had suffered from British prudes and officials, and the common misperceptions about Lawrence and his life.

Perhaps written as a last jab at Christian orthodoxy while faced with his own mortality, Lawrence analyzes the book of Revelations in the Bible. Beginning with the question of authorship, he concludes that it was written by John of Patmos (not John the Baptist, or John the Apostle, or John the Evangelist) while he was a prisoner on the island of Patmos. While framing Revelations as an ultimate Christian revenge fantasy overall, Lawrence examines the imagery in the various sections of Revelations and concludes that its contents originated in ancient mythology, was later modified by Jewish doctrine, and then had a thick layer of Christian doctrine added before final editing so as to be somewhat consistent with the rest of the New Testament.

Out of literary interest I read the Bible cover-to-cover about twenty years ago, and remember plodding through Revelations in a last test of endurance. It didn't seem to make much sense and only showed where some of the more farfetched of Christian beliefs originated. Lawrence's story of Revelations was more interesting, but not enough to even interest me in reading either his or the Biblical book again.

K.D. Absolutely says

David Herbert Richard Lawrence (1885-1930) last completed work before his death was a non-fiction reflection on the Book of Revelation (last book of the Christian Bible), called **Apocalypse**. This was first published in 1931, a year after he died at the age of 45. He died of complications from tuberculosis.

According to Wiki: *"At the time of his death, his public reputation was that of a pornographer who had wasted his considerable talents. E. M. Forster, in an obituary notice, challenged this widely held view, describing him as, "The greatest imaginative novelist of our generation."*

He might have been dying at the time he was writing this book but as written by Richard Aldington in his introduction of the edition I have of this book, *"the remarkable thing is that a book by a dying man should contain so much energy, physical energy. The glow and warmth of himself, as of his very blood and flesh, which Lawrence gave in his books, are wonderful and a lovable thing. There was no literary posing, no dry crackle of witticism, no arid friendliness mind-spinning in his work. It was himself."*

I chose this book as one of my year-ender books because of 3 reasons: (1) The Book of Revelation has always been of interest to me and since I with a Filipino group reading the Holy Bible since October 1, 2010, sometime later this year, 2011, we will reach the end of it with that book. I thought I would like to prepare for that; (2) The word Apocalypse *is a disclosure of something hidden from the majority of mankind in an era dominated by falsehood and misconception, i.e. the veil to be lifted.* so who would not want to see what's behind the veil; and (3) December 20, 2011 is supposed to be the end of the world according to the Mayan calendar so I thought I would like to prepare for that as well *kidding*.

Anyway, D. H. Lawrence made a lot of sense in this book. He gave his own interpretation of who we thought represented the Four Horsemen of Apocalypse, the Four Beast at the throne of God, the Beast with the Seven Heads, 666 - the Anti-Christ and the numerological significance of number 7 and 10. Of course, he may have limited his interpretations on what he knew to be of interest to his readers (he was known for his controversial views that earned himself lots of enemies in the later part of his life) but he was a well-educated guy and the depth of his knowledge on ancient history and mythology were very evident in this work. In fact, I thought that, with my very little knowledge on those, I was not yet prepared for this book.

One eye-opening part that I enjoyed and read many times is found on page 5 and it talks about the difference between reading many books and re-reading those that you find meaningful: *"Now a book lives as long as it*

*is unfathomed. Once it is fathomed, it dies at once. It is an amazing thing, how utterly different a book will be, if I read it again after 5 years. Some books gain immensely, they are a new thing. There are as astonishingly different, they make a man question his own identity. Again, other books lose immensely. I read **War and Peace** once more, and was amazed to find how little it moved me, I was almost aghast to think of the rapture I had once felt, and now felt no more.*

*So it is. Once a book is fathomed, once it is **known**, and its meaning is fixed or established, it is dead. A book only lives while it has power to move us, and move us **differently**; so long as we find it **different** every time we read it. Owing to the flood of shallow books which really are exhausted in one reading, the modern mind tends to think every book is the same, finished in one reading. But it is not so. And gradually the modern mind will realise it again. The real joy of a book lies in reading it over and over again, and always finding it different, coming upon another meaning, another level of meaning. It is, as usual, a question of values: we are so overwhelmed with **quantities** of books, that we hardly realise any more that a book can be valuable, valuable like a jewel, or a lovely picture, into which you can look deeper and deeper and get a more profound experience every time. It is far, far better to read one book six times, it will be a deeper and deeper experience each time, and will enrich the whole soul, emotional and mental. Whereas six books read once only are merely an accumulation of superficial interest, the burdensome accumulation of modern days, quantity without real value."*

Sorry for quoting the whole two paragraphs. This made me question my group's quest of reading all the books included in the 1001 Books You Must Read Before You Die.

