

From Evelyn Averbach, *Minimosis*, W. Trask (trans), Princeton UP, 1953

THE ARREST OF PETER VALVOMERES

what later on came to be called Baroque; and Ammianus, with his much more rigid and intrinsically frozen splendor, has nothing to compare with it. Yet even Jerome's hope, which enables him to rise to such moving lyrical heights, has no reference whatever to this world. His propaganda, directed entirely toward an ideal of ascetic virginity, is opposed to generation and intent upon the annihilation of the earthly. It is only with difficulty and halfheartedly that he allows the resistance, which had then just set in, to extract partial concessions from him. His is a somber fire too; in him too, the contrast between the pictorial splendor of the language and the somberly suicidal ethos, the immersion in horror, in distortion of life and hostility to life, is often almost unbearable. He is not the last to clothe such asceticism and murderous hatred of the world in an extravagantly pictorial style; that remains a Christian tradition. But in him the effect is all the more lugubrious because there is a complete lack of the opposing voices of delight in the world, which make themselves heard in all later forms of the Baroque, even in the most profoundly ecstatic devotion. It seems that declining antiquity, somberly and desperately on the defensive, could no longer produce such voices.

However, even in the Fathers there are texts which reveal a completely different, a much more dramatically militant attitude toward the realities of their time—and, with it, a completely different, a much less baroque form of expression, much more under the influence of the classical tradition. The following text, which I shall use to illustrate this, is chapter 8 of book 6 of Augustine's *Confessions*. The person referred to is Alypius, a friend of Augustine's earlier years and one of his disciples. The person addressed (*tu*) is God.

Non sane relinquens incantatam sibi a parentibus terrenam vitam, Roman praecesserat, ut ius disceret; et ibi gladiatorii spectaculi hiatu incredibili et incredibiliter abreptus est. Cum enim aversaretur et detestaretur talia, quidam eius amici et condiscipuli, cum forte de prandio redeuntibus per viam obvius esset, recusantem vehementer et resistentem familiari violentia duxerunt in amphitheatrum, crudelium et funestorum ludorum diebus, haec dicentem: si corpus meum in illum locum trahitis, et ibi constitutis, numquid et animum et oculos meos in illa spectacula potestis intendere? Adero itaque absens, ac sic et vos et illa superabo. Quibus auditis illi nihilo segnius eum adduxerunt secum, idipsum forte explorare cupientes, utrum posset efficere. Quo ubi ventum est,

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et sedibus, quibus potuerunt, locati sunt, fervebant omnia imanis sinis volupatibus. Ille autem clausis foribus oculorum interdixit animo, ne in tanta mala procederet, atque utinam et aures obturavisset. Nam quodam pugnae casu, cum clamor ingens totius populi vehementer eum pulsasset, curiositate victus et quasi paratus quicquid illud esset etiam visu contemneret et vincere, aperuit oculos; et percussus est graviore vulnere in anima, quam ille in corpore, quem cernere concupivit, ceciditque miserabiliter, quam ille quo cadente factus est clamor: qui per eius aures intravit, et reseravit eius lumina, ut esset, qua feriretur et deiceretur, audax adhuc potius quam fortis animus; et eo infirmior, quod de se etiam praesumpserat quod debuit tibi. Ut enim vidit illum sanguinem, immanitatem simul ebibit, et non se avertit, sed fixit adspectum, et hauriebat furias, et nesciebat; et delectabatur scelere certaminis, et cruenta voluptate inebriabatur. Et non erat iam ille qui venerat, sed unus de turba ad quam venerat, et verus eorum socius a quibus adductus erat. Quid plura? Spectavit, clamavit, exarsit, abstulit inde secum insaniam qua stimularetur redire: non tantum cum illis a quibus prius abstractus est, sed etiam prae illis, et alios trahens. Et inde tamen manu validissima et misericordissima erusti eum tu, et docuisti eum non sui habere, sed tui fiduciam; sed longe postea.

