

A DADAIST CRISIS
IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to present a new approach to the art of Rosso and Pontormo and to suggest a new interpretation to its controversial character. The first part is essentially a preparation to the main discussion: the notion of Spirituality, necessary to a full understanding of the art of Rosso and Pontormo, is first developed, followed by an extensive study of the primary "will" which was guiding the classic painter in his major realizations.

The second part discusses the art of Rosso and Pontormo. The object here is to demonstrate that in a reasonably large number of their works we can detect a distinct will to awake feelings of incongruity, abnormality, strangeness in the beholder, and to perplex, disturb, frustrate and even shock him. This will is defined as the new will. After an expose of the latter, the art of Rosso is taken up, followed by the art of Pontormo. Eight works by Rosso and eleven by Pontormo are discussed individually. The method of analysis followed extensively takes into account the fact that the revolutionary art of those artists made its apparition in an essentially classicizing atmosphere.

The third part attempts to explain what may have caused the new will to germinate in Pontormo and Rosso. A first chapter is devoted to showing that corruption, at the height of the Renaissance, pervaded the Italian clergy from top to bottom. In a second chapter, documents are brought up to the support of the fact that a reformation of the clergy was the great spiritual need of that age. It is also pointed out that the whole of the Italian society of that time, indeed, was morally deteriorating at an alarming rate.

A final chapter describes how, under the effect mainly of the new dignity awakened in them by their recent recognition as liberal artists, Pontormo and Rosso would have subconsciously awakened to such a state of affairs. They would have realized, among other abnormalities, that Christian art, essentially meant to promote the spiritual advancement of society, was not helping to solve the great spiritual demand of their age, nor was it truly helping society as a whole, although it had just reached an unprecedented degree of perfection. Disillusion and despair would have followed, ultimately engendering, at least at the pre-conscious level, a bitter resentment against society in general which was failing to respond as it should to the artist's message. The will to turn the work of art against society by making it disturbing, frustrating and even shocking would have been the direct result of such a resentment. The thesis concludes by pointing out some important similarities between the art of Rosso and Pontormo and the modern Dadaist movement.

I am greatly indebted to H. Wölfflin for my understanding of classic art and also to S.J. Freedberg mainly for his perspicacious analyses of the early works of Pontormo and Rosso.

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PREFACE

This thesis is essentially concerned with the analysis of a group of works by Rosso and Pontormo. The title chosen, I must admit, is not quite appropriate. My intention was to devise one which would describe the psychological response of these artists to the high degree of immorality reached by the society of their time, and which would also be expressive of this very response as transmitted through their works. After several unsuccessful attempts I finally decided on the present title, much more indeed for its suggestiveness, which will be found helpful in understanding the ideas submitted, than for its adequacy of expression. I wish to make it clear that I will not by any means be attempting to interpret the art of Rosso and Pontormo in terms of Dadaism. There are indeed important similarities between the latter and the art of those artists but these will be suggested only at the very end of this essay and in a way which will make the main discussion independent and utterly self-sufficient. With these restrictions in mind, the reader should be better prepared to accept this rather dissonant title.

The first part may seem to be a long diversion ranging from early Christian art to Raphael's Tapestry Cartoons. The nature of the first chapter was dictated to me by the fact that the term spirituality, fundamental to my discussion of the art of Rosso and Pontormo, is so often misused that a re-definition of it in a way particularly applicable to painting appeared highly desirable if not necessary. That I have found it most convenient to go back

to early Christian times in order to illustrate my definition should not require any justification. The second chapter is an attempt to summarize the fundamental character of classic painting. Such a task seemed desirable before discussing Rosso's and Pontormo's art, and indeed it may be found that many of the ideas which I express there will facilitate the understanding of my approach to the art of these artists.

The ultimate goal of art history should not be simply to achieve a perfect anatomy of the exterior manifestations of the work of art but to enable us to understand as much as possible why and how those manifestations came into being. Most attempts at penetrating the creative process, in the case of a particular artist, either limit themselves to the discussion of formal influences from the works of other artists, or else theorize about it in such a vague and abstract way, that one finds it hardly possible to even perceive, in the works themselves, the theory which is being proposed. It is hoped that the present essay, which is indeed highly speculative, will enable the reader at least to see the ideas suggested, and also perhaps to gain a deeper, broader and more intimate understanding of the artists in question.

I have no pretension about this essay and indeed it should be considered as a first exploration of the subject: for I am perfectly aware that even only in a few years from now I may want to amend and perhaps even abandon so many of the ideas which I now believe in, that if retouched then the present paper will certainly be hardly recognizable.

PART ONE
FROM EARLY CHRISTIAN TO CLASSIC PAINTING

I

THE ADVENT OF SPIRITUALITY IN CHRISTIAN PAINTING

The transformations undergone by Christian painting during the early phase of its history were not without complexity. So many conflicting influences were at work, so many new concepts and feelings had to be externalised, that no single line of development can actually be followed during the first five centuries. It is possible, however, to determine several major intentions by which artists of that time would have been guided and which would have played an important role throughout those centuries of development. I shall presently attempt to survey what appear to be the most significant ones of those intentions.

A first generalization which we can safely make about early Christian painting, leaving aside the emotional aspect for the moment, is that on the whole it aims at giving a clear, distinct rendering of the action depicted: the observer must find out readily what is going on. To this end, nature will be distorted if necessary, and distracting elements will be eliminated. The essential thing here is for the event to be readily "grasped" by the observer. The Adoration of the Magi (fresco in the Cemetery of Petrus and Marcellinus; III century)¹ illustrates this tendency perhaps at its purest. Against an empty background, two magi are depicted coming towards the Virgin, who is seated in a chair and holding the Child in her arms. The figures are all rendered with a fair amount of naturalism: they have a certain vitality, average proportions and their gestures sufficiently approximate the ones

of normal human beings. There is no deliberate attempt at dehumanization.² One sees, however, that the artist has unnaturally tipped the bowls which the magi are holding: so that we can judge of the nature of their offerings. That is all. The emotional content in this work is indeed reduced to a minimum: the event stands out in an atmosphere of practically complete neutrality.

Now we may very reasonably imagine that many an artist would have been tempted to make his depictions look more plausible, more true to life, more "real": this resulting either, on the one hand, from a genuine interest in naturalistic, or, in some cases, idealized (in the classical manner) descriptions, or on the other hand, from a desire to convince the beholder that the action depicted actually took place (or is taking place). Thus here he would have been inclined to suggest a three-dimensional space, to give plasticity to the figures, to add a realistic background with buildings and trees...etc. A full outburst of this urge can be clearly seen in the apsidal mosaics of Sta Pudenziana, Rome. (ca. 401-417).³ Here the illusion of a three-dimensional space is clearly intended; numerous buildings recede in the background; the figures themselves (Jesus and his disciples) are portrayed "as majestic and dignified persons just as if they were distinguished Romans, imperial governors or influential senators".⁴

If it did not significantly interfere in such scenes as the one we have just described, such an interest was, however, theoretically coming into conflict with the desire for clarity and directness of expression, when an actual event had to be

depicted. For the more you integrate an event in a natural setting, the more indeed you give it the appearance of reality, but the more also the event itself somehow tends to be engulfed in this setting. Therefore, in his desire to impress the event still more vividly on the mind of the observer, the early Christian artist was led to take measures which often disregarded even the basic principles of naturalism. Thus he was led to eliminate irrelevant details, to geometrically reorganize the spatial components, to compress the scene in an irrational space; he was also led to increase the size of the central figures, and this is apparent even in the Adoration of the Magi discussed above;⁵ frontality was also found highly effective and therefore it was adopted as a standard device; for the same reasons, the figures, from the beginning, were given clear, emphasized, arrested gestures.⁶ A full embodiment of all these tendencies can be seen in the nave wall mosaics of Sta Maria Maggiore, Rome (ca. 432-440).

What has been said so far (except for the tendency to idealize forms the classical way, which did not last very long), was relevant more to the event itself than to the fundamental spirit of the depiction. Since they were at the service of a new religion which was radically displacing old-established beliefs, and because the traditional art was intimately associated with those beliefs, it was to be expected that the artists of that time would have eventually attempted to characterize their works in a way that would make them fundamentally different from traditional works; and since the god of the new religion was one

whose kingdom was not of this world, since detachment and renunciation from the things of this world were indeed the most revolutionary ideals preached by the new religion, it was also to be expected that this characterization, this new spirit which would make them fundamentally different from purely pagan works, would also be somewhat related to "unworldliness." And indeed when we survey the art of the sixth century for instance, we realize that something new has been added, we become conscious, in many works, of the definite existence of a new spirit, a truly new "life-current", hardly known to Antiquity and eminently symbolic of the very essence of Christianity.

The work in which to my mind this new spirit, this new life-current can be apprehended the most significantly and unequivocally is the set of mosaics narrating events from the life and Passion of Christ, in the nave of Sant' Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna (early VI century). The following description matches these mosaics perfectly: "We have here scenes that take place in a peculiar medium without light and air, in a space without depth, perspective, and atmosphere, whose flat, shapeless figures are without weight and shadow. All attempt to produce the illusion of a consistent piece of space is now altogether discarded; the figures do not act upon one another in any way, and the relations between them are purely ideal. They become far more stiff and lifeless, and at the same time far more solemn, more spiritualized, more remote from life and from this earth. Most of the devices by which these effects are achieved -- above all, the reduction of the spatial depth, flatness and frontality of figures, economy

and simplicity of design -- were known to late Roman and early Christian art; but now they all coalesce and form the elements of a new style of their own. Formerly they were found in isolation, or at least only employed if a particular situation seemed to require them, and were always in open and unresolved conflict with naturalistic traditions and recollections; but here the flight from the world is fully accomplished and all is cold, stiff, lifeless form -- although instilled with a very intense and very essential life through death of the fleshly Adam and awakening of a new spiritual man. It all reflects the words of St. Paul: "I live, but not I but Christ liveth in me." The ancient world and its joy in sense is now abolished; the old glory departed; Imperial Rome in ruins. The Church now celebrates her triumph, not in the spirit of the Roman nobility, but in the sign of a power which pretends to be not of this world."⁷

The reader will have noticed here that the new life-current which I was mentioning above is described very penetratingly by Hauser as "a very intense and very essential life through death of the fleshly Adam and awakening of a new spiritual man." Now such a "very intense" life would indeed presuppose that the contact with Nature (considered as a life-giving power) has been practically "cut off." In scenes, for instance, such as the ones depicted on the nave walls of Sta Maria Maggiore, this contact is definitely not quite cut off (which should become apparent upon comparison of these mosaics with the ones in Sant'

Apollinare Nuovo): there is still too much naturalism in the air; the space defined, in most depictions, is still too deep and comfortable; the figures in general still have too much plasticity and aliveness, their gestures often seem too easy and they are still too organically related to one another.

A further comparison will help us to still more firmly grasp the essence of this "very intense and very essential life" of which Hauser speaks. Let us consider the figures of Patriarchs and Prophets (early VI century) immediately below the scenes from the life and Passion of Christ, in Sant' Apollinare Nuovo. These figures psychologically belong to a normal humanity: they have personality and seem rationally controlled; their look is positive and lucid. Now let us glance at the Procession of Martyrs (ca; 557-569) just below these Patriarchs and Prophets. The Martyrs stare into emptiness; they have a blank look; even though some may appear to be looking at us, on closer observation we find that they do not seem aware of our presence. They do not seem under the control of Reason; they seem to be under the spell of some foreign power which takes all individuality away from them. Although there are some differences among them, we do not feel them much. The impression we get is that these people all belong to one same family. A similar difference can be observed in the treatment of the bodies and draperies. While in the case of the Patriarchs and Prophets the artist had striven for a certain variety and a certain plasticity, here in the Procession of Martyrs, his concern is to put as little variety and plasticity

as possible; flowing lines are kept to a minimum; roundness is eliminated in favor of angularity, which tends to make the design look more two-dimensional. As with the Patriarchs and Prophets the artist, although setting the figures on a gold background, had suggested a sufficient three-dimensional space on the ground, here the sense of spatial illusion is entirely suppressed: the Martyrs stand in an unreal space.