BTW, this book, *Apocalypse* by D. H. Lawrence is my 195th book read in 2010. My first time to read as many books in a year for my entire life!

Michael says

Lawrence reconsiders the most controversial book of the New Testament -- the Revelation of St. John -- as a horoscopic blueprint meant to connect man with the cosmos via the unification of body and soul, but one that over time was expurgated by the early church founders to erase all traces of pagan belief and philosophy. It was the last book Lawrence ever wrote, and he may have spent himself putting everything he had into it, all his anti-Christian, anti-democratic, pro-sensuality ideas. As disturbing as some of its undertones are, the power of *Apocalypse's* spiritual imagination cannot be denied, as Lawrence painfully forces the reader to confront how much we've lost by abstracting God into a vindictive, moral judge rather than the pantheistic hypostasis of nature He (or It) once so vitally was.

Bethan says

The best thing about this slim book is that there is some seriously poetic and passionate writing on Lawrence's part, with one or two great quotes, and he does have some amazing underlying spirit, so I enjoyed reading this book for that reason.

Most of it is an argument for that the Apocalypse in the Bible is pagan in origin and still very pagan but just was altered and written over by Jews and Christians, and there is some social discussion on whom it appeals to and why. With the disclaimer that I'm not a theologian nor a Christian, I don't have a big problem with this because it's obvious that the Apocalypse is totally different to the Gospels, is really bizarre and that the Bible

is man-made.

But the rest of it loses serious points for:

- a) Aping Nietzsche, whose philosophy is intellectually stupid (I've written a review on why to *Thus Spake Zarathustra*). If Lawrence had thought more for himself, it might have been better, so that makes me sad.
- b) In one part, for going on about how woman is a source of evil and always a policewoman.. just seems ridiculous and is offensive as well as just stupid. True intelligence would be trying to actually move from simplistic and divisive categorisation where one has projected issues that just causes conflicts: embracing the grey shades and complexity that is more the truth of things. There is not one big simple 'man is this, woman is that', in other words.
- c) It felt like he was being seriously rose-tinted about past civilisations rather than acknowledging that when they worshipped the cosmos instead of Christianity or Judaism they no doubt had problems just as much. It was like he had an idea of how it was or should be and idealised it, which isn't well-grounded in reality. I have sympathy because I can see how he got carried away with an ideal rather than looking more critically at how things work in practice, but I cannot respect it.

So his manifesto as laid down in this book does not work for me. It's a shame.

Nihal Vrana says

It is trying to be an insightful book, but it only comes through as the ravings of an old, bitter man. It is murky, full of bile all the way and feels like one of those self-published books people try to peddle on the streets. If you remove the name D.H. Lawrence from the cover, nobody would take it seriously and discuss about it.

On top of that, the edition I read has the worst introduction ever by a pretentious academician named Richard something. It was about 30 pages, supposedly in the format of a letter to Lawrence's wife but the guy was so pompous that he could not even keep his selected style. It was ridiculously bad. Get a book, man!

Erik Graff says

We're in the habit of reading aloud to one another at Chicago's Heirloom Books. Having done one memoir and two Salinger novels, we decided to move ahead with this, D.H. Lawrence's last work, motivated in part by my interest in biblical exegesis in general and of the Book of Revelation in particular. If it hadn't been for this communal commitment I never would have finished the thing.

Lawrence is no biblical scholar. He appears to have read some material about the Apocalypse of John, but he doesn't furnish sources or treat much of the debates concerning the text. Generally speaking, he subscribes to the fringe theory that the text, as we have it, represents a pagan original, then a Jewish and finally a Christian redaction. On this suspect frame he appends his own opinions which favor the pagan substrate and excoriate the Judeo-Christian overlays. Indeed, most of the book is opinion, opinion which might be of interest to Lawrence biographers as they reveal much about him while revealing little about the text or its author(s).