(He, not relinquishing that worldly way which his parents had bewitched him to pursue, had gone before me to Rome, to study law, and there he was carried away in an extraordinary manner with an incredible eagerness after the gladiatorial shows. For, being utterly opposed to and detesting such spectacles, he was one day met by chance by divers of his acquaintance and fellow-students returning from dinner, and they with a friendly violence drew him, vehemently objecting and resisting, into the amphitheater, on a day of these cruel and deadly shows, he thus protesting: "Though you drag my body to that place, and there place me, can you force me to give my mind and lend my eyes to these shows? Thus shall I be absent while present, and so shall overcome both you and them." They hearing this, dragged him on nevertheless, desirous, perchance, to see whether he could do as he said. When they had arrived thither, and had taken their places as they could, the whole place became excited with the inhuman sports. But he, shutting up the doors of his eyes, forbade

his mind to roam abroad after such naughtiness; and would that he had shut his ears also! For, upon the fall of one in the fight, a mighty cry from the whole audience stirring him strongly, he, overcome by curiosity, and prepared as it were to despite and rise superior to it, no matter what it were, opened his eyes, and was struck with a deeper wound in his soul than the other, whom he desired to see, was in his body; and he fell more miserably than he on whose fall that mighty clamor was raised, which entered through his ears, and unlocked his eyes, to make way for the striking and beating down of his soul, which was bold rather than valiant hitherto; and so much the weaker in that it presumed on itself, which ought to have depended on Thee. For, directly he saw that blood, he therewith imbibed a sort of savageness; nor did he turn away, but fixed his eye, drinking in madness unconsciously, and was delighted with the guilty contest, and drunken with the bloody pastime. Nor was he now the same he came in, but was one of the throng he came unto, and a true companion of those who had brought him thither. Why need I say more? He looked, shouted, was excited, carried away with him the madness which would stimulate him to return, not only with those who first enticed him, but also before them, yea, and to draw in others. And from all this didst Thou, with a most powerful and most merciful hand, pluck him, and taughtest him not to repose confidence in himself, but in Thee—but not until long after.)

The Confessions of St. Augustine. Translated by J. C. Pilkington. Citadel Press, 1943.

Here too the forces of the time are at work: sadism, frenetic blood-lust, and the triumph of magic and sense over reason and ethics. But there is a struggle going on. The enemy is known, and the soul's counterforces are mobilized to meet him. In this case the enemy appears in the guise of a bloodlust produced by mass suggestion and affecting all the senses at once. When the defense blocks his way through the eyes, he forces his way in through the ears and so obliges the eyes to open too. The defense is still confident of its inmost fortress, the strength of its inner determination, its conscious will to refuse. But this inmost consciousness does not hold out for even an instant; it collapses immediately, and the pent-up forces which a great exertion of will has so far pressed into the service of the defense go over to the enemy. Let us try to see what this means. Against the increasing

dominance of the mob, against irrational and immoderate lust, against the spell of magical powers, enlightened classical culture possessed the weapon of individualistic, aristocratic, moderate, and rational self-discipline. The various systems of ethics all agreed that a well-bred, self-aware, and self-reliant individual could through his own resources keep from intemperance and that, against his will, it could find no foothold in him. The doctrine of the Manichaeans too, from which Alypius' position was not very far removed at the time, relies on man's ability to recognize good and evil. So Alypius is not overly concerned when he is dragged *familiari violentia* into the amphitheater. He trusts in his closed eyes and his determined will. But his proud individualistic self-reliance is overwhelmed in no time. And it is not merely a random Alypius whose pride, nay whose inmost being, is thus crushed; it is the entire rational individualistic culture of classical antiquity: Plato and Aristotle, the Stoa and Epicurus. A burning lust has swept them away, in one powerful assault: *et non erat iam ille qui venerat, sed unus de turba ad quam venerat.* The individual, the man of noble self-reliance, the man who chooses for himself, despiser of excesses, has become one of the mass. And not only that: the very powers which enabled him to remain aloof from mass suggestion longer and with greater determination than others, the very energy which has until now made it possible for him to lead a proud life of his own—these same forces he now puts at the disposal of the mass and its instinctive urges; not only has he been seduced, he turns seducer. What he has despised, he now loves. He raves not only with the others but before them all: *non tantum cum illis, sed prae illis, et dios trahens.* As is only too natural in a young man of great and passionate vitality, he does not gradually concede a little, he rushes to the opposite extreme. The about-face is complete. And such an about-face from one extreme to the very opposite is also characteristically Christian. Like Peter in the denial scene (and inversely Paul on his way to Damascus), he falls the more deeply the higher he stood before. And, like Peter, he will rise again. For his defeat is not final. When God has taught him to rely on Him instead of on himself—and his very defeat is the first step toward that knowledge—he will triumph. For in the fight against magical intoxication, Christianity commands other weapons than those of the rational and individualistic ideal of antique culture; it is, after all, itself a movement from the depths, from the depths of the multitude as from the depths of immediate emotion; it can fight the enemy with his own weapons. Its magic is no less a magic than is

bloodlust, and it is stronger because it is a more ordered, a more human magic, filled with more hope.