We can indeed observe in these mosaics a difference in spirit similar to the one which we have pointed out between the nave wall mosaics of Sta Maria Maggiore and the scenes from the life and Passion of Christ in Sant' Apollinare Nuovo. In the case of the Patriarchs and Prophets, the contact with Nature is still much felt, even though there is a drastic tendency towards abstraction. With the Procession of Martyrs, however, such a contact no longer exists: here "the flight from the world is fully accomplished and all is cold, stiff, lifeless form-- although instilled with a very intense and very essential life through death of the fleshly Adam and awakening of a new spiritual man."

Let us finally compare the mosaic version of the Baptism of Christ in the dome of the Baptistry of the Orthodox, Ravenna (ca. 449-452) with the one in the dome of the Baptistry of the Arians, Ravenna (ca. 500). In the earlier version, the Baptist is standing in a normal and relaxed position; his raised left foot is resting comfortably on a clearly three-dimensional rock, and he is pouring water on Christ's head while looking calmly at the Dove. The figure personifying the Jordan, on the other hand,

is sympathetically looking at Christ; the latter is looking down, conscious of the importance of the event, but remaining calm and dignified. The interrelation among the figures here is indeed highly organic. From this interrelation, from the strongly plastic modeling of the figures and also from the flowers and plants depicted at the lower left-hand corner, one gets a distinct sense of "true life", circulating through the work.

In the later version, a fundamentally different atmosphere has been created. Here the foliage has been eliminated and the figures are now standing in a rigid symmetrical order. The strong chiaroscuro of the earlier treatment has been drastically reduced. One of the Baptist's feet is still raised, but here the rock on which it was resting in the earlier version has been eliminated, which gives a character of artificiality, of forced arrestedness to his posture; this impression is reinforced by his look which, like for the other two figures, does not seem to rest anywhere; moreover, instead of pouring water, he is now simply touching Christ's head with his right hand. The figure personifying the Jordan has also been significantly altered: he is here depicted frontally, with a frozen look in his eyes, as if in a state of momentary transfixion. -- Briefly, one gets the impression in this depiction that life has been momentarily suspended and that a supernatural, irrational power has taken over. The contact with Nature, still very strong in the earlier version, is here no longer felt. Like for the Procession of Martyrs and the scenes from the life and Passion of Christ in the nave of Sant' Apollinare Nuovo, one may say indeed, here also, that "all is cold, stiff, lifeless form -- although instilled

with a very intense and very essential life through death of the fleshly Adam and awakening of a new spiritual man."

Now I am not denying that much of the new spirit or new life-current, which Hauser's description analyzes so penetratingly and which I have tried to make the reader conscious of, can indeed be felt in such works as the nave wall mosaics of Sta Maria Maggiore. Therefore, in order to enable us to more practically handle this new spirit, this new life-current, we shall make use of Hauser's definition but in a somewhat modified way. We shall define it (i.e. the new spirit or new life-current) as an ether breathing the presence of an unworldly and supernatural power (which is God himself as understood and taught by the Christian religion), and we shall call this ether by the name of Spirituality. By this definition we are making provision for a difference in degree, in intensity for this "very intense and very essential life", and we are also allowing it (which Hauser's definition does not allow) to co-exist with another ether, this one breathing the presence of a natural power (which is Nature considered as a life-giving power), and to which we shall give the name of Natural Life.⁸

Spirituality thus understood⁹ can be said indeed to have emerged in Christian painting long before the time of the nave wall mosaics of Sta Maria Maggiore. It is, however, as we have pointed out above, only in such depictions as the ones narrating events from the life and Passion of Christ in the nave of Sant' Apollinare Nuovo that it reached full purity (or maturity) and that Natural Life practically vanished from the scene.¹⁰

From then on, and especially with the victorious and decisive spread of the Byzantine style, Spirituality was to remain, for many centuries, a foremost concern for the Christian artist.¹¹

The re-awakening of interest in nature which took place with the Gothic period meant a revolutionary transformation in the outlook of the Christian artist. The new interest can significantly be seen, for instance, in the statues of the North and South porches of Chartres Cathedral (second quarter of XIIIth century) as compared to the ones in the Royal West Portal (begun ca. 1145). While the latter are elongated, prisoner of the columns to which they are attached, highly stylized and literally shut to our world,¹² the ones of the North and South porches reveal a definite will to rehumanize the figure of man.¹³ At the same time, by their awareness of their environment, of the world around them, they manifest a re-awakening of interest in the world itself from the part of the artist.

From then on this renewed interest in man and the world was to compete for a place of its own. The main problem raised in Christian art, from that time on, was to conciliate this interest in man and the world (or, ultimately, Nature) with the will to impose Spirituality.¹⁴

With the opening of the Early Renaissance, artists set out to conquer Nature systematically. The reticences which had manifested themselves all through the fourteenth century are now discarded by the greatest majority of artists, and the interest in Nature takes over. So much indeed that in some artists the interest in Spirituality subsists at a bare minimum.

One by one the mysteries of Nature are uncovered and integrated in the field of Christian art. The conflict between Natural Life and Spirituality remains still unresolved, however, until the coming of Leonardo da Vinci and the other classic artists finally brings it to a solution.

1. W. Lowrie, Art in the Early Church, New York, 1947, plate 14c.
2. By dehumanization I mean that the human figure is recast in another form than it would have if naturalistically rendered. Likewise I shall use the term dematerialization whenever the environment of the figures is recast in another form than it would have if depicted with naturalism.
3. The dating of this work, as well as of the other early Christian monuments discussed from here on, is taken from W.F. Volbach, Early Christian Art, London, 1961.
4. A. Hauser, The Social History of Art, Vintage edit., 4 Vols., New York, 1957, I, p. 126.
5. One will note here the slightly enlarged scale of the Virgin compared to the one of the magi.
6. All these devices can indeed be found in late Roman art. I am simply pointing out here why the early Christian artist would have wanted to use them.
7. Hauser, op. cit., I, p. 128. I must quickly point out here that this description, in Hauser's book, is not meant for the Sant' Apollinare Nuovo mosaics but for the nave wall mosaics of Sta Maria Maggiore, Rome. Obviously I do not agree with this. To my mind, as will be seen presently, the nave wall mosaics of Sta Maria Maggiore embody far too many naturalistic tendencies to fit this description perfectly.
8. By Nature I mean here the natural agent creator of all that exists on earth including man's intelligence. Thus anything with a recognizable natural form or presumably created by man's intellect (e.g. an architectural construction) will theoretically breathe the presence of Nature (or Natural Life). This latter presence will diminish in intensity in proportion as the amount of dehumanization and dematerialization increases.

9. There is a certain spirituality inherent in the crudest depiction of any religious event, due to the fact that we automatically recognize in it the presence of God (no matter in how indirect a way). I term this spirituality the "internal" spirituality of the work. Thus the spirituality which the early Christian artist was led to impose is really an "external" one. Since an internal spirituality is inherent in all religious paintings and is not relevant to our discussion, except in so far as it "prepares the ground" for the existence of the external spirituality, we shall call the latter by the simple name of Spirituality (with a capital S).
10. It would be tempting to speak of the "ascent" of Spirituality in Christian painting, and to point out for instance the more advanced character, in this respect, of the triumphal arch mosaics in Sta Maria Maggiore (ca. 432-440) as compared to the nave wall mosaics, and the decisive triumph of Spirituality, some years later, in the nave of Sant' Apollinare Nuovo. One could indeed be led to speak of a "classical phase," when the contact with Nature would have just been broken, and during which Spirituality would have dominated with the minimum display of movement, emotions... etc. Thus Romanesque art, for instance, would have constituted a baroque or even a rococo phase, in this respect... If one had gone that far, the temptation, in so far as Spirituality is concerned, to consider the series of mosaics relating events from the life and Passion of Christ in the nave of Sant' Apollinare Nuovo, as the "Parthenon Sculptures of Christian Art" (in a way not totally unlike the one in which Raphael's tapestry cartoons have been called the Parthenon Sculptures of Modern Art") -- would be hardly resisted.
11. The fact that Byzantine art owed its decisive advent partly to purely political motivations does not basically conflict with our argument. For an exposé of the political significance of this art, see Hauser's chapter entitled The Artistic Style of Byzantine Caesaropapism, op. cit., I, pp. 129-136.
12. The heads are vertical; the draperies fall rigidly; the arms do not stretch outside the body. The books they are holding are all vertical.
13. The attitude of these figures is much less rigid indeed. The fantastic elongation of the West portal statues has gone. Draperies are more deeply (and thus naturalistically) carved. There is more variety and a certain aliveness in the position of the arms. Some figures are looking sideways, aware of their environment.
14. I am considering here the new naturalistic trend which moved implacably through the Early Renaissance and culminated in the art of the High Renaissance as we shall soon see.

II

THE CLASSIC WILL

What actually happened in early Christian times was that the demands which Nature imposes on the work of art for her dignity to be respected and affirmed were ignored by the artist: at first, essentially for purposes of clarity and directness of expression; and later, more essentially in order to impress on the beholder the transcendental meaning of the scenes depicted. When interest in the world around began to redevelop, Nature began to impose herself again and from then on raised her voice more and more in order to have her dignity affirmed more and more in the work of art. With the advent of the Early Renaissance, the will to reassert this dignity was given a decisive elan, which culminated in the art of the High Renaissance. Here Nature is fully conquered and her dignity powerfully affirmed.

The full affirmation of the dignity of Nature, in painting, implies the respect of some basic natural laws. Through the respect of these laws, the projection of the world depicted onto our own takes place spontaneously. We feel the figures animated with the same type of life as animates us and with a blood similar to ours running in their veins. Their environment, on the other hand, does not fundamentally differ from ours and we would not feel stranger in it. Thus is created a sense of intimate relationship between our world and the world depicted by the artist. We feel intensely acting in it the same natural power (Nature) as is acting in our own.

Now what are these basic laws, the respect of which assures such an affirmation. They are or rather constitute what I term the physical premises of classic painting. The latter does not specifically reside in their realization, as we shall see, for it goes beyond them. But it is based on them and respects them. These premises demand first of all that the figures appear convincingly living with a humanity like ours; they must thus have realistic proportions; their limbs and joints must be rounded out naturalistically; their movements must appear easy and natural; they must have a convincing plasticity and occupy a true three-dimensional space adequate for them; they must have vitality and appear controlled by Reason. The physical premises also demand that the law of gravity be respected: figures must stand up firmly and securely on their feet; if they are seated, they must appear sufficiently grounded to their seat.¹ The laws of optics, finally, must be respected: to this effect, linear and aerial perspective shall be used; the lighting shall appear realistic; the distinction between the animate and the inanimate shall be clear.

The significance of classic painting resides partly in the fact that it realizes and respects those premises more faithfully than ever before in Christian art. Hauser observes that "in the whole of Italian painting before Leonardo there is no human figure which, compared with the figures of Raphael, Fra Bartolommeo, Andrea del Sarto, Titian, and Michelangelo, has not

something clumsy, stiff, constricted about it. However rich they are in accurately observed details, the figures of the Early Renaissance never stand quite firmly and securely on their feet; their movements are always somewhat cramped and forced, their limbs creak and wobble at the joints, their relationship to the space around them is often contradictory, the way they are modelled is obtrusive and the way they are illuminated artificial. The naturalistic efforts of the fifteenth century do not come to fruition until the sixteenth."² Thus is it that classic art affirmed the dignity of Nature to a degree unprecedented in Christian times.

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A complete definition of the classic will would involve so lengthy a discussion, that I have no other ambition here than to point out only what appear to be the main objectives behind the classic artist's efforts. The first thing which strikes us, after the elaborate and fancy descriptions of Quattrocento art, is the seriousness with which the classic artist takes his subject-matter.³ The scene is purged from all accessories and incidentals, and the event confronts us with a force of presence indeed recalling the one of early Christian art. Simplification and concentration become two major rules. The event must be grasped in its essence immediately and directly: to this end all distracting elements, not intimately bound to it, are excluded.

A comparison of the Drunkenness of Noah as treated by Benozzo Gozzoli (Pisa, Campo Santo; ca. 1467-69) with the same subject as dealt with by Michelangelo in his Sistine Ceiling (Rome, Vatican; 1509) will serve to make this clear. Gozzoli takes pleasure in depicting all the antecedents leading to the drunkenness itself, including a crowd of irrelevant details. Michelangelo, on the other hand, with the minimum of figures and using an almost bare setting, concentrates exclusively on what really is the key-moment of the event, namely the discovery by his grandchildren of the drunken man indecently exposed.