H says

A tirade against Christianity's political paradox: its message comes from those in power stepping down in humility, but its flagbearers since Christ have been the downtrodden stepping up in hubris. Lawrence uses the Apocalypse (John of Patmos' book of Revelation) as one symbol of pagan power struggles corrupting what could have been a pure religion. Altogether astute judgments. But too angry, too increasingly emotional in tone for the reading to be smooth & informative.

"Because, as a matter of fact, when you start to teach individual self-realization to the great masses of people, who when all is said and done are only *fragmentary* beings, *incapable* of whole individuality, you end by making them all envious, grudging, spiteful creatures. ...

"In a hierarchy each part is organic and vital, as my finger is an organic and vital part of me. But a democracy is bound in the end to be obscene, for it is composed of myriad disunited fragments, each fragment assuming to itself a false wholeness, a false individuality. Modern democracy is made up of millions of frictional parts all asserting their own wholeness. ...

"Democratic man lives by cohesion and resistance, the cohesive form of 'love' and the resistant force of the individual 'freedom'. To yield entirely to love would be to be absorbed, which is the death of the individual: for the individual must hold his own, or he ceases to be 'free' and individual. So that we see, what our age has proved to its astonishment and dismay, that the individual *cannot* love. The individual cannot love: let that be an axiom. And the modern man or woman *cannot* conceive of himself, herself, save as an individual. And the individual in man or woman is *bound* to kill, at last, the lover in himself or herself. ...

"You love your neighbour. Immediately you run the risk of being absorbed by him: you must draw back, you must hold your own. The love becomes resistance. In the end, it is all resistance and no love: which is the history of democracy.

"If you are taking the path of individual self-realization, you had better, like Buddha, go off and be by yourself, and give a thought to nobody. Then you may achieve your Nirvana. Christ's way of loving your neighbour leads to the hideous anomaly of having to live by sheer resistance to your neighbour, in the end.

"The Apocalypse, strange book, makes this clear. It shows us the Christian in his relation to the State; which the gospels and epistles avoid doing. It shows us the Christian in relation to the State, to the world, and to the cosmos. It shows him in mad hostility to all of them, having, in the end, to will the destruction of them all."

Ben says

This book is terrible. For the most part, it's a half-formed, ill-informed diatribe of the sort one might expect a local crazy to direct at the lamppost (or conceivably a mailbox) on the corner for an hour or two. What begins as a criticism of Christianity and more specifically, of that unfortunate collection of febrile ravings, the Book of Revelation, soon turns into its own jumbled mess of nonsense, non sequiturs, gross generalizations of humanity, and confident assertions of unknowable facts about the ancient world. I think Lawrence is really onto something when he boils Revelation down to essentially a revenge fantasy of the downtrodden, and his assertions that our scientific understanding of the world and ourselves has necessarily destroyed something primal and yet fundamental to a fulfilled human life certainly warrant a discussion. But when he veers off into the realm of unsubstantiated claims about, for example, how the people of thousands of years ago felt and thought without any basis besides his own imaginings and intuitions (and preferences!),

to my mind he's just wasting his readers' time. I certainly feel like he wasted mine.

maia johnson says

An interesting read, lots of little antidotes. Like it says on the back of my edition, you learn more about Lawrence himself than the topic at hand. He did bring up some interesting points about the book of revelation, namely possible/definite pagan roots.

Kevin K says

I was curious when I heard D. H. Lawrence had written on the *Book of Revelation*, and this book did not disappoint. Lawrence was not an expert on the Bible or history, but as an artist he has a number of thought-provoking ideas.

First, he suggests that *Revelation* is partly derived from an earlier pagan text, perhaps the initiations of a mystery cult (e.g., Dionysus, Mithra, the Orphics). That idea opens up new vistas, regardless of whether it's true or not. Consulting one of my references, *The Origins of Christianity & the Bible*, I found a wealth of evidence that Christianity borrowed from the mystery cults. The Eucharist is a good example; anyone familiar with the Torah's strict prohibitions on ingestion of blood can immediately see the problem of a devout Jew (Jesus) calling on his disciples to "drink my blood." In fact, the ritual seems to derive from the Cult of Dionysus, as hinted by Clement of Alexandria and Cicero.

