

TOWARDS THE SOLUTION OF THE BAROQUE PROBLEM

It is more than obvious that the present situation as regards the study of the Baroque is not clear, that a certain doubt, a despondency, even a kind of distaste is noticeable in many studies and articles. René Wellek's article¹, *The Concept of Baroque in Literary Scholarship*, which gives an excellent survey of the whole trend of baroque studies, ended with the statement that he no longer saw Baroque as a style with distinctive features. Downheartedness, too, is what I see in the attempts to insert a period lashing up to about the end of the sixteenth century, a period to which historians and art critics have given the name of Mannerism and in which they include Michelangelo and El Greco, as was demonstrated at the Amsterdam Exhibition "The Triumph of Mannerism" (1955). Whoever reads the introductions to the Catalogue of this exhibition will find no unity of conception but, on the contrary, a number of gross contradictions or mild ironies. Press-comment, too, where this was written by experts, continually talked of mannerism passing into baroque, but it is, above all, the names of Michelangelo – his „maniera" is at the root of the term „mannerism" – and of El Greco that prove the unnatural and forced character of such a division of the baroque period. The „terribilità" of the one is not less than that of the other, the heavy, chaotic expression of Michelangelo's "Last Judgement" is not stronger than that of Greco's "Fifth Seal", and it was not for nothing that King Philip's self-control stood in fear of his volcano-like eruptiveness.

What we lack is a psychological interpretation of *the period that follows the Renaissance*, a definition which gives an idea of the exact connection with that Renaissance and which explains the situation in the North as well as in the South, in protestant Holland and England as well as in Italy, Spain and France.

What is it, then, that both zones have in common? It is the fear of the consequences of the rise of Renaissance and Humanism, the consequences which not only, as Luther said, led „zum Teufel" and . . . to the stake, but which at every moment also confronted the scientifically ill-equipped people of the 16th century with numerous questions. Freedom, moreover, is a way of life most people are not ready for, possible only if people of all classes and ages, of both sexes and intersex, and of all colours of skin, live in freedom. Any other form of freedom implies privileges or, if it is not real and inner freedom, means libertinism and dissipation. The optimistic view of life and the sense of freedom of the self-governing personality² – of great importance for the inner life

1. *Journal of Aesthetics etc.* V 1946.

2. It was expressed by Pico della Mirandola (1463–1496) in these words: "I made you a creature not celestial nor terrestrial and neither only mortal or immortal, in order that you, freely according your own will and honour, may be the creator and modeller of yourself. To you only I gave growth and development, dependent of your own free will."

and culture of the Renaissance – were badly shaken by the wave of death which, in the first half of the cinquecento, struck Florence, Rome, Italy and the whole of Europe. The will of the people and that of the Church met obstructions and obstacles by which they were broken. The Catholic Church lost its universality; an ‘iron curtain’ began to divide Europe in two parts. The “sacco di Roma” (1527), the Papal Inquisition, the Council of Trent, Luther, Calvin, the peasants’ risings and the Anabaptists, were all symptoms of an enormous fermentation and of the efforts to calm it down. The upper class, the initiates of humanism, believed in the classics and the stoa – which soon came to be a new kind of authority – but out of real fear for the lower classes who also longed for freedom, and out of the unconscious fear that came forth from their own consciences, they preferred to gather round the Church (if hypocritically at times) and also came to depend on the new born absolute sovereigns.

Free investigation, which they had considered themselves authorized to pursue, ought, they thought, to be prohibited to the “vulgus”. In Spain it was forbidden, among other things, to translate biblical books into Spanish and that prohibition lauded many artists in trouble (Fray Luis de León). The Trent Council (C. 1545–1565) imposed a rigid discipline not only in matters of sex and marriage (in which liberty is a vital impulse), but also in art. Nude representations were excluded from the churches (with exceptions for pictures of St. Sebastian and Magdalen); reproductions of holy matters had to be theologically correct; religious expression and the propagandistic effect on the faithful was more important than the purely artistic. The Jesuits took up the re-christianisation of aristocratic youth in particular.