Having thus purified the scene from all irrelevancies, the classic artist now turns his efforts on suffusing the work with a powerful vitality. The latter process is first applied to the figures themselves, considered individually. The classic figures, as has already been hinted, breathe vitality to a degree unprecedented in Christian art. Wölfflin observes that "one feels a heightened physical vitality, and, indeed, the mere act of looking at something is endowed with an energy previously unknown."⁴

A comparison of Verrocchio's Baptism of Christ (Florence, Uffizi; ca. 1476) with the treatment given to the same subject by Andrea Sansovino in the Baptistery of Florence (ca. 1502-05) illustrates this idea significantly. In the Verrocchio, the ceremony takes place with hastiness and we feel a certain restlessness in the figures.⁵ Sansovino, on the other hand, depicts the protagonists as simply standing there, quite calmly: yet

the vitality pulsating in them greatly surpasses the one of the animated figures in the Verrocchio.

The same phenomenon is observable in portraits, where "a new expressive vigour"⁶ can be seen. The desire for vitality is so great indeed that a new organic current is noticeable even in the clothes which the figures are wearing. The Count Castiglione by Raphael (Paris, Louvre; 1515-16) offers an excellent example of such an organic current.

Now beside vitalizing the figures individually, the classic artist endeavours to also vitalize the relationships among them on the one hand and the relationships between the figures and their environment on the other hand. His aim is to relate the figures among themselves and to integrate them with their environment in a truly organic way. The School of Athens (by Raphael), as we shall see, offers a perfect example of such interrelations. But the idea there is fundamentally the same as exists in such a work as the Madonna of the Harpies (Florence, Uffizi; 1517) by Andrea del Sarto. In the latter work, the placing of the figures in different positions and at different angles, allied with the interplay of light and shadow and the directions suggested by the draperies....etc., is specifically meant to produce such an organic current, such a rhythmic freedom among them. Wölfflin observes that here "the eye is continually kept in pleasing movement."⁷ It goes without saying that such an organic current adds its own share to the vitality already present in the figures considered individually, and contributes to make the work pulsate with vitality still more.⁸

Now in works such as a Holy Family, or a Madonna with Saints, there is no actual event taking place. Such works essentially aim at confronting the beholder with certain holy figures, without really trying to impose a story on him. The Holy Family tondo by Michelangelo, the Sistine Madonna by Raphael and the Madonna of the Harpies by Andrea del Sarto belong to such a group. In such cases, the endeavours of the artist are on vitalizing the figures individually, and also vitalizing the relationships among them (and between them and their environment), on the purely formal point of view, without really aiming any further (as far as vitality is concerned).

On the other hand, in works such as the Creation of Eve, the Liberation of Peter, the School of Athens ...etc. an actual event is taking place.⁹ Let us visualize such an event as having an existence of its own, independently from the world in which it is taking place. We shall then be in a position to understand that beside being turned on vitalizing the individual figures and vitalizing their relationships among themselves and with their environment (in other words vitalizing the world in which the event is taking place) the classic artist's efforts are also turned on powerfully vitalizing the existence of the event itself.

We must clearly realize how such a vitality of existence is something different from the mere force of presence the event may have. In an early Christian work such as the Raising of Lazarus (Ravenna, Sant' Apollinare Nuovo; early VIth cent.),

the event as such possesses a powerful force of presence, yet its existence can be said to be static. The classic artist, while preserving in the event a similar force of presence, aims at powerfully vitalizing or dynamizing its existence.

It cannot be denied of course that the vitality of the event as such depends largely on its force of presence (statically considered) and also very largely on the vitality of the world in which it is taking place (for indeed it would be possible to visualize a vitalized event without a vitalized world). But more is needed to make us feel the pulse of the event strongly. There must be a particular concentration of the actors on the event itself and there must also be among the figures certain inter-relations through which the essence of the event is dynamically and powerfully brought out.

Giotto had been clearly concerned with such an intensification. His late frescoes in Santa Croce indeed reveal an obvious desire to suffuse the figures and their environment with a greater degree of natural vitality, but we can also detect a distinct will to vitalize the event itself. In the Renunciation of the Worldly Possessions [with pupils] (Upper Church in San Francesco of Assisi; ca. 1296-99);¹⁰ the father's disapproval is clear, yet its existence is rather static. Giotto takes up the same subject in Santa Croce (Bardi Chapel; ca. 1325), but this time the father's gesture is made much more aggressive and dynamic. The man violently steps out toward his son and two attendants are now needed to hold him back. Further, Giotto

adds on the left the figure of a child prevented to throw a stone at the Saint by his mother. These two alterations combine to greatly intensify the pulse of the event.

It is interesting to compare the Raising of Drusiana by Giotto (Santa Croce, Peruzzi Chapel; ca. 1318-23) with the Creation of Eve by Michelangelo (Vatican, Sistine Ceiling; 1509). Both artists aim at organically relating the power of the "raiser" with the helplessness of the person raised. To this end, Giotto depicts Drusiana seated with her hand pointing at the saint, and looking straight at him. The latter is slightly bent towards her with his hand in a commanding gesture. Yet how arrested does this event appear when we compare it to the Creation of Eve by Michelangelo (who uses basically the same motif). Here the raising of Eve is still clearly in process while her complete dependence on God's gesture breathes vitality in a most powerful way.

So far we have seen that the classic artist aimed at giving the event an intense force of presence while suffusing it and the world in which it takes place with a powerful vitality. What remains to be said now is that on the event thus brought into focus and vitalized, the classic artist is interested in imposing Monumentality.

Webster gives of monumental the following definition: of the nature of, or resembling a monument; hence, massive and lasting; impressive; stupendous; as conspicuous as a monument; colossal; notable. And indeed we readily know what is meant by

a monumental architecture and the monumentality of such Egyptian statues as the Colossi of Memnon. I would like here to make a particular use of the word Monumentality and define it as a quality partaking of the dignified, the grand, the solemn, the grave, the potentially powerful, the highly lucid, the calm, the ordered, the controlled....This quality can be seen in its purest form (which is also the perfectly static one) as embodied in a statue such as the seated Chefren (Diorite. Life-size. Cairo, Egyptian Museum. IVth dynasty, ca. 2530 B.C.)

Now with the proper adjustment, it can be said that the classic artist endeavours to impose the essence of this quality on his works (considered as wholes). To this end, he purifies the scene from all accidental details: only the essentials are kept in both the setting and the figures. The architecture used is severe and powerful. The figures themselves are given the attitude of noble, dignified beings. The clothes they are wearing are simple, but heavy and distinctive. Anything partaking of the vulgar or the low is cast aside. They stand easily and move freely but with calm and dignity. Their gestures, no matter how vitalized, are at the same time measured and restrained. They remain in control of their emotions even in the most dramatic cases. Their behaviour in any situation is the one of true aristocrats.¹¹ The classic artist further makes use of symmetry, balances, verticals and horizontals, lays out the spatial components in layers parallel to the picture plane and clearly delineates all the individual objects. Thus is created

an atmosphere of lasting order, control, dignity, solemnity, power and high lucidity. And thus is made to prevail over the work the quality embodied in the Chefren which we have defined as Monumentality.

One of the major problems confronting the classic artist was the conciliation of Monumentality with vitality. The latter must always be kept within certain bounds, otherwise the atmosphere of high lucidity and solemnity inherent to the existence of Monumentality finds itself endangered. It is such an interest in vitality, broken free, which partly led to the advent of the Baroque. A significant example of such an interest is the Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus by Rubens (Munich, Museum; ca. 1617). Here the spirit of the Chefren ceases to be felt.

It is interesting to observe how Michelangelo succeeded in maintaining such a spirit in his Sistine Ceiling. Although the latter is bursting with vitality, yet we have the impression of a solemn order and control. It is most important here to consider the Ceiling as a whole. The solid grounding of the Seers and Ignudi (already pointed out) greatly contributes to keep the bursting energy within controllable bounds. We also observe that the passionate figures of the Prophets are answered by the calm figures of the Sibyls and that the active Ignudi count among them some solemnly calm ones (such as the one above Jeremiah). The figure of God himself, bursting with boundless vigour in the Creation of the Sun and Moon, is given less impetus

in the nearby scene (Separation of the Earth and Waters) and a solemn calm (although it is sweeping down) in the still next one (the Creation of Adam).

Now in classic art in general, the subject-matter usually lends itself fairly easily to a conciliation of Monumentality and vitality. The School of Athens, the Baptism of Christ, the Creation of Adam, the Madonna with Saints....etc. are all of such a kind. Trouble begins to develop when an animated drama (such as the Expulsion of Heliodorus) has to be depicted. The classic artist, here, in his will to impose on the event both Monumentality and a strongly pulsating life of its own, is faced with the problem of suffusing the work with dramatic vitality (which can easily run wild) while keeping the latter within the solemn frame of Monumentality. We shall see later how Raphael reached an "impasse" in the Expulsion of Heliodorus and how in the tapestry cartoons he evolved the perfect solution to this problem.¹²

There is another category of events which cannot be called true dramas in the same sense as the Expulsion of Heliodorus or the Kiss of Judas but which still imply a certain departure from the calm and the controlled. A Lamentation over the Body of Christ and an event like the Death of St. Francis belong to such a group. Here the vitalizing of the event implies the display of a living sadness. Now sadness is another quality which conflicts with Monumentality, for (as just said above) it implies a certain departure from the calm and the controlled, and can

easily develop into an exaggerated sentimentalism. Here too, thus, the classic artist was faced with a problem.

Giotto had understood that problem and in his Lamentation (Padova, Arena Chapel; ca. 1305-10) he included some figures actively displaying their sorrow, but he also enclosed them with calm and dignified figures and distributed the latter in such a way that Monumentality was made to most happily co-exist with sadness. The Death of St. Francis in Santa Croce (Bardi Chapel; ca. 1325) reveals the same intention and displays basically the same treatment, with still happier effects.

Faced with the same problem, Michelangelo in his early Pieta (Rome, St. Peter's; 1498-99) opted for the display of a stoical acceptance only tinged with sadness. Fra Bartolommeo's Pieta (Florence, Pitti; ca. 1516-17) on the other hand, displays a greater amount of living sadness. The event as such is perhaps indeed more vitalized but the work also somewhat loses in Monumentality over Michelangelo's.

Summarizing our results, we can say that the triple imposition on the event of an intense force of presence, of a powerful vitality and of the solemn spirit of the Chefren (defined as Monumentality) constituted the major aim of the classic artist.¹³ The whole of classic painting, indeed, could perhaps be summed up as a series of attempts to bring these three elements into a happy unity. Towards that end (and this could be called the practical side of the classic will), the classic artist endeavoured to intensely exploit all the possibilities of the formal elements¹⁴ and to interrelate the latter within a powerful unity.

The work which to my mind exemplifies this will most spectacularly and most successfully, and which is thus eminently classic, is the Liberation of Peter by Raphael [Stanza d'Eliodoro] (Rome, Vatican; late 1513-early 1514). Let us consider the middle scene, where the dramatic tension is at its highest. The event depicted here is the waking up of Peter by the angel. I shall not insist on the mere force of presence which Raphael gives to it for it is obvious. I would like instead to attract the reader's attention on Raphael's interest in vitalizing the drama taking place, in dynamizing its very life, in making it pulsate with dramatic vitality.

It is such an interest which first made him choose to depict the event at its most pregnant moment. Peter is still sleeping profoundly and the angel is just about to wake him up. Coupled with this is the fact that the soldiers are placed in such positions that they appear much more only temporarily dozing than fast asleep (they are both standing up and resting on their lances). Now had Raphael depicted Peter wide awake (as Domenichino did)¹⁵ their sleep would more easily appear artificial (i.e. caused by God's direct intervention), since a striking contrast would then exist. But with their standing as they are, we get the distinct impression that they are just temporarily dozing, of the same natural sleep as Peter's. And somehow we get the mysterious feeling that they could wake up at any time. We wonder indeed whether the angel has not used his power to get into the cell, profiting of a moment of weakness from the part of the soldiers, and has not taken the chance that the latter do not wake up. Thus Raphael confronts us here with

a situation where a conflict between the supernatural and the natural is imminent and could arise at any moment. Needless to say that the pulse of the dramatic event taking place is thereby greatly intensified.