Second, Lawrence calls attention to the astral/cosmic aspects of *Revelation* (and religion as a whole). His thesis: "the stars are the very oldest religion." Another very fertile idea. It's true that *Revelation* is brimming with star lore, much like the mysteries of Mithra. And it's intriguing that the deepest and oldest layers of religion are always linked to the sky. Lawrence got me wondering about the constellations of the Zodiac: How old are they? Incredibly old, it turns out. Even the Babylonians knew Scorpio as the Scorpion, and there's considerable overlap between Chinese and occidental constellations.

Humans seem to directly bond with the sacred through the sheer vastness of the visible cosmos, like the farmer in Enrico Fermi's anecdote, lying on the grass and saying: "What a beautiful sky... to think there are some people who say God does not exist." Lawrence captures this awe in a beautiful passage:

Surely one of the greatest imaginative experiences the human race has ever had was the Chaldean experience of the stars, including the sun and moon. Sometimes it seems it must have been greater experience than any god-experience. For God is only a great imaginative experience. And sometimes it seems as if the experience of the living heavens, with a living yet not human sun, and brilliant living stars in *live* space must have been the most magnificent of all experiences, greater than any Jehovah or Baal, Buddha or Jesus. It may seem an absurdity to talk of *live* space. But is it? While we are warm and well and "unconscious" of our bodies, are we not all the time ultimately conscious of our bodies in the same way, as live or living space? And is not this the reason why void space so terrifies us?

In contrast, he describes the impoverished modern view:

We have lost the sun, and we have found a few miserable thought-forms [...] Do you think you can pull the universe apart, a dead lump here, a ball of gas there, a bit of fume somewhere else? How puerile it is, as if the universe were the back yard of some human chemical works! How

gibbering man becomes, when he is really clever, and thinks he is giving the ultimate and final description of the universe! Can't he see that he is merely describing himself, and that the self he is describing is merely one of the more dead and dreary states that man can exist in?

Finally, Lawrence highlights a significant point I'd never noticed about *Revelation*: the destiny of the cosmos. At the end of the book, God annihilates the universe. The material world is so messed up and evil that God has to destroy/erase the whole thing, leaving only singing choirs of good people in a city of jewels. It's a form of hate when you think about it. Hate for the very cosmos itself, by shrill, unhappy men:

How they long for the destruction of the cosmos, secretly, these men of mind and spirit! How they work for its domination and final annihilation! But alas, they only succeed in spoiling the earth, spoiling life, and in the end destroying mankind, instead of the cosmos. Man cannot destroy the cosmos, that is obvious. But it is obvious that the cosmos can destroy man. Man must inevitably destroy himself, in conflict with the cosmos. It is perhaps his fate. Before men had cultivated the Mind, they were not fools.

John Miller says

Lawrence's essays are always amazing--he writes so angrily and so viciously that reading is actually an exciting, energizing experience. He's sort of like the Nietzsche of Britain. *Apocalypse* doesn't contain material dramatically different from, say, *Studies in Classic American Literature*. Both books use other texts as platforms for Lawrence to expound his (again, very Nietzschean) philosophy: *Studies* uses American Lit, and *Apocalypse* uses the book of Revelation. Personally, I prefer *Studies*--I'm not as familiar with or as interested in the book of Revelation. Hence the three stars...the book gets bogged down in the symbolism of the horns and dragons, even if only to assert that it's horrible symbolism.

One major difference between the two works is that *Apocalypse* focuses far more intently on man's relationship to the cosmos; *Studies* is much more about the difference between "civilized" and "savage" man, racial/cultural theories, and the dichotomy of intellect vs. instinct. Read *Studies* to learn DHL's thoughts on man's relationship to himself; read *Apocalypse* to learn his theories on man's relationship to everything else. The last chapter contains a number of postulates about democracy, Christianity, the individual, and the universe; it is especially priceless.

Evan Snyder says

I first heard about this book while eavesdropping on a conversation of two friends over breakfast at PyCon 2015. Their description excited me so much, that I very awkwardly interrupted them to say, "I'm so sorry for listening, but can you please tell me what book you are talking about? Because I absolutely have to read it." Totally worth it. A+ analysis of the Book of Revelation, studying a number of compelling themes:

- * Revelation's call-backs to pagan symbolism
- * its particular popularity among the poor and powerless
- * individuality versus collectivism in Christianity
- * fear and envy as major drivers of Christianity
- * modern man's loss of connection with the cosmos

The last item in particular touches many similar points as Chesterton does with "The Ethics of Elfland" in