In Northern Europe the Reformation turned away from Humanism more deliberately: there the masses soon became lulled by the “slavish will” and predestination, and let themselves be tamed by the cult of labor (which on account of growing prosperity gave prospects there) and by the authority of synod, confession and catechism. Avowed dissidents, dissenters who thought for themselves, were fiercely persecuted in both zones: the most eminent example is perhaps Michael Servet who fell from the tolerant hands of the Church of Rome into the unsparing clutches of Calvinist Geneva.

Most artists pursued freedom, but at times they had to pay for it with their lives, with insanity or with the utmost loneliness. Freedom frequently leads to thoughts and deeds unconsciously felt as wrong or sinful, and this gives rise to an unconscious feeling of guilt resulting in fear and the desire to be punished. Such rebelliousness always turns into a reinforced yearning for submission, for self-punishment and asceticism, but also into hatred of oneself and of the outer world. All of this is to be found in the baroque people and artists. We find, too, and especially in Roman Catholic countries, that type of person to which

sinning represents a perverse pleasure, but which as long as it recognises the rule and the moral law, remains tolerated by the Church and particularly by the Jesuits.

A man like Ortega y Gasset, the Spanish philosopher who in his "razón vital" or *ratiovitalism* leaves the Kantian "reine Vernunft" far behind, does not pay attention to the unconscious features mentioned above. In his magnificent essay "Ideas y creencias" he stated that man again and again devises a new "*plan de campagne*" as soon as the old one is no longer satisfactory to assail the circumstances, the outer world. Necessity, in his opinion, teaches us to think: the "sea of doubt" in which we are in danger of being drowned will make the best of us ponder. This accounts for the fact that the Baroque was also the period of incubation of science and contains such names Copernicus, Michael Servet, Descartes, Galileo, Francis Bacon, Pascal, Huyghens, Spinoza, Harvey, Leibnitz and Newton.

And here I believe we have discovered the deepest psychological ground in which the Baroque took root, from which the entire immensely varied baroque-vegetation shot up luxuriantly: *the unconscious, irrational fear of freedom and the outer, real fear of the reign of terror, the oppressing power of society, Church and State.*

When I framed this working hypothesis and published it in „De Nieuwe Stem" (May, 1950), I unfortunately did not yet know of the work by the American psycho-sociologist Erich Fromm, called "The fear for freedom" in the English edition and "Escape from freedom" in the American 11th edition (1950). Nor had there appeared "Le baroque espagnol et Calderón de la Barca" of Dr. A. L. Constandse (Amsterdam 1951). To both of them I could have appealed; to the first more than the second, for Constandse deals especially with suppressed sexuality, which is, of course, of the utmost importance when Spain is the subject.

The conclusion drawn by Fromm is that man, each time he acquires a new grade of freedom, i.e. the more he develops his individuality and moves away from unity with his fellow-men and nature, becomes more afraid, and will seek again new bonds with his environment, which will bring into great peril both his newly gained liberty and his human dignity, because he will slide down from the level that should be his. Groups will nearly always follow this course. Individuals, artists and other creative people can, of course, proceed to the complete realization and experience of positive freedom. For them there is only one efficient solution as to their relation to the world: *active solidarity with man, in love and work, which in a new manner will unite them with the world, no longer by primitive bonds but as free and independent personalities.* If economic, social and political circumstances do not provide a basis for it, then freedom will become an unbearable burden, identical with doubt and despair, a way of life without any meaning or direction. Complete indifference will then be a very common attitude.