Space, architecture, color and light are also exploited and fused powerfully to intensify the pulse of the event. Light is here the unifying agent among all those means. Emanating behind the angel, it shines dramatically on the armor of the guards and illuminates the plain black structure of the ceiling and the walls in a most peculiar way. The yellow of the light intermingles with the black of the structure in such a way that the black, although obviously beneath the yellow, tends to pierce through the latter and to affirm itself as much on the surface; the structure thus ceases to be of a unified color to which one could give a distinct name: the black is specifically felt as such and so is the yellow spread over it; the conflict, the tension which we feel between the two results in a dramatic vibration. This vibration, by a true phenomenon of resonance, sets into a similar vibration the grill of the cell; consequently the space included between the two (i.e. the whole space of the interior of the cell) becomes itself activated: by thus adding its own vibration, it contributes directly to enliven, to intensify the dramatic life of the event.

As much as it was on making the event pulsate with vitality, Raphael's concern was on imposing on it a powerful Monumentality. To this effect, he includes the scene within two giant, massive piers and uses a plain, severe structure

for the interior; he also gives noble and dignified attitudes to the figures (apparent even in the soldiers) and distributes them in a clear symmetrical order. Thus is created an atmosphere of order, nobility and even solemnity which strikingly contrasts with the restlessness achieved in Domenichino's work.¹⁶

A similar analysis could be done of the two side scenes. The reader may notice especially how the dark form of the soldier holding a torch rises dramatically and energetically on the whole length of the brighter stairs, and how the silhouette of his companion also affirms itself impressively against the distant bare landscape. He may also observe how the fact that we cannot see their faces gives a more official "cachet" to the action of these two soldiers by affirming in a purser way the authority which they personify, and how this fact directly contributes to the monumentality of the whole by making the event look more official and more formal. He may observe, finally, the outstanding nobility and grandeur of pose in the sleeping soldier on the extreme right, how light, especially, unifies the three scenes, and how Raphael makes the two massive piers contribute, through their colossal scale, to the monumentality intended, and, through their "glowing", to the dramatic life of the whole.

This work indeed, especially when we take into account the stringent economy of means practised, realizes, within the event which it faithfully and powerfully brings out, one of the happiest dynamic combinations of Monumentality and dramatic

vitality ever achieved. For this reason, it can be included without hesitation among the very few greatest masterpieces of the classic will.¹⁷

The School of Athens [Stanza della Signatura] (Rome, Vatican; late 1510-mid 1511) is another outstanding example of the classic will. The event taking place, here, has nothing of a drama; it can be described as rational thinking being done, Reason at work or still intellectuality in process. The idea was to illustrate this activity using a group of outstanding philosophers from Antiquity, among whom Plato and Aristotle. In agreement with the classic will, Raphael proceeds to monumentalize the scene. He sets the figures in an architectural context at once powerful and majestic; the monumental arches recede with order and solemnity in the distance. The figures themselves are given "noble" proportions; their gestures are clear and controlled and their attitude breathes calm and dignity.

Beside conferring Monumentality to the event, the architecture is also made expressive of the very activity depicted: it is clear, vast and powerful and thus directly contributes to the specific atmosphere of "high clear thought"¹⁸ which Raphael intends. The pavement in the foreground fulfills the same function: it is made of clearly spaced squares inscribed one in the other, at once expressive of "rationality" and order.

Now by depicting the philosophers in the middle of an animated discussion, Raphael at once communicates a certain vitality to the event itself. In agreement with the classic

will, Raphael wishes to intensify this vitality. To this end, he first proceeds to organically relate the architecture with the figures. This is accomplished first by suffusing the figures with such a vitality, distributing and interrelating them in such a way, and using such a system of coloring on them,¹⁹ that the whole space which they are occupying becomes itself activated and vitalized.²⁰ Now the vitality thus circulating in the space of the figures, expands, like the molecules of a gas, beyond and above the figures, in the space created by the majestic arches. (This is greatly helped by the placing of some figures inside the border of the space of the arches, and by the fact that the space of the arches is connected with the foreground space, independently of the figures, through perspective). What results is a truly organic interpenetration of the vast space created by the arches with the space inhabited by the figures.²¹ It is this interpenetration which allows the latter to be organically related with the architecture, and it is through this organic relation that the architecture is made to dynamically (and not statically as was the case in the Quattrocento)²² lend its qualities to the event depicted.

Now Raphael distributes and interrelates the figures in such a way that the eye is led implacably to the two philosophers in the center (this is greatly helped by the placing of the latter exactly in the opening of the last arch). By thus doing Raphael is making all the amounts of intellectual vitality present in the scattered figures (especially in the foreground) converge towards the figures of Plato and Aristotle and contribute

their own share to the vitality already present in those too. Similarly, the qualities inherent to the architecture find themselves dynamically concentrated and integrated in those two figures (and not only juxtaposed, as would be the case if there was no organic or dynamic relationship between the figures and the architecture).

As a result of all this concentration of energy on Plato and Aristotle, the life of the mind (which they eminently symbolize) is presented to us suffused with a powerful vitality. Here again, like in the Liberation of Peter, the event has been not only monumentalized but powerfully vitalized.

The Expulsion of Heliodorus [Stanza d'Eliodoro] (Rome, Vatican; second half 1512) narrates a drama in the full sense of the term: avenging angels, at the request of the High Priest in the background, come to punish the impenitent Heliodorus. The activity is essentially: drama, suspense. In agreement with the classic will, Raphael's intention is to suffuse it with a powerful vitality. Like he was to do in the Liberation of Peter the year after, he chooses to depict the moment most pregnant with dramatic tension, when the angels are just about to fall on Heliodorus. Now the wide space between the two groups in the foreground (disregarding the papal group) had to be activated with dramatic vitality, and to this end Raphael made the group of women and children, on the left, recoil violently." Their force of look and gesture is directed toward the right, but at the same time an equal and opposite impulse of fear makes them recoil toward the left."²³ The

space between the two groups thus becomes charged with tension, like a tensed spring which could come back to its normal position at any time.

It is with a similar intention of charging the air throughout with dramatic tension that Raphael devised such an architecture as he did: "The vacant foreground of the scene is marked out in a floor pattern of movemented, perspective-diminished shapes; the architecture to the rear is open not only in its center but at the sides, making a wider and more pervasive sense of the activity of space; in the center bay of the temple arches, cornices and mouldings are multiplied, and insistently and quickly scan their diminution into distance."²⁴ And Freedberg further observes: "Unobstructed to the front, and swiftly and irresistibly channeled to the rear, the space and its vehicle, the architecture, are of one temper of dramatic animation with the figures; more than their sounding board, the space becomes an actor in the drama with them."²⁵

Light is also used by Raphael to directly contribute to the sense of drama intended: it falls as a dynamically intersected beam on the arches of the center bay and thus adds its own share to the dramatic life of the whole. We can also see why Raphael included the two figures climbing up on one of the columns: so that the eye will be induced still more towards the deep center and at the same time to help unify the space in the foreground with the one of the background by inserting them as a connecting element, a plastic link between the two spaces. Similarly for the two men standing against that

column and talking to each other: one is turned towards the center and induces the eye in that direction, while the other one is violently twisted, thus charging the air immediately around him with tension and contributing to the dramatization of the whole.

On the drama thus powerfully vitalized, Raphael was faced with the problem of imposing Monumentality. The papal group on the left serves such a purpose. It may also be observed how the impenitent Heliodorus preserves a dignity of bearing in the critical situation he finds himself in. The massive architecture also throws a note of severity. But all the same, we feel here an unresolved conflict between dramatic vitality on the one hand and Monumentality on the other hand. The papal group is not integrated in the event but merely juxtaposed; the architecture, for all its massiveness, does not resolve in repose and majesty.

Now I would like the reader to realize the difficulty which Raphael was encountering in the treatment of this subject as compared with the School of Athens. In both depictions, the space defined is wide and deep and the figures occupy a rather small proportion of it. In the School of Athens, as we have seen, space is energized but in a gentle and controlled way, let us say, in agreement with the event taking place. In the Expulsion on the contrary, Raphael had to devise ways to pervade space not only with vitality but with dramatic vitality (since the event is a true drama), if the specific event taking place was to be truly enlivened.

Now such a large space as exists in the Expulsion is not so easily dramatized and Raphael found out that he had to sacrifice Monumentality to a large extent in order to do so. The logical solution was to increase the scale and the power of expression of the figures and reduce the importance given to and the role played by space and architecture.²⁶ In the tapestry cartoons (1515) Raphael took the final step towards such a solution. In the Death of Ananias, for instance, the figures are contained in such a shallow space that there is no need for a complicated architecture to impose the sense of drama intended. The energy released in the foreground is not allowed to be dispersed but immediately reaches the group of apostles, on which it is at once reflected and amplified. The apostles thus fulfill the dual function of imposing Monumentality on the event to a powerful degree (by the solemnity of their presence) and of acting as a human sounding board for the dramatic energy released in the foreground. Monumentality and dramatic vitality are thus not felt as conflicting (like in the Expulsion) but as integrated into a powerful unity.²⁷

Such an integration was also one of the major concerns of Andrea del Sarto, as can be seen for instance in the Arrest of St. John the Baptist (Florence, Scalzo; 1517). One may notice here how effectively the calm and solemn figure in the left foreground answers Herod's dramatic movement forward (although the latter is addressed to the Baptist), and how the enclosing of the actors in a shallow space allows the event to vibrate with Monumentality and dramatic vitality, both being powerfully unified.

A word may be said here about Spirituality. It was stated earlier that classic art solved the traditional conflict between Spirituality and Natural Life. Now such a conflict, in the Quattrocento, existed in two forms. Artists could purposely dehumanize the human form in order to emphasize the idea of the supernatural (as Botticelli, for instance, so often did) -- in which case the conflict was between Natural Life and Spirituality. On the other hand, they could depict the holy figures as simple, down-to-earth people, aiming essentially at a convincing naturalism²⁸ -- in which case a conflict existed between Natural Life and the internal Spirituality of the work (by challenging our conception of holy figures).

By powerfully affirming the dignity of Nature (as we have seen) the classic work automatically integrates Natural Life in full (and vice-versa). On the other hand, the higher level of existence (at once more vital and more monumental) to which the classic artist raised reality, became the equivalent for a spiritualized existence. The religious classic work of art thus theoretically breathes both Natural Life and Spirituality (internal and external) no longer felt as conflicting, but as conciliated.

1. Michelangelo grounded his Prophets and Ignudi (in the Sistine Ceiling) so powerfully to their seat partly because he rightly gathered that the suggestion of any loose detachment of these figures from their seat, when seen from below, would make them look half-seated, half-suspended in the air, thus challenging our sense of gravity. And this could not be tolerated by the classic will operating in him.
2. Hauser, op. cit., II, pp. 88-89.
3. H. Wölfflin, Classic Art, New York, 1950, p. 208.
4. *ibid.*, p. 233.
5. *ibid.*, p. 208.
6. *ibid.*, p. 219.
7. *ibid.*, p. 174.
8. It is important that we realize how the dignity of Nature is respected by the classic artist. The latter achieves in his works a vitality often greater than is found in real life, yet through the respect of the physical premises enumerated above, Nature is always fully integrated. What is happening is that the latter's vitality is, let us say, intensified: there is an increase in true vitality, as before there was always a lack. That is why although the world created by the classic artist may be highly superior to ours, yet we would feel more at home in it than in any of the Quattrocento worlds: precisely because we feel a more intimate correspondence between its principle of life and ours (which is Nature herself, considered as a life-giving power).
9. It is irrelevant to our discussion that pre-Socratic and Hellenistic period philosophers appear side-by-side in the School of Athens. What matters is that they are depicted as if living at the same epoch.
10. The dating and attribution of this as well as of the other works assigned in this essay to Giotto, are taken from C. Gnudi, Giotto, Milan, 1959. For a contestation of these matters, see M. Meiss, Giotto and Assisi, New York, 1960.
11. Wölfflin observes that "a bourgeois art is transformed into an aristocratic one which adopts the distinctive criteria of demeanour and feeling prevalent among the upper classes." (op. cit., p. 213).