Such a text, however much it too may reveal of the somber traits of contemporary reality, is of a wholly different character from the work of Ammiannus and the passage from Jerome quoted above. What distinguishes it at first glance from the other texts is the ardor of the dramatic human struggle it represents. Alypius is alive and fights. In comparison, not only Ammiannus' characters but Pammachius too, in Jerome's letter, are static shadows which reveal nothing of a life within. This is the crucial characteristic which sets Augustine wholly outside the style of his age, so far as it is known to me: he feels and directly presents human life, and it lives before our eyes. The rhetorical devices, which he never disdains to use, either in this text or elsewhere, are closer on the whole, I believe, to the manner of the older, classical, Ciceronian writers than what we have found in Ammiannus and Jerome. The extremely dramatic *spectavit, clamavit, exarsit, abstulit inde*, etc. reminds us of the figure in the second Catilinarian oration, *abijt, excessit, evasit, erupit*, to which, by the way, its genuinely meaningful crescendo and the ensuing transition to the factual make it vastly superior. Elsewhere too—especially in the second half of the text—there are a large number of figures of speech, antitheses, and clauses in parallel. The rhetorical element makes a more classical impression than in Ammiannus or Jerome, yet it is clear—and unmistakably so even at a single glance—that we are not dealing with a classical text. The tone has something urgently impulsive, something human and dramatic, and the form exhibits a predominance of parataxes. Both of these characteristics, either considered individually or in their joint effect, are manifestly unclassical. If, for example, we examine the sentence, *narn quodam pugnae casu, etc.*, which contains a whole series of hypotactically introduced members, we find that its climax is a movement which is at once dramatic and paratactic: *aperuit oculos, et percussus est, etc.*; and as we try to trace the impression back, we are reminded of certain Biblical passages, which in the mirror of the Vulgate become: *Dixitque Deus: fiat lux, et facta est lux; or: ad te clamaverunt, et salvi facti sunt, in te speraverunt, et non sunt confusi (Ps. 22: 6); or Flavit spiritus tuus, et operuit eos mare (Exod. 15: 10); or: aperuit Dominus os asinae, et locuta est (Num. 22: 28). In all of these instances there is, instead of the causal or at least temporal hypotaxis which we should expect in classical Latin (whether with *cum* or *postquam*, whether with an ablative absolute or a participial*

construction) a parataxis with *et*; and this procedure, far from weakening the interdependence of the two events, brings it out most emphatically; just as in English it is more dramatically effective to say: He opened his eyes and was struck . . . than: When he opened his eyes, or: Upon opening his eyes, he was struck . . .

This observation upon the climax of the sentence, *aperuit oculos, et percussus est*, is but a symptom of a much more general state of affairs: Augustine certainly uses the classical periodic style and the corresponding figures (consciously so, as appears from his explanations in book 4 of his *De doctrina christiana*), but he does not allow it to dominate him. The urgently impulsive element in his character makes it impossible for him to accommodate himself to the comparatively cool and rational procedure of the classical, and specifically of the Roman, style, which looks at and organizes things from above. How frequently, especially in the case of a dramatic development, he puts clauses one beside the other, can be observed throughout our text: *Traditis, et ibi constituitis; adero ac superabo; interdixit, atque utinam obturavisset; aperuit, et percussus est, ceciditque; intravit et reseravit; ebiit, et non se avertit, sed fixit, et nesciebat, et delaeetabatur, et inebriabatur, et non erat iam ille.* This would be impossible in classical Latin. It is unquestionably the Biblical form of parataxis—just as the content (the dramatization of an inner event, an inner about-face) is awowedly Christian. *Et non erat iam ille qui venerat, sed unus de turba ad quam venerat*: this is a sentence which in form as in content is unimaginable as a product of classical antiquity; it is Christian and, more specifically, Augustinian; for no one ever more passionately pursued and investigated the phenomenon of conflicting and united inner forces, the alternation of antithesis and synthesis in their relations and effects. And he did so not only in practical contexts (as in our case) but also in connection with purely theoretical problems, which under his hands become drama. His treatise on the Trinity is the most impressive illustration of this; but anyone who wishes to discover, from a brief though characteristic passage, how much of a problem Augustine sees in growth and development and yet how clear they are to his mind, may read the first sentences of *The Confessions* (1, 8) where the transition from childhood to adolescence is discussed; such a passage would be unthinkable before Augustine. Parataxis serves Augustine to express the impulsive and dramatic, most often in matters concerned with the inner life; on the other hand, he has almost no trace of what is the primary preoccupation of Ammiannus and other authors of the

period, even including the Christians among them: the vivid sensory depiction of outward events, especially of the magical, the morbid, and the horrible. In our text there is ample opportunity for vividness, but it is taken care of in a few effective but entirely general terms.