It is nearly the same picture that we find in Theophile Spoerri's "Formwerdung des Menschen" (Berlin 1938, p. 51-52): „Im Mittelalter tritt die Vertikale (Grundrichtung) hervor. Der *gotische* Dom lenkt durch alle in die Höhe strebenden Formen den Blick nach oben. Die *Renaissance* liebt die Horizontale. Das Nebeneinander der Dinge wird als beglückend empfunden. Der Mensch bewegt sich mit Sicherheit auf ebener Erde. Der *Barock* lebt in der Spannung der beiden Achsen, in der Diagonale. Der Mensch hängt zwischen zwei Welten. Es gelingt ihm selten, die Mitten zwischen oben und unten, zwischen innen und aussen zu finden. Darum verliert er sich ständig in falsche Geistigkeit oder falsche Sinnlichkeit, in falsche Äusserlichkeit oder falsche Innerlichkeit. Immer für Qualität Ornament, Surrogat für lebendige Form. Doch für den, der nicht auf das Resultat, sondern auf den Prozess, nicht auf das Erreichte, sondern das Erstrebte schaut, tritt gerade in diesem Kampf die höchste menschliche Wirklichkeit hervor, besonders wo er ein solches Ausmass und einen solchen Sieg findet wie bei Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Shakespeare und Joh. Seb. Bach." (And one could add the names of Cervantes, Molière, Racine etc.). Certainly this is one of the finest panorama's of the Baroque that has ever been sketched; but it gives no psychological explication.

To prove the correctness of my theory – since Fromm does not speak about art and culture – it would be necessary to treat the whole baroque period in the various countries of Europe and Latin America, not only from the aspects of painting, sculpture and architecture, but also from those of literature, music, dance, philosophy, and so on. That would need a book of six large volumes at least. This is the more true when we bear in mind that there are three points which we have to consider carefully:

1. the general characteristics of baroque are *not* found at just the *same moment* in all these countries, regions or cities; this is true of the Renaissance, as well as of Baroque and Romanticism, and in our own time;
2. it is a fact, and a fact that leads many people into confusion, that the Baroque situation in each country has a *local character* in accordance with its history and other circumstances having their own local structure; and
3. one must never lose sight of the fact that each person, and still more each artist and each specially gifted and sensitive personality, will react in a personal way to the influence of his *time* and his *environment*. We have a very fine specimen of the *great complexity* in the work of an artist in Arnold Hauser's „Sozialgeschichte der Kunst und Literatur" (1953, I 430-455), where the author offers an analysis of Shakespeare. It seems probable that the greatest and strongest personalities, after reaching the summit of their evolution, turn out to have escaped their temporal and local circumstances and to have passed beyond the boundaries of *their time* and perhaps of *all times*.

Nevertheless, despite the hesitations and scruples that the foregoing

considerations arouse in me, I feel constrained to offer a very concise sketch of the baroque situation in one of the West European countries. I have chosen France because it was in that country that the term 'baroque' was first used – in 1937, by the literary historian Lebègue, and even then only timidly in a footnote. It was in France, too, that Georges Pillement in 1945 published a work on „La sculpture baroque espagnole” (with many reproductions), but refused to acknowledge a Baroque in his own country on account of „notre goût inné de la mesure et de la sobriété.” This situation has changed only recently, but the existence of books like Victor-L. Tapié's *Baroque et classicisme* (Paris 1957) and Imbrie Buffum's *Studies in the Baroque from Montaigne to Rotrou* (New Haven 1957) excuse me from having to demonstrate that France, too, has passed through a baroque period. And how could things be otherwise? France had its Renaissance under Francis I, but a violent reign of terror was already in existence, accompanied by a quick disenchantment („où sont les neiges d'antan”): Dolet is executed, the printer Morin is convicted; Clément Marot, as early as 1536, is called to order at Lyon. Rabelais and Des Périers are denounced in 1566. The civil wars of religion are fierce and the terror against the Huguenots (lasting more than 100 years and ending with the absurd self-mutilation of expelling them in 1688) is readily suppressed in French history, but John Viennot¹ has told us the truth about it. „Un monde renversé,” a world of magic and monstrosity, of absurdity and of contradictions, was the formula by which the themes were resumed, chosen by the French court for its ballets and masquerades in the first half of the XVIIth century². And indeed, France shows a piling up of conflicting situations: national unity is saved by Richelieu, the cardinal from ecclesiastical intervention, from the effects of conflicts within the royal family, from the attacks of the heretic Huguenots who are supported in Southern France by Catholic Spain. The Sicilian Mazarin and the Spanish-born queen Anne d'Autriche cooperate for the greatness of France, against a “Fronde” of a declining, pessimistic, hispaniolized nobility fighting its last struggle for liberty. It was a century of ferocity, insecurity and bestiality: 4000 nobles slaughtered one another in duels during the minority of Louis XIV alone. He may never have declared „l'état c'est moi”, yet „un roi, une foi, une loi” is surely the expression of the totalitarian unity that was reached by much censoring and terror. A re-emphasizing of „bienséance”, of the „honnête homme” and, above all, of some „préciosité” as a feminine protestation, was not superfluous. Jansenism and Port-Royal with its rigorism was certainly a reaction against the jesuitic probabilism of Escobar, but looks more like a religious Fronde than a devout serving of the Saviour and a yearning for primitive Christian earnestness. Pascal with his sarcastic 'Lettres provinciales' (1656-'57) is one who must certainly