12. Giotto also had to face this problem in a subject like the Kiss of Judas (Padova, Arena Chapel; ca. 1305-10). Although he imposes here a powerful monumentality on the event, yet he fails to dynamize its existence and we have the clear impression that all the activity going on has been "frozen".
13. These three elements indeed all contribute to one another. They have been considered separately here in order to enable us to better grasp the mechanism with which the classic will is fundamentally operating.
14. By formal elements I mean essentially here space, light, color and architecture as well as the human figure itself.
15. In his Liberation of Peter (Rome, S. Pietro in Vincoli; early XVIIth cent.).
16. The comparison of the two works is taken from Wölfflin, op. cit., p. 104.
17. Wölfflin observes that the Liberation of Peter "is perhaps better fitted than any other of Raphael's works to lead the hesitant to a full appreciation of him." (op. cit., p. 106).
18. S. J. Freedberg, Painting of the High Renaissance in Rome and Florence, Harvard Univ. Press, 1961, I, p. 123.
19. For a description of this system of coloring, see Freedberg (op. cit.) pp. 124-25. It is demonstrated here how Raphael makes use of the assertive and recessive "personality" of the different hues to activate space.
20. Freedberg observes that the space occupied by the figures is transformed into a "plastically responsive aether" (ibid., p. 126).
21. The idea of "interpenetration" is taken from Freedberg, op. cit., p. 124.
22. The Funeral of St. Stephen (Prato, Duomo; 1460) by Fra Filippo Lippi offers a good example of a static juxtaposition.
23. Freedberg, op. cit., p. 159.
24. ibid., p. 159.
25. ibid., pp. 159-160.

26. The increase in scale which his figures gradually underwent can be partly interpreted as a search for such a solution.
27. In the Liberation of Peter, as we have seen, Raphael achieved a similar integration. It may also be observed that the force of presence of the event has greatly gained in the Cartoons. In a work such as the Expulsion, the eye is attracted certainly to the main actors, but also to the architecture and wide space around. The latter are indeed pervaded with drama, but in doing so we somewhat lose notion of the specific drama being played. In the Cartoons, the event confronts us with a most powerful intensity of presence. In the latter works, indeed, as in the Liberation of Peter, Raphael struck what is perhaps the ideal balance between force of presence, vitality and Monumentality.
28. A good example is Benedetto da Maiano's Madonna and Child (Berlin Museum; ca. 1480-85). This example is taken from Wölfflin, op. cit., p. 42.

PART TWO

THE NEW WILL IN ROSSO'S AND PONTORMO'S ART

III

NOTION OF THE NEW WILL

Classic painting reached its climax, in Florence, between the years 1516 and 1518, under the leadership of Fra Bartolommeo (who died in 1517) and Andrea del Sarto.¹ The former produced such outstanding works as the Holy Family (Rome, Galleria Nazionale; 1516), the Salvator Mundi (Florence, Pitti; 1516) and the Pieta [with Bugiardini] (Florence, Pitti; ca. 1516-17). Andrea, on the other hand, created his two masterpieces: the Madonna of the Harpies (Florence, Uffizi; 1517) and the Disputation on the Trinity (Florence, Pitti; 1517-18). In all these works we recognize the classic will (as we defined it in the preceding chapter) as unmistakably as in the works discussed above.

By a rather unusual coincidence, since the classicizing trend was overwhelmingly predominating,² those years also saw the emergence of a new art which was soon to powerfully challenge the accepted ideals. This new art, which we shall study in the works of Pontormo and Rosso, has proven to be one of the most controversial ones which art history has dealt with in the last forty years. It is my intention to help throw some light on its true character and on the spirit which led to its advent.

In order to do so systematically, I shall make a particular use of the word "irrationality". I define as partaking of irrationality the amount by which the depiction departs from

what would be a normal realistic rendering of the event. Thus I include under irrationality any amount of dehumanization or dematerialization, also anything which reveals itself to be abnormal, strange, odd, ambiguous, incongruous, dissonant, "irrational", inappropriate, illogical, untrue to life, untrue to normal experience, anything which does not agree with the notion we have of a realistic, normal representation of the event.

On surveying the whole of Christian painting prior to the new art³, we find that irrationality had resulted from a great diversity of interests. It had resulted, for instance, from an interest in clarity and directness of expression (as was the case in early Christian times); it had been used to promote Spirituality; it had resulted from an interest in the things of nature (as when animals, which we would normally not expect to be included, are inserted by the artist); it had resulted because the artist was interested in celebrating the fashion of the day (as Ghirlandaio is when he dresses biblical figures in the costumes of the day), or because he wanted to please the archaeologically-minded ones (as Ghirlandaio does in his Adoration of the Shepherds (Florence, S. Trinita; 1485)⁴; it had resulted from a concern for purely aesthetic effects (as was partly the case with the refined Gothic line); it had resulted from an interest in Monumentality (as was the case in Giotto, Masaccio, Piero della Francesca and the classic artists); it had resulted from a particular interest in the human figure (as Michelangelo manifests in depicting biblical stories with nudes)....etc.⁵

Now it can be said that until the advent of the new art, the irrationality included in the work of art, on the whole was not meant as such to arrest the mind. When he dehumanizes the human figure and dematerializes the latter's environment, the Byzantine artist exaggerates everything in such a way that the mind will not find interest in the resulting abnormality and strangeness as such. He is concerned with avoiding the the provocation of such comments as: "What a strange face!" or "How illogical is the size of the eyes!" or "How ambiguous is the space!" Instead, he hopes that the abnormality and strangeness created will be immediately interpreted as a manifestation of the presence of the spirit of God, and thus readily translated by the mind into Spirituality.

Quattrocento art is filled with irrationalities of all kinds. But here again the latter are not meant, as such, to arrest the mind. When he includes antique monuments in his Adoration of the Shepherds, Ghirlandaio expects that the incongruity as such will not impose itself on the beholder; he expects the latter to enjoy both the monuments and the scene of the Adoration without being disturbed by the obvious abnormality. Wölfflin observes, in this context, that "all the romancing of the fifteenth century is just a harmless game with architecture and dress."⁶⁶ The same thing, with the appropriate adjustments, could be said of all the irrationality present in classic art. When Raphael, for instance, includes two youths climbing up one of the columns, in the Expulsion of Heliodorus, the abnormality thereby created is not meant as such to arrest the mind. It is meant to be simply by-passed.

The significance of Pontormo's and Rosso's art comes from the fact that we are confronted here with an art endowed with an irrationality meant to impose itself in its very character of abnormality and strangeness. Indeed it is my contention that we can discern in the new art a distinct will⁷ to awake feelings of abnormality, of incongruity, of dissonance, of illogicality, of ambiguity, of inconsistency, of strangeness in the beholder. Irrationality is no longer meant to be translated nor to be by-passed, but, as such, to arrest the beholder's attention, to perplex and disturb him, to frustrate and baffle him, and often to create malaise, discomfort and uneasiness in him.

Romanesque art, at times, achieves effects resembling the ones achieved in the new art. Its irrationality sometimes possesses such a power of fascination that, like in the new art, it tends to impose itself in its very character of strangeness. But the latter is, let us say, a naive strangeness. A Romanesque work may intrigue and fascinate the mind through its very irrationality (like do also the ones created by Hieronymus Bosch) yet it does not really perplex the mind nor does it truly awake in the beholder feelings of incongruity, abnormality, illogicality, etc. because of its being too consistently and obviously irrational. The new art, as we shall see, awakes such feelings essentially through subtle or isolated departures from the logical, the normal, the congruous, the clear, the "rational"...which, as such, challenge the mind, perplex it and disturb it. The latter cannot be truly challenged nor disturbed unless a sufficiently high amount of rationality or "plausibility" is included.

And indeed it is one of the main characteristics of the new art that the force of impact of its irrationality as such is largely due to the rather high amount of "rationality" with which this irrationality is contrasted.

In the first chapter, we have defined Spirituality as an ether breathing the presence of the Spirit of God. It is of a fundamental importance, for an adequate understanding of the new will, to understand how such an ether is different from the one which irrationality, as such, produces. The latter, by definition, is made of abnormality, strangeness, ambiguity, illogicality, incongruity...etc. Now when these qualities as such strike the mind, we are not properly speaking in the domain of Spirituality. The latter is allowed to exist only when these qualities are translated by the mind. Thus a search for the abnormal, the strange, the ambiguous, the incongruous, the illogical...etc. is something theoretically different from a search for the spiritual. In the latter case, abnormality, illogicality and strangeness are means through which the apprehension (and consequently the existence) of Spirituality is made possible, while in the former they are ends in themselves.

We must also realize how any dwelling of the mind on the irrationality as such is detrimental to the existence of Spirituality. For in such a case the apprehension of irrationality in its very character of abnormality and strangeness tends to substitute itself to its apprehension as Spirituality. The event tends to be grasped more as taking place in a "strange"

and abnormal world, than in a world pervaded with the Spirit of God. The powers we feel at work tend to partake more of the strange and the abnormal than of God himself. We shall see how sometimes in the new art, feelings are awakened which actually contradict Spirituality itself. In such cases, Spirituality is literally "killed" by the irrationality displayed.

St. Bernard was not "being" insensitive to art when he protested against the exaggerations of the art of his time: "So many and so marvelous are the varieties of divers shapes on every hand that we are more tempted to read in the marble than in our books, and to spend the whole day in wondering at these things than in meditating the law of God."⁸ Indeed he saw with reason that the irrationality created by his contemporaries tended to be more effective in intriguing and fascinating the mind by its own power of appeal than in fostering Spirituality. He perceived that the art of his day tended to promote not so much the supernatural (which in God himself) as the strange and the fantastic. Instead of awakening feelings of fear and reverence towards a merciless God (merciless for the sinner, that is), monsters tended to be regarded as "strange" beasts and wondered at for their own sake. Instead of being grasped as a spiritual event, the latter tended to be grasped as a truly "strange" event. Now the essential *raison d'être* of irrationality, as established in early Christian times, was to symbolize and to be translated into Spirituality. This, as we have seen, is how irrationality had finally been integrated in

the fundamental structure of Christian art. In St. Bernard's times, irrationality had come to be used in such a way that this very structure was endangered. Irrationality tended to become interesting to the mind in its very character of strangeness and abnormality, so that its translation into Spirituality tended to be no longer effective. It is against such a degeneration that the saint thundered.

Now I am not denying here a certain concern for Spirituality from the part of Pontormo and Rosso. Neither am I declaring that the new will is active in all of their works. I am only stating for the moment that in a large number of their works, along with the will for Spirituality (which I am conceding) the new will (to awake feelings of abnormality, incongruity,etc.; to create malaise, disturbance, discomfort) is unmistakable and lives with a life of its own. In some works, as said above, even the internal Spirituality of the work is annihilated by the irrationality displayed; in others, as we shall see, the two wills can be felt separately.

Thus as the Byzantine artist had endeavoured to bathe the event in Spirituality, the event, in the new art through the new will, finds itself bathed in an atmosphere of abnormality, strangeness, incongruity, dissonance. To the superior world created by the classic artist the new art substitutes strange and abnormal worlds (partaking sometimes of the nightmare), where abnormality, dissonance, illogicality, ambiguity are the accepted values.

It cannot be denied, of course, that a new aesthetic beauty and even a new Spirituality emerge in the new art. It would be a matter of great controversy to decide whether it is the new will, the will for a new Spirituality or the will for new aesthetic effects which was the decisive one for the advent of the new art. Although I am strongly inclined to believe in the first hypothesis, my aim in this essay will be limited first to showing the existence of the new will in Pontormo's and Rosso's art, and second to explaining what would have caused this new will to make its appearance.⁹

I would like to add, finally, that in order to firmly grasp the new will, it is indispensable that we try and recapture the sensitivity to the subtleties of art, which the contemporaries no doubt had to a very high degree, and on which the new art was certainly relying on. We must also remember that the new art made its appearance in an essentially classicizing atmosphere, and that along the lucidity and refinement of Andrea del Sarto's and Fra Bartolommeo's works, its incongruities and abnormalities would have been the more disturbing (thus making the artist's intention still the more obvious).

1. Freedberg, op. cit., p. 427.

2. ibid., p. 427.