Yet here too the inner, tragic, and problematic event is embedded in concrete contemporary reality. The age of separate realms of style is over. Among pagan authors too, as we have seen, the depiction of reality made its way into the elevated style. And in a much purer form (which begins, and then but occasionally, to be distorted only when it comes into contact with the epideictic style of late antiquity) the principle of mixed styles makes its way into the writings of the Fathers from the Judeo-Christian tradition. The true heart of the Christian doctrine—Incarnation and Passion—was, as we have previously noted (p. 41ff.), totally incompatible with the principle of the separation of styles. Christ had not come as a hero and king but as a human being of the lowest social station. His first disciples were fishermen and artisans; he moved in the everyday milieu of the humble folk of Palestine; he talked with publicans and fallen women, the poor and the sick and children. Nevertheless, all that he did and said was of the highest and deepest dignity, more significant than anything else in the world. The style in which it was presented possessed little if any rhetorical culture in the antique sense; it was *sermo piscatorius* and yet it was extremely moving and much more impressive than the most sublime rhetorical-tragical literary work. And the most moving account of all was the Passion. That the King of Kings was treated as a low criminal, that he was mocked, spat upon, whipped, and nailed to the cross—that story no sooner comes to dominate the consciousness of the people than it completely destroys the aesthetics of the separation of styles; it engenders a new elevated style, which does not scorn everyday life and which is ready to absorb the sensorily realistic, even the ugly, the undignified, the physically base. Or—if anyone prefers to have it the other way around—a new *sermo humilis* is born, a low style, such as would properly only be applicable to comedy, but which now reaches out far beyond its original domain, and encroaches upon the deepest and the highest, the sublime and the eternal. I have discussed these connections elsewhere (“*Sermo humilis*,” *Romanische Forschungen*, Frankfurt am Main, vol. 63, 1952) and pointed out the special role played by Augustine. Equally at home in the world of classical rhetoric and in that of the Judeo-Christian tradition, he may well have been the first to become conscious of the problem of the

stylistic contrast between the two worlds; he formulated the problem very impressively in his treatise *De doctrina christiana* (4, 18) in connection with the cup of cold water mentioned in Matthew 10: 42.

The Christian mixture of styles is not especially noticeable at this early period (in the Middle Ages it can be seen much more clearly), because the Fathers do not often take occasion to concern themselves with current reality or to practice the imitation of it. They are no poets or novelists and, on the whole, no historians of their present. They are preoccupied with theological activities, especially apologetics and polemics, and these fill their writings. Passages like those here quoted from Jerome and Augustine, which depict current reality, are not very frequent. All the more frequently, however, do we find the Fathers pursuing the interpretation of reality—interpretation above all of Scripture, but also of large historical contexts, especially Roman history, for the purpose of bringing them into harmony with the Judeo-Christian view of history. The method employed is almost exclusively that of figures, which has repeatedly been referred to in this book (pp. 16 and 48f.) and the significance and influence of which I have tried to some degree to clarify elsewhere (“*Figura*,” *Arch. Roman.* 22, 456). Figural interpretation “establishes a connection between two events or persons in such a way that the first signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second involves or fulfills the first. The two poles of a figure are separated in time, but both, being real events or persons, are within temporality. They are both contained in the flowing stream which is historical life, and only the comprehension, the *intellectus spirituales*, of their interdependence is a spiritual act.” In practice we almost always find an interpretation of the Old Testament, whose episodes are interpreted as figures or phenomenal prophesies of the events of the New Testament. One example is to be found on pages 48f. above, and a large number of examples, with commentary, are given in the essay just mentioned.

This type of interpretation obviously introduces an entirely new and alien element into the antique conception of history. For example, if an occurrence like the sacrifice of Isaac is interpreted as prefiguring the sacrifice of Christ, so that in the former the latter is as it were announced and promised, and the latter “fulfills” (the technical term is *figuram implere*) the former, then a connection is established between two events which are linked neither temporally nor causally—a connection which it is impossible to establish by reason in the horizontal dimension (if I may be permitted to use this term for a tem-