1. *Histoire de la Réforme française*, 1934.

2. Jean Rousset in „*Trivium*, 1946”.

have preferred the struggle to the victory, and reminds us of those other Baroque heroes, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, who respectively preferred the open road to the lodging house and the good hope to the vile possession. Pascal shows no love for the church of Christ and, as to French ideology, would like to increase its scepticism. He was a split personality like so many others in France: like Father Ange de Joyeuse, who changed from Capuchin to field-marshal and back again to Capuchin; like Henri IV and Jean de Sponde, Montaigne, Bodin and Descartes (who after having discovered analytics went to Loreto in Italy to thank the Holy Virgin for it). And what are we to say of Racine whose heroes with their mortal conflicts between love and *raison d'état*, between living and reigning, between individuals and society, speak a courtly and apparently very moderate language while performing the most barbarous exploits? Actually they behave much like Don Quixote, who also talks most wisely and acts like a lunatic. Quite differently from the heroes the young Corneille and Rotrou and the Shakespearean theatre in France, which was discovered only some 20 years ago at the *Arsenal* by Lebègue, on which occasion he used for the first time the word „baroque”¹.

And Molière? Our insight into his personality and his works is every day becoming more profound and more complicated, as we can learn from these words by W. G. Moore²: “The difficulty is that in the plays no conclusions are drawn; a picture is presented. The picture seems to me to fit neither the Christianity of Bossuet, nor the worship of nature, which for Brunetière was Molière’s philosophy. It is a picture of contrast within the autonomous personality. The power of will and of wit is checked by what most people think the inferior power of instinct and sense. Men are shown as inhuman in their worship of power and intellect; they are human only in their baser instincts. But for his gross sensuality Tartuffe would be a robot. What Christians call our lower nature is seen as saving our superior qualities”. It is obvious that if this really is the philosophy of Molière – and I am inclined to join Mr. Moore in his penetrating elucidations – it is one of deep pessimism and despair, of pure baroquism. That is the opinion too of E. B. O. Borgerhoff who in his article “Mannerism and baroque”³ says: “when, in other words, I want to emphasize Molière’s double attraction to the reasonable and to the utterly unreasonable, the word “baroque” seems much more satisfactory than the word ‘classic’”. The fact is that this author calls Racine and Boileau baroque and Donne, for instance, a mannerist, because the latter deals with the absurd in a playful way. As we are not here considering English literature of the epoch, I might avoid all commentary; I would, however, like to lay stress on the fact that any artist