3. The "new art" shall refer exclusively to the art of Rosso and Pontormo discussed in this essay.

4. He includes a sarcophagus next to the Child, two antique pillars and a brand new triumphal arch in the background. Pointed out by Wölfflin, op. cit., p. 218.
5. The lack of skill, which by itself certainly caused a great deal of irrationality throughout the history of Christian art, is not relevant to our discussion.
6. Wölfflin, op. cit., p. 227.
7. I shall refer to this will as the "new" will.
8. E. Holt, A Documentary History of Art, Anchor Books, New York, 1957, I, p. 21.
9. The possible forces at work during the creative process are so numerous that they could never be enumerated completely. Among the major ones are the desire to follow the prevailing fashion, the desire for fame, the desire to please the patron by giving him what he expects, the desire for originality, the will to impose Spirituality, the will to achieve new aesthetic effects, the search for a new beauty...etc. Each one of these forces, considered individually, theoretically makes the artist paint in a certain way and aim at such a result that it will be satisfied. For instance, the desire to please the patron, knowing that the latter wants something essentially classical, will make the artist aim at producing a work essentially classical. The will for Spirituality (if it exists at all), on the other hand, will make the painter aim at pervading his work with Spirituality...etc. It is obvious that some of these forces (or drives) play a more important part than others during the creative process, depending on the artist's own temperament, his particular mood at the time of the sketching, the social conditions of the time...etc. Generally the actual work will satisfy and conciliate the most powerful of these forces, and the artist will be, on the whole, satisfied. If, however, conflicting forces are imposing themselves strongly on the artist's mind, the result will necessarily displease the artist himself and he will express dissatisfaction at his own work, precisely because in satisfying one force (or one drive) he will have been unable to satisfy the other equally important force. The works by Pontormo and Rosso which we shall discuss embody a new aesthetic beauty, as said above, and this is no doubt, first of all, because being genuine artists, they could not help producing in beauty. What I am contending is that the will to disturb, perplex and even shock the beholder was one of the major forces (or drives) at work during the creative process which led to their production. I would never claim that it was the only one.

IV

THE ART OF ROSSO

It is in Rosso's art that the new will first asserted itself most clearly and most unequivocally. Born in 1495, Rosso while still quite young manifested signs of dissatisfaction with the classic ideals.¹ In his Holy Family (Rome, Borghese; ca. 1513-14), the scale of Joseph and St. John in the middle distance is quite illogical compared to the one of Mary and Christ Child, due to a lack of articulation of the intervening space between the two groups. This space is easily apprehended, yet it is obviously not large enough to account for the abnormally reduced scale of Joseph and St. John. What is more, Rosso inserts in the background a landscape which extends far into the distance, and which appears "normally recessive."² Thus here a conflict is created between the irrationality of the space included within the two groups and the rationality of the deep space annexed to it.

What further adds to this conflict is that the figures are depicted with a sufficiently great amount of naturalism: they all have easy and natural gestures; their proportions are average; Joseph is reclining nonchalantly. In brief, they would easily belong to a normal world. But Rosso includes them in an irrational space, and as if to emphasize the irrationality of it, he annexes to it a completely rational one (the deep landscape) as a contrast. Thus here the artist emphasizes the incongruity between the figures and the world they inhabit, thereby creating an abnormality which tends to be disturbing.

In Rosso's Portrait of a Young Man (Berlin Museum; ca. 1516),³ the new will manifests itself as fully active. Freedberg gives an impeccable description of this work. "The sitter's body is altogether according to the usual convention of High Renaissance portraiture; only the fine and somewhat pointing drawing of the hands and the brittle painting of the drapery give it a difference in account from the ordinary. The head, however, has been strangely dislocated in respect both to the axis of the body and the vertical axis of the picture, and it has been even more abnormally displaced in space, thrust preternaturally forward to the foremost plane. It is framed squarely by the lank long hair and by the hat, a flat floating biomorphic shape. In the background landscape, the topmost level of the trees continues the straight line of the hat, already singular enough, in an irrational connection between near and distant. Thus imminently disjoined from its context and compelled toward us, the face is then subtly warped on its own axis, the far side pulled slightly toward the picture plane. The eyes turn still more toward us and stare, the pupils sharp against the white, with an unbearably insistent gaze. This unpleasant communication is all in one direction: there is no sense of a pacific and mutually interested inspection, as in Raphael's or Andrea's portraits....Rosso's sitter inverts the normal relation between spectator and the portrayed subject: he aggressively examines us, but does not permit that we examine him. We can look at him only with unease, and with the sense that association with him, even in this purely psychological domain of

art, might be dangerous; he is a male and anticlassical inversion of the Mona Lisa."⁴ Elsewhere Freedberg points out the "almost dangerous abnormality" of his expression.⁵

Little need be added to this description except that we have here an excellent manifestation of the new will. The "subtle departure" from the normal, which I mentioned in the preceding chapter, is here unmistakable and is meant to impose itself on us as such, and in such a way that a concrete disturbance results. We do not know what this young man has in mind, but it does not seem reassuring to us. We sense abnormal ideas going on in his mind and that is why his staring at us makes us feel that "association with him,...might be dangerous" as Freedberg writes. This work is the more significant that by its being a purely secular work, there cannot be any question of Spirituality (in the sense defined above). The new will, here, dominates unchallenged.

The Assumption (Florence, SSS. Annunziata; doc. 1517) was the last in the series of frescoes on the life of the Virgin begun by Andrea del Sarto a few years before. Pontormo had contributed the Visitation (1515-16). In the context of the latter and the other depictions (such as the Birth of the Virgin by Andrea), which are all essentially classic, "almost the first impression that emerges from the Rosso is of its bizarre types and their expressions: snub-nosed, weak-chinned and shapelessly fat of face; the Apostles bemused or vacant...)"⁶ The figure on the extreme left is particularly striking through the crudity of his facial expression: "So strange a grimace, evoking such an

irrationality of spirit in an actually portrayed being is without antecedent in the Renaissance, even in the most abnormal imaginings of Piëro di Cosimo."⁷ Further, while all the other frescoes are self-contained,⁸ here the robe of the apostle in the middle spills out over the frame, thus aggressively abolishing the boundary between the world of the picture and ours. It is easy here, indeed, to detect a will to truly shock the beholder by imposing on him, after the refinement and ennoblement of reality present in the other frescoes, a true crudity of types and an aggressive affirmation of these types (through the spilling of the robe).

What is more, Rosso clothes his figures in truly monumental draperies, even more monumental than in the adjacent Visitation by Pontormo, and recalling the ones used by Andrea in his nearby Adoration of the Magi (1511).⁹ It is as if Rosso had wanted to make a parody of the monumental figures depicted in the nearby frescoes: on the one hand, dressing his figures conspicuously like noble, superior beings, on the other, giving them the attitude and physical appearance of crude, down-to-earth, undignified people. The latter remark applies especially to the two figures on the far right, to the one facing the middle figure and turned almost completely toward us, looking up with his mouth opened, and to the one at the far left.

Thus Rosso in this work creates a double conflict, a double incongruity, first by juxtaposing crude figures to the idealized ones of the adjacent frescoes, and second by dressing them in clothes which rationally and conspicuously do not belong

to them. The atmosphere emanating is one of conflict, of contradiction, of incongruity, not of Spirituality.

The new will is again fully active in Rosso's Madonna and Saints [S. M. Nuova Altar] (Florence, Uffizi; doc. 1518). Like was the fashion in classic art, the figures are set in a shallow but rational three-dimensional space. They stand quite comfortably in conventional attitudes. There is especially in St. John the Baptist, Mary and the Child an easiness and relaxation of pose which are peculiarly classic. The bodies of those figures are also remarkably well proportioned and rounded out.

The figures of St. Jerome, on the right, throws a striking note of discordance in the work. His outstanding skinniness and the abnormal elongation of his neck contrast disturbingly with the roundness of the other figures. His hands are also drastically elongated; the fingers reach out in a frightful way: they look more like claws and confer to him a demoniac character. He is a man, indeed, whom we would not feel safe with. Rosso makes him the focal point of the work by turning three of the figures (including the Virgin) towards him and depicting him as if he was explaining something to them. The casualness with which the Virgin is listening to him could make us think that he is really not dangerous, but the abnormality of facial expression which they all share makes us conclude, on the contrary, that in all probability they all fundamentally belong to the same abnormal humanity as he does and are most likely inhabited by the same untrustable feelings as he is. Freedberg observes that they

wear "an air of just perceptible genteel lunacy which, in a moment, could become hysteria or shapeless psychological collapse."¹⁰ And indeed the general impression is of a strange, abnormal humanity. We feel them inhabited by feelings which we would refuse to share because of their intimate closeness to mental illness. As if to emphasize their oddness, the two infants, at the bottom, seem on the contrary quite normal; they are playing innocently together, unaware of what is being plotted above them.

The atmosphere of strangeness and abnormality which emanates from the figure of St. Jerome and the facial expression of the figures in general is further emphasized by Rosso's use of color. Freedberg observes "a tendency, only partly restrained, to dissonance... The Madonna, for example, wears a mauve headdress and a blue-green cloak, this framing a magenta crossed by a vermilion girdle, in her dress. The magenta goes "changeant" to blue in shadows; one sleeve is curiously transformed by light to yellow-gold. The John Baptist is red-haired, clad in a mantle of pale rose, bleached white in highlights, which contrasts with the tones of blue white, grey, and dark green of his other garments. The browned body of Jerome opposite is draped in blue, very dark in shadow and very cool in light..."¹¹ And Freedberg summarizes the whole scheme of colors as being "evidently irrational."¹² This irrationality only adds to the one already existing in the body of St. Jerome and in the psychological expression of the figures in general to make the latter look still more strange and abnormal.-- Irrationality

indeed is here no longer effectively translatable into Spirituality. And how still further away from Spirituality could the work have stood if the church master who had commissioned it had not expressed his utter disapproval, while it was still in progress. "When he saw the sketch, narrates Vasari, he thought the saints were devils... Accordingly the master rushed out of the house and refused to take the picture, saying that he had been deceived."¹³

I would like here to point out two psychological phenomena which are extremely significant for an adequate understanding of the new art. The first one is the remarkable easiness with which a strikingly abnormal and disturbing element often brings out in its very character of abnormality and strangeness the irrationality of the other irrational elements present in the work -- and how such irrational elements (which would not be otherwise disturbing) thus activated, contribute to make the work pulsate with abnormality and strangeness still more. The scheme of colors, for instance, which is used on the figures of the S.M. Nuova Altar would not have the same effect on the beholder's mind if used on a group of Byzantine figures. Here its irrationality would not truly disturb and would be easily translated into Spirituality along with the irrationality of the figures themselves. But applied as it is (in the S.M. Nuova Altar) on a group of figures, which strike through the peculiar abnormality of their facial expression, its irrationality somehow seems to come out in its very character of abnormality and dissonance and contributes to

make the figures look still more "strange" and abnormal. And we can be sure that the artist knew and was relying on that phenomenon.

That is why it is of the utmost importance, when considering a certain irrationality (or a certain group of irrationalities), to analyze it in the context of the other irrationalities present, if we seriously aim at grasping the artist's fundamental intention. For it will often be the case that a particular irrationality (or a particular group of irrationalities), when considered by itself, would be easily interpreted in terms of Spirituality, but that if the former is seen in the context of the other irrationalities present in the work, such an interpretation could not hold.

The second phenomenon I want to point out has already been indicated. It consists in the fact that the force of impact of the irrationality included is greatly helped by the amount of "rationality" with which this irrationality is contrasted. A characteristic of the new art, as I wrote above, is that it practically always includes a rather high amount of rationality (or, more generally, a clear rational frame of reference) through which the abnormality and strangeness of the irrationality present is communicated (as such) with still greater force and efficacy, and through which the artist's intention is made still the more obvious.

In the S.M. Nuova Altar, for instance, the space defined is rational and quite habitable, the figures (except St. Jerome) have normal proportions and there is an easiness

in the postures of St. John, the Virgin and the Child which (as observed above) is typically classic. The two infants at the bottom also strike by their innocence and the gentle idealization which Rosso imposed on them. On this background of rationality and idealism, the demoniac-looking figure of St. Jerome, the dissonance of the scheme of colors, and the abnormality of facial expression which the figures (except the two infants at the bottom) all share are thus imposed on us with a greater acuity than would be the case if, for instance, all the figures were immeasurably elongated and set in an utterly irrational space. In this case, the disturbing elements of the S.M. Nuova Altar would be easily "swamped" in the irrationality present and would attract the attention far less than they do in the actual work.

Indeed the world of the S.M. Nuova Altar (as are the worlds of the other works by Rosso which are discussed here) is far from possessing the naivety of medieval art, for instance. It plays on the beholder's sense of normality, of logic, of congruity in a way which is all but naive and which allows us to deduce in all fairness an utterly positive willingness in Rosso to disturb, shock and frustrate the beholder.