poral extension). It can be established only if both occurrences are vertically linked to Divine Providence, which alone is able to devise such a plan of history and supply the key to its understanding. The horizontal, that is the temporal and causal, connection of occurrences is dissolved; the here and now is no longer a mere link in an earthly chain of events, it is simultaneously something which has always been, and which will be fulfilled in the future; and strictly, in the eyes of God, it is something eternal, something omni-temporal, something already consummated in the realm of fragmentary earthly event. This conception of history is magnificent in its homogeneity, but it was completely alien to the mentality of classical antiquity, it annihilated that mentality down to the very structure of its language, at least of its literary language, which—with all its ingenious and nicely shaded conjunctions, its wealth of devices for syntactic arrangement, its carefully elaborated system of tenses—became wholly superfluous as soon as earthly relations of place, time, and cause had ceased to matter, as soon as a vertical connection, ascending from all that happens, converging in God, alone became significant. Wherever the two conceptions met, there was of necessity a conflict and an attempt to compromise—between, on the one hand, a presentation which carefully interrelated the elements of history, which respected temporal and causal sequence, remained within the domain of the earthly foreground, and, on the other hand, a fragmentary, discrete presentation, constantly seeking an interpretation from above.

The more cultivated in the antique sense of the term, the more deeply imbued with antique culture the writers of the patristic period were, the more imperatively did they feel the need for casting the content of Christianity in a mold which should be not a mere translation but an assimilation to their own tradition of perception and expression. Here again Augustine is an example; large portions of his *Civitas Dei*, especially books 15 to 18 where he treats of the progress (*procurus*) of the City of God on earth, show his constant endeavor to complement the figural-vertical interpretation by a representation of intrahistorical chains of events. As an example, any chapter in which he comments on a Biblical story may be read—for instance 16, 12. Here there is a discussion of the house of Terah, Abraham's father (that is, of Genesis 11: 26), which Augustine supplements by other Biblical passages, e.g., Joshua 24: 2. The subject of the chapter is Judeo-Christian and so is the interpretation; the whole stands under the sign of the *civitas Dei* which, prefigured since Adam, is now

fulfilled in Christ. The period of Terah and Abraham is interpreted as a link in the divine plan of salvation, as one of the stations in the figural sequence of preliminary, fragmentary, prophetic prototypes of the *civitas Dei*, and in this sense it is compared with the distant period of Noah. But, within this frame, there is visible a constant endeavor to fill in the lacunae of the Biblical account, to supplement it by other passages from the Bible and by original considerations, to establish a continuous connection of events, and in general to give the highest measure of rational plausibility to an intrinsically irrational interpretation. Almost everything which Augustine himself adds to the Biblical account serves to explain the historical situation in rational terms and to reconcile the figural interpretation with the conception of an uninterrupted historical sequence of events. The element of classical antiquity which asserts itself here is also apparent in the language—is, indeed, more apparent there than anywhere else; the periods, it is true, seem to be hastily constructed and make no impression of great art (there are too many relatives); but with their abundant display of connectives, their precise gradation of temporal, comparative, and concessive hypotaxes, their participial constructions, they still form a most striking contrast to the Biblical passage cited, with its parataxis and its lack of connectives. This contrast between text and Biblical citation is very frequently to be observed in the Fathers and almost always in Augustine. For the Latin translation of the Bible had preserved the paratactic character of the original. In such a passage as this from the *Civitas Dei*, one clearly recognizes the struggle in which the two worlds were engaged in matters of language as well as in matters of fact. It is a struggle which might well have led to a far-reaching rationalization and syntactic organization of the Judeo-Christian tradition. It might have, but it did not. The antique mentality was already too shaken. And so the most important and most influential piece of literary work, the translation of the Bible, could only imitate the paratactic style of the original, thus meeting the prevailing trend in the popular language halfway, while the literary language declined; finally came the invasion of the Germanic peoples, who, despite their humble respect for antique culture, were unable to absorb its rationality and its refined syntactic texture.

Thus the figural interpretation of history emerged unqualifiedly victorious. Yet it was no fully adequate substitute for the lost comprehension of rational, continuous, earthly connections between things, for it could not be applied to any random occurrence, although of

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course there was no dearth of attempts to submit everything that happened to an interpretation directly from above. Such attempts were bound to founder upon the multiplicity of events and the unfathomableness of the divine councils. And so vast regions of event remained without any principle by which they might be classified and comprehended—especially after the fall of the Roman Empire, which, through the concept of the state which it exemplified, had at least oriented the interpretation of political occurrences. There remained passive observation, resigned acceptance, or active exploitation of whatever chanced to occur in the world of practical events—raw material which was absorbed in its rawest form. It was a very long time before the potentialities in Christian thought (mixture of styles, comprehensive penetration of the processes of existence), reinforced by the sensuality of new peoples, could manifest their vigor.

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