1. Cahiers de l'Association Internat. des Etudes françaises 1951, I *La poésie baroque en France*, p. 28.

2. W. G. Moore, *Molière. A new criticism*. Oxford 1949, p. 51.

3. Comp. Lit. V, p. 328.

of the Baroque period will react in his own way to the innermost collision in him between reason and sentiment. I have the support of Miss Odette de Mourgues who, in discussing the theme of death, includes Donne amongst the baroque authors (like Sponde, Shakespeare, d'Aubigné), as appears from this paragraph: "The theme of death is not in itself baroque (no more than it is in itself metaphysical). It becomes baroque when its treatment indicates some distortion and lack of balance. The distortion begins with death becoming an obsession, and more especially with the poet's deriving some unwholesome satisfaction from brooding upon what in death is physically repulsive"¹. We may conclude from this example, only one of many, that there is no reason to distinguish between mannerism and baroque: the only useful division seems to be (a) the first phase of baroque, characterized by expressions of a frenetic, extravagant, neurotic, desperate, rebellious, experimental, and similar nature (b) the second phase that *seems* to have recovered somewhat from its terrors and doubts, and *makes a show* of its selfreliance, its magnificence, its rejoicing in life and vitality.

However this may be, my conclusions as regards the French baroque go so far as to say that the French people and artists between 1550 and 1700 – after a short spell of freedom and trust in human autonomy – have recoiled in doubt, in fear and in hatred of life, and each in his own way has uttered, camouflaged, suppressed or avoided these feelings. This is true not only of the poets, playwrights and novelists but also of the painters, from the Florentine Rosso and the School of Fontainebleau to Lebrun, Rigaud and Coypel. Between there lies a whole century containing the varied expressions and originalities of Antoine Caron, Jacques Bellange, Callot, La Hyre, Champagne, the three brothers Le Nain, Nicolas Poussin and Claude Lorrain; the architects Pierre le Muet, Salomon de Brosse, Du Cerceau, Lemercier, Mansart, Lebrun and Louis Le Vau; and sculptors like Germain Pilon, Girardon, Puget, Coysevox; all of them exemplifying the typically baroque.

In order to prove the correctness of my psychological theory, however, I wish to show that it also applies to some other periods in the history of human behavior. "For the science of art" – says Sir Herbert Read in *Art now*, p. 102 – "is finally the science of human psychology, and the mutations of the history of art are but part of the fundamental process governing all development in human history: the checkered, fateful adjustment of man to the outer world."

In the first place there is Hellenism. About its baroque Von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf wrote 70 years ago. This artistically and culturally rich period had to struggle with the same kind of difficulties as sixteenth century Baroque and the Baroque of today, and its resemblance to ours is the stronger of the two. For it is evident that our time, with Rilke and Zadkine, with Valéry, Claudel, Sartre, Picasso, Eliot and *tutti quanti* is

1. *Metaphysical, baroque and précieux poetry*, Oxford 1953, p. 88.

baroque in its outward appearance and its sympathies. But Hellenism and our time are baroque, too, in their psychic dualism. It was a strange and confused age, as Gilbert Murray shows us in his *Hellenism and the modern world* (1953). Thucydides had already seen that “archè”, the pursuit of power, “was the root of all evil.” All philosophic schools, the Stoa, the Pythagoreans, the Epicureans, the cynics, and the followers of the messianistic sects were trying to obtain a clear insight into ideal and psychic matters (soul, virtue, wisdom, inner peace). What strikes us most is the lack of control over the outer world: the hellenistic man *desired so much* and achieved so little. He believed in equality but was subject to vast inequalities of wealth. Slavery, for instance, as an institution bothered the philosophers greatly – Aristotle thought out a nice theory to rationalize it – but it could not be abolished without alarming consequences. Neither the Stoa nor Christianity dared to reject it. Therefore they treated slavery as a misfortune like any other and in their spiritual communities welcomed all kinds of people, slaves and freemen, men and women, whoever was in search of divine truth. Again and again one comes upon individuals releasing their slaves in twos or threes, while the big world-markets continued to make slaves of others by the thousand. Their ideal was “taming the wildness of mankind” and “making life on earth lovely” – *Deus est mortalis mortalem iuvare* (for a man to help his fellowman is to be like God) was a sentence that tried to express this idea. And then Murray compares Zeno to Ghandi and the U.N.O., which does not succeed in bringing *Homonoia*, and the Greek towns’ vain efforts to achieve it.