The will to impose actual discomfort on the beholder, which had been fully active in the Portrait of a Young Man (discussed above) is given free course again in the Madonna with Sts., John Baptist and Bartholomew / Villamagna (near Volterra),

Pieve; dated 1521⁷. The space in which the figures are set is here again quite rational. The Child clings to his mother in a natural way and his proportions are normal. The Virgin's proportions are also, in general, very plausible. Yet look at the way her right arm surrounds the Child and how it appears "nightmarishly" melting into his body; and look at the long and sharp fingers on both of her hands: they have something demoniac. Now compare the looks on the faces of St. Bartholomew and the Virgin. There is something frightening in them. These people seem to belong to a race of abnormals, not of the innocent kind, but of the dangerous one, with an intelligence which has been distorted. The way the Virgin and Bartholomew look at us indeed makes us feel uncomfortable. St. John the Baptist on the left is trying to explain something to them but they are not listening to him. They are insistently staring at us and for this reason we feel the more uneasy about their interest in us. We wonder by what kind of frightfully diabolic means they are already planning in their individual mind to attract us into their world. The Child himself seems devoured by some strangely conflicting inner urges. He seems to be of the same breeding as the two saints yet they have learned to repress (momentarily) their instincts as he has not. The sharpness of the light modelling these figures gives them a somewhat metallic appearance and adds to the nightmarish atmosphere of the scene. The internal Spirituality of the work is here completely annihilated. What overwhelmingly dominates is an atmosphere partaking of the nightmare, the abnormal and the dangerous. -- As in the S.M. Nuova Altar the abnormality

and strangeness prevailing did not reach us directly but theoretically remained confined to the work, here it aggressively breaks the barrier between the world of the picture and our world to impose on us a concrete uneasiness and discomfort.

The Deposition (Volterra Museum; dated 1521) is another striking example of the new will. The first incongruity we shall observe is between the upper and the lower parts. At the bottom, a scene of desolation and sadness. The Virgin, sustained by two ladies, bows her head in a direction completely parallel to the ground, in a sign of ultimate despair but also resignation: the struggle is over but it has left her practically lifeless. The Magdalena, also overcome with grief, is resting her head on Mary's lap. The boy holding the ladder looks at them silently and respectfully. St. John, on the right, is bowing deeply, also with his head parallel to the ground. His face is hidden in his hands and he is crying silently. For him also the struggle is over.

What is happening above them is a masterpiece of confusion and noisy activity. Christ's body is sustained by a man in quite precarious a position on his ladder. The one holding his legs is bent away from the ladder on which he is resting. Moreover, we cannot determine whether his right foot is resting on the ladder or not, for it is hidden behind one of the women's head. The only way he is apparently supported is by having his left knee resting on one of the ladder's steps, and this gives him, still more than to the first man described, a most precarious position. Furthermore, he looks away from Christ's body as if

about to bring himself back into a more secure and stable position on the ladder. The man next to him, with his mouth wide opened and his arms pointing at Christ, is shouting something at the man across him. We cannot determine exactly what it is, although he is probably warning him to be careful, seeing the precarious position this man is in. As to the man on top, he is supervising the operations with a worried and excited look, which the flying band of his robe, on top of him, only contributes to emphasize. -- So here we have an activity which on top of being in complete disagreement with the bottom scene, is also most disturbing. We find ourselves actually worrying about those men's activities: will the man holding Christ's body succeed in bringing him down safely? How about the one holding Christ's legs: will he reestablish himself solidly on his ladder? It seems here that Rosso had wanted to attract our attention on the difficulties involved in taking a body down a cross, rather than on the fact that it is Christ's body which is being taken down. This idea is further emphasized by the fact that all the figures are exclusively intent on their job, which is to take a body down, without dropping it: none of them looks at Christ (even the one shouting seems to be rather looking at his companion). What a change when we look at Fra Angelico's Deposition (Florence, San Marco Museum; ca. 1435), where we feel indeed that it is Christ himself, and no one else, which is being taken down.

To emphasize the distinction between the upper and lower

parts, Rosso makes all the actors in the lower scene act as if unaware of the difficulties involved in the upper scene. Even the boy holding the ladder, whom we would expect to be looking up and intently following the operations, seems unconcerned about them. The result of such a disunity between the two scenes (the upper scene is noisy and secular, while the lower one is silent and religious) is to lead our eye up and down, making us unable to decide whether we should stay down and sympathize with the mourners, or go up and join in the rescue operations. The atmosphere immediately created by this disunity is one of conflict and incongruity: we sense indeed there is something abnormal going on here.

Looking more intently at the upper scene, we observe that Christ's body is in such a position that the hand (which must belong to the man supporting him) grasping the cross, could as well be His! The unusual smile on Christ's face, combined with this ambiguity, now makes us doubt whether He is really dead and we begin to wonder whether the whole thing is not simply a macabre joke: we would not be surprised now to see Christ burst into a hysterical laugh. At this point the event depicted takes on the character of a possible fantastic hallucination. The sharp light falling on the figures only adds to this impression by its bestowing on them a ghost-appearance,¹⁴ thus imparting to the event a truly nightmarish quality. The incongruity between the upper and lower scenes (which was rationally incomprehensible) now finds its explanation within the irrationality which the nightmare allows. Similarly for the figure of St. John, who is much taller than the other figures and bows his head

quite out of the picture. Without the mechanism released by the problematic situation of Christ, his abnormal stature and his breaking out of the picture plane would not be so disturbing, but now we are made more aware of it and the strangeness thereby created imposes itself as such to make the whole event look still more strange and nightmarish. Finally, the unusual glance of the lady looking out (there is not the least friendliness nor invitation in it; actually one can detect a certain (although very slight) fear in it) adds its own share to the strangeness of the whole: we realize now that most likely our world is forbidden to her and that she is looking out because she must be somehow aware of strangers spying on their macabre recreation. -- Rosso's main concern in this work, it must be admitted, was for the strange, the abnormal and the fantastic, hardly for Spirituality.

The new will is again fully active (although in a different form) in Rosso's Virgin with Ten Saints (Florence, Pitti; dated 1522). The space in which the figures are set here is again fully rational. Most of the latter are depicted quite normally, both physically and psychologically. The one to the immediate right of the Virgin is, however, in a rather ambiguous position: while all the other saints occupy a clearly sufficient space, he seems to be partly integrated in the interior wall of the niche. He looks outward with an air somewhat timid and unsure, which only emphasizes the ambiguity of his situation. The saint on the extreme right, on the other hand, looks at us menacingly. His body is turned as if he was about to leave, yet he takes at us a last glance in which we feel a certain threat to our security.

The monstrosity of St. Bernard's hands, while the proportions of the other saints are plausible, is also a highly disturbing element. He is one of the saints in most evidence and the abnormal elongation of his right hand, especially, throws a note of unpleasant discordance and abnormality in the work.

It seems indeed that Rosso could not resist the temptation to insert disturbing elements. This work, for instance, would be highly consistent and pleasant without the abnormalities enumerated above; the latter, as it were, "spoil" the atmosphere of calm and nobility which would be prevailing otherwise. -- It is perhaps in works such as this one, where a few isolated elements conflict disturbingly with the "atmosphere d'ensemble" that the new will can be apprehended most unequivocally.

The last of Rosso's works which I shall discuss in connection with the new will is the Moses Defending the Daughters of Jethro (Florence, Uffizi; c. 1523). Friedlaender observes about this work that it is "the strangest, wildest picture"¹⁵ which Rosso ever devised. The action here is set in a deep three-dimensional space, which is conveyed by the juxtaposition of parallel layers one behind another. The figures, in general, have average proportions and their gestures approximate fairly plausibly the ones of normal human beings. They also have a great deal of plasticity. One may notice the outstanding vitality in the figures of Moses and of the man behind him moving towards the frightened girl (whose attitude, by the way, retains something charmingly feminine). The rendering of the heads of the lambs also conveys

remarkably well the natural commotion which such an event may cause among animals.

In this atmosphere of rationality or "plausibility", Rosso inserts a few disturbing elements which change the tone of the work completely. The head of the man in the right foreground gives the effect of an isolated sphere;¹⁶ the base of the column which stretches under the body of the man shouting does not continue; the situation of the sheep is most ambiguous: we cannot make out where they are standing; the two knees which we see underneath the bent figure on the left seem to belong to no body;¹⁷ the position of the bent figure in the left foreground is irrationally forced and appears artificially arrested.

The impression we get, once we have noticed those disturbing elements, is of a world which is neither utterly unreal nor satisfactorily real but reveals itself as an unusually strange one. We are perplexed and unconsciously try to find a solution to the unresolved irrational elements. The new will in this work has indeed achieved its purpose perhaps as successfully as in the ones described above: for although it may be very interesting esthetically, the arrangement which Rosso has devised here fundamentally remains a baffling and frustrating enigma.

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1. Freedberg, op. cit., p. 248.
 2. Freedberg, op. cit., p. 251
 3. The attribution and dating of this work are taken from Freedberg, op. cit.

4. *ibid.*, p. 541.
5. *ibid.*, p. 541.
6. *ibid.*, p. 542.
7. *ibid.*, p. 542.
8. I mean here, physically, for some of the figures in those frescoes are clearly aware of our presence. But it is, let us say, a refined awareness. The boundary in the Rosso is broken, on the contrary, with aggression.
9. K. Kusenbergl, Le Rosso, Paris, 1931, p. 10.
10. Freedberg, *op. cit.*, p. 546.
11. *ibid.*, p. 547.
12. *ibid.*, p. 547.
13. Vasari, The Lives of the Painters, Sculptors, and Architects, tr. by A.B. Hinds, London, 1927, II, p. 356.
14. W. Friedlaender, Mannerism and Anti-Mannerism in Italian Painting, New York, 1957, p. 31.
15. Friedlaender, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
16. Kusenbergl, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
17. *ibid.*, p. 23.

V

THE ART OF PONTORMO

Rosso, as we have seen, while still quite young, manifested unclassic tendencies; and although it seemed at a time [in such works as the Madonna in Glory (Leningrad, Hermitage; ca. 1515)] that he might have been tempted by the classic ideals, his adhesion to the latter was never wholehearted.¹ The case of Pontormo is different in that we are confronted here with an artist for whom the classic ideals at first constituted the only goal. The Visitation (Florence, S.S. Annunziata; doc. 1515-16) and the St. Veronica [Florence, S.M. Novella (Cappella del Papa); second half of 1515] mark the climax of this "classic" period of Pontormo. Their degree of excellence runs high within the classic tradition. Freedberg remarks that "with these two works Pontormo carried the postulates of classical style that had been given to him to a kind of fulfillment no other artist in the city had as yet attained and which, in this kind, no other artist would surpass."² Friedlaender also observes about the Visitation that it shows Pontormo as a complete master of the Florentine High Renaissance vocabulary. "This painting of Pontormo represents Florentine classicism at its most brilliant."¹³

The drastic change which took place in Pontormo's attitude toward art between 1516 and 1518 was perhaps without any precedent in the whole history of Christian painting. Here is an artist who succeeds (along with others of course) in bringing the efforts of a whole century to a climactic consummation and who the next day abandons his former ideals and starts off in a completely different direction.

The case of Botticelli of course immediately comes to mind. We all know how under the influence of Savonarola, this artist disregarded his own achievements in order to impose an uncompromising Spirituality on his art. The difference between Botticelli's and Pontormo's approach, is, however, fundamental. Their handling of space is perhaps the factor best revealing of their individual attitude. In works by Botticelli such as the Agony in the Garden (Granada, Royal Chapel; ca. 1500-1504) and the Nativity (London National Gallery; 1500-1501) the scale of the figures is so obviously illogical, the space defined so clearly irrational that the resulting strangeness does not as such attract the mind; it is presented in such an exaggerated way that the latter does not take interest in it but easily translates it, along with the rest of the irrationality included, into Spirituality. Pontormo, on the contrary, often takes pleasure, as we shall see, in crowding his figures in a space "not quite" sufficient or logical for them, or in challenging our sense of location, with the result that feelings of ambiguity, incongruity, and illogicality (all detrimental to the apprehension of Spirituality) are awakened in us. Indeed while Botticelli's late art reveals a clear search for the spiritual, Pontormo's, from around 1516 onwards, on the whole reveals primarily a search for the strange, the incongruous, the perplexing, the disturbing.

In several of his works, as we have seen, Spirituality was the least of Rosso's concerns. Consequently the new will was given free course and was often allowed to run wild. In Pontormo, the conflict between the will for Spirituality and the new will

is more intense and Spirituality's "struggle for survival" is stronger than in Rosso. It is possible indeed to sometimes discern in the same work by this artist the two wills side by side, each one with a life of its own.

Pontormo's art in general does not produce the discomfort and uneasiness which we have observed in Rosso's. Further, while Rosso favored an abnormal humanity and nightmarish effects, Pontormo favours to challenge the beholder's sense of consistency, which had been so highly developed under the impact of classic art; to this end, he devises such formal disturbances as spatial ambiguities or incongruities, the conspicuous tipping of a triangle, the lack of unity, physically or psychologically, among the figures...etc. This differentiation does not apply by any means to all of these artist's works, but it gives an idea of their respective approach. What must be kept in mind at any rate is that in both exists fundamentally the same will: to perplex, disturb and frustrate the beholder by substituting to the superior, ideal world of classic art a world where illogicality, incongruity, ambiguity, abnormality, strangeness are the accepted values.

One of the first works by Pontormo in which the new will manifests itself distinctly is the so-called Joseph Sold to Potiphar of the Borgherini series (Henfield, Lady Salmond; ca. 1516).⁴ It actually depicts the departure of Jacob's sons for Egypt. We see them about to leave, in the background, while Jacob, in the foreground, is giving Benjamin his permission to accompany them.⁵ There is certainly in this work an abundance of secondary figures and a certain confusion which make it depart from classic norms.

The most significant unclassic feature however, is the ambiguity of space created in the middle ground.⁶ Pontormo has articulated it with one figure, but it is impossible to determine exactly where the latter stands. There is no appreciable interval of distance between him and the foreground figures. We know through his diminished proportions that he stands away from them, yet his exact location eludes us.

Now this would not perhaps be so disturbing if he was occupied at some minor activity, but Pontormo places him conspicuously in the exact center of the picture. Furthermore, he attracts our attention on him by making him look directly at us; this figure indeed is the only one not participating in the event depicted: he stands isolated from the rest, not aware of them, but insistently staring at us and seemingly asking us: "Guess where I am standing!" The essential purpose of this figure seems to be to challenge our sense of location.⁷ And this is as complete a manifestation of the new will as could be. We are perplexed and disturbed by this figure; we would want to integrate him with the rest, yet we are powerless. He imposes his presence on us (through his staring at us) yet he eludes us and does not allow himself to be grasped. The result is perplexity, disturbance and frustration.

In the Joseph in Egypt (London, National Gallery; ca. 1517) the new will has invaded the whole panel. Briefly, this work depicts the coming to Egypt of Joseph's family and Jacob's blessing of Joseph's sons.⁸ Pontormo has made of it a masterpiece of formal ambiguity, illogicality and incongruity. The space defined

in the foreground is clear enough and inhabited quite comfortably by the figures included in it. The flight of stairs and the scene of Jacob's blessing in the upper right hand corner are also spatially satisfactory. The mind here is not disturbed. The scale given to these figures in general, in these spatial areas, is sufficiently decreasing as the figures recede into deep space to appear plausible. The Joseph in the middle of the stairs is smaller in size than the Joseph in the foreground and larger than the figure of Asenath at the top of the stairs.

However, the space between the man holding out an empty bowl with an imploring gesture and the architectural construction in the background defies any rational analysis. The scale of the mass of people held back by the two guards has diminished so drastically that they should normally stand much further back in space, yet there is no indication along the ground that this is so. And look at the isolated figure immediately behind them, standing against the wall below the stairs: he seems to be clearly set apart from the group yet we can't determine his position in space relating to them; there is no way of telling how far away he stands from them; he appears at once close to them and far away from them. This figure is the exact counterpart of the isolated figure in the middle ground of the Joseph Sold to Potiphar. In both cases, a man standing by himself, looking outwards, not participating in the event actively and in a completely ambiguous situation as far as his position in space is concerned. It seems that in both of these cases, Pontormo has included such a figure mainly to simply baffle the beholder's sense of location.⁹

The scale and situation of Joseph's waiting relatives in the center also "admits no reasonable explanation."¹⁰ They look outwards, most of them directly at the beholder, as if to affirm themselves still more and disturb with still greater acuity our sense of reality.

Wischnitzer observes that the landscape does not recede into depth but rises like a screen.¹¹ In any case it certainly "rises as much as it recedes into the space."¹² This effect is conveyed largely by the fact that the stairs appear to carry the eye into the background as well. It is further reinforced by the complete absence of spatial articulation immediately behind the upper part of the stairs: what we see there is a uniform piece of background which truly gives the effect of a completely vertical screen. The impression immediately created by all those spatial irrationalities is one of abnormality, illogicality and incongruity. The latter impression is further reinforced by the effect created by the statues. Freedberg observes that they are "imminently as animate as the actors."¹³ Thus here the boundary between the inanimate and animate worlds partly ceases to exist. We wonder indeed in what kind of a world Pontormo is transporting us. The key to its mystery is given to us by the situation of the group of people held back by the two guards.

Unusual groupings of this kind were quite common in medieval art. A typical example is seen in the Kiss of Judas by Duccio (from the reverse of the Majestas, Siena, Cathedral Museum; 1308-1311). Here the soldiers are unnaturally pressed together behind

the figure of Christ; but so are the fleeing apostles on the right; moreover the scale of all those figures is consistent and also we do not feel any actual uneasiness amongst them. Consequently, the irrationality thereby created does not as such tend to perplex the mind and no actual disturbance results. In the Joseph in Egypt, on the other hand, two major factors combine to make the group held back by the soldiers truly disturbing. First, the drastically reduced size of those figures compared to the one of the figures in the foreground. Second, the particular uneasiness which, on careful observation, we perceive amongst them, compared to the ease with which the figures move in the rest of the canvas. Of course, their eagerness to approach Joseph and the fact that two guards are holding them back partly explains this uneasiness, but not quite sufficiently. Beside this genuine eagerness and the control exercised by the guards, we feel the presence of another power at work, a truly physical power which seems to press on the figures and group them together in a tighter way than they would normally allow themselves to be grouped: we get the distinct feeling that they are struggling against this power. Since there is no visible force (other than the soldiers) surrounding them, the result we come to is that space itself is truly closing on them! Space thus becomes in this work directly activated by a strange force which gives it the ability not only to irrationally extend or narrow down the distance between the figures, but to even actually weigh on the latter and impede their activities. Once we are aware of this, it is to this strange power activating space itself that we now attribute the ability to change the natural appearance of things. And the animate aspect of the statues now appears to be the work

not of our imagination but of this power.

The whole scene now seems to breathe the presence of this power. We now feel that the "rationality" included in the work is at the mercy of the latter and that in the next instant, the characters depicted in the foreground could find themselves reduced to the same scale as the figures in the middle ground and background. We would not be surprised, either, if the statues suddenly began to move. The world which Pontormo offers us here suddenly reveals itself as utterly transitory, subject to radical changes at any moment. The control which medieval art allowed (through its naivety) and which classic art did not prevent (through its respect of the basic laws of nature) is here lost. The beholder finds himself confronted here with a world regulated by incomprehensible laws and activated by powers as incomprehensible. His sense of consistency and congruity finds itself openly baffled. The new will has triumphed.

The works by Pontormo so far discussed were intended for private use. His first "public" work in which the new will is fully manifested, is the so-called Visdomini Altarpiece Madonna and Child with Saints (Florence, S. Michele Visdomini; dated 1518⁷). The figures here are distributed in the usual way: the Virgin is set in the center in a niche of classic architecture, with two saints on each side of her; Christ Child is balanced by St. John Infant and two putti, in the upper corners, also balance each other.

The use of the triangular form, grouping Mary, St. Francis, Joseph and St. John Evangelist is also discernable. One

peculiarity about it is that it is tipped; moreover, one of its extremities lies outside the frame. Further, if brought back to normal position, its base would be too wide to be contained within the canvas. For these reasons it is not immediately graspable but a closer examination reveals it as an almost perfect triangle. The apex is just above Mary's head, about half-way between the top of her head and the upper frame. One side goes through St. Francis' head and ends where his two feet intersect. The other side slightly touches Joseph's chin, goes through St. John Evangelist's right eye and ends outside the frame at approximately the same level as the latter's right wrist. The base goes through St. John Evangelist's right hand, through his right knee and cuts midway through St. Francis' left leg, all along it.

The triangular form was used by the classic artists to confer stability to the grouping and to enclose the figures compactly. The new will operating in Pontormo made him use such a form but in a tipped position, thereby denying one of its properties and at once provoking a certain disturbance in the beholder. Pontormo further chose to openly deny the other property (enclosure) by turning Joseph's and St. John Evangelist's heads away from the triangle. Joseph's head indeed is violently twisted sideways and backwards, so much that it completely breaks out of the triangle. Again here a disturbing effect results.¹⁴ A further disturbance emanates on comparison of St. John Evangelist's head with Joseph's. While the former is turned easily and appears quite relaxed, Joseph's proves to be in quite uncomfortable a position. There is in it a combination of restlessness and

uneasiness which only increases the sense of malaise already conveyed by the denied triangle.

The intent gazing of St. Francis at Christ Child also proves to be disturbing. While the other four saints appear totally unconcerned about the latter, St. Francis is concentrated on him almost like in ecstasy. In order to make this oddity still more conspicuous, Pontormo makes Christ Child utterly unconcerned about St. Francis: he is laughing playfully, looking vaguely but not seriously towards the altar; indeed he makes us wonder whether the saint is not somewhat exaggerated in his attitude towards him. Pontormo further elongates St. Francis' figure drastically while giving fairly plausible proportions to the other saints. This has a "return" effect: to still more attract our attention on his abnormal attitude towards Christ Child, while this attitude inversely forces our attention on the exaggerated elongation of his body, relatively to the other saints. The result here again is to awake in us feelings of incongruity, of abnormality and of illogicality.

The classic artist, in his will for concentration and intensified life, had endeavoured to achieve a high degree of cohesion between three-dimensional space and surface representation. To that effect the figures were often gathered compactly in a shallow space, as for instance in the Disputation on the Trinity by Andrea del Sarto. In the Visdomini Altar, Pontormo also gathers his figures compactly, but in a space "not quite" sufficient for them all. As in Andrea's work there is still ease and detente, the spatial arrangement in the Pontormo conveys at once ambiguity and

a certain malaise. Freedberg observes that Pontormo here substitutes "a situation of height for one of depth."¹⁵ He does so, however, not in the naive way of the middle ages, but in a critical way which truly challenges our sense of location. On the one hand he allows the Virgin, St. Joseph, St. James and the two Infants to occupy a plausible space, while on the other he irrationally compresses the figures of St. John Evangelist and St. Francis, just enough to awake in us feelings of ambiguity and illogicality. As in medieval art, the irrationality of such compressions was naive and clear, and was not otherwise disturbing, here it is just such as to awake our curiosity. We wonder whether St. John Evangelist is not actually intruding in Joseph's space; as to Francis, his situation, on closer examination, proves to be most perplexing. His right leg appears to be in the same plane as the figure of St. John. Infant: but this would be rationally impossible, since there is a step running all along on which are seated the Infant and St. John Evangelist. It would mean that the step would end exactly where the Infant stands, which is quite improbable. -- Thus here Pontormo mixes the rational and the irrational in such a way as to create perplexity and doubt in the beholder. In the light of the other abnormalities we have detected in this work, we can safely conclude indeed that the will for disturbing effects here was a major one for Pontormo.

Freedberg has proven that the predella for the Visdomini Altarpiece originally included as a central portion a Pieta which is now in the National Gallery in Dublin.¹⁶ He attributes the latter to Pontormo and dates it 1517-18. In general design, this

Pieta recalls the Avignon Pieta (Paris, Louvre; XVth cent.) Both are set in a deep bare landscape which creates a mood of nostalgia and solitude. In the Avignon Pieta, however, the figures are distinctly integrated in the landscape through a clear movement in space going from the donor on the left to the Magdalena on the right: the donor is set in the immediate foreground while the Magdalena stands in a plane further back; the eye going from one to the other is thus induced to carry on beyond them and the integration of the group with the landscape is thus automatically facilitated.

The pieta by Pontormo does not suggest such an integration. Freedberg observes that the actors are disposed against the landscape