Clearly, this was the same fear of freedom – of general freedom and of the new world which would develop from this – that we saw grow up at the Renaissance and drive people of the Baroque to distortions of a thousand kinds. We notice it in our own modern Baroque too, obsessed as it is by that same fear of freedom, of the new attitude to life and the new ways of living to which the evolution of thinking, technical progress and interdependence urge us. The difference is only this “trifle”: that about the year 1600 it was objectively *impossible* to realize this freedom in all its aspects or even to reason it out theoretically, whereas in our times the conflict is much more vehement because more inward and moral, more illogical and *neurotic*; because although reason, with its new discoveries of biology, psychoanalysis, for example, and the objective circumstances (e.g. the “one world or none”) show the possibility and even the necessity, the moral and psychic impotence, the inner lack of freedom and therefore the despair and distraction of huge multitudes are greater in our days. Far greater than in the Baroque characterized by Hausenstein¹ in these terms: „Barock bedeutet das Udenkbare: den Flusz mit zwei Mündungen”. Certainly this is an adequate definition of the baroque.

1. *Vom Geist des Barock*, München 1924; 2th edition 1956.

But more mature is P. Kohler's statement: „l'étude du baroque littéraire en est encore à chercher sa méthode.”

This method – I would like to say it once more – will have to reckon with: 1. the psychological reaction away from the preceding Renaissance period, a period of individual liberty among an *élite* deprived of cooperation with their fellow men and of intimacy with nature; this reaction I call the generally human Baroque situation;

2. the three successive stages of this reaction, the so-called Mannerism, Baroque, Rococo;

3. the fact that this reaction and its three stages, do not occur in all countries of Europe (and Latin America) in exactly the same years and in precisely equal historical and sociological circumstances;

4. and – well-nigh the most important fact – that each man reacts in his own way, and as an artist shows the trace of it in his work.

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SCHILLERS 'WILHELM TELL': DANKGESANG EINES GENESENDEN

Wie die Sonne im Sinken noch einmal Berg und Tal in ätherischem Glanz erhellt, so erleuchtet zuweilen die Geste eines Sterbenden die Landschaft seiner Seele. Solch eine Geste war Schillers Abschied von seinem Kinde.

Als er nah am Sterben war, verlangte er sein Jüngstes, Emilie, noch einmal zu sehen. „Er wandte sich mit dem Kopfe um” – so lesen wir – „nach dem Kinde zu, fasste es an der Hand und sah ihm mit unaussprechlicher Wehmut ins Gesicht. Die Schillern sagte mir es wäre gewesen, als ob er das Kind habe segnen wollen. Dann fing er an bitterlich zu weinen und steckte den Kopf ins Kissen und winkte, dass man das Kind wegbringen möchte.” Niemand, der Schiller liebt und kennt, kann sich der Gewalt dieser Schilderung entziehen. Dieses wortlose Abschiednehmen ist nicht weniger beredt als Marfas berühmterer Monolog. In ihm sehen wir die intimste Geste seines Geistes.

Was mag die Seele dieses Menschen bewegt haben, als er sein Kind zum letzten Male sah? Vaterliebe, gewiss, und der Schmerz darum, ein so junges, nur eben begonnenes Leben verlassen zu müssen. Aber es liegt noch mehr in diesem Blicke unaussprechlicher Wehmut: Wissen um eine ganze Welt, Liebe und Verzicht darauf. Wir stellen uns vor, dass dieser Bewussteste der Menschen, als er das ganz Unbewusste zum letzten Male sah, Abschied nahm von der Natur, die ihm stiefmütterlich gewesen war, die sein hochstrebender Geist mit Füßen getreten hatte und die er doch schliesslich zu ehren und zu hegen gelernt hatte; dass er Abschied nahm von dem sehnsuchtsvollen Traum einer zukünftigen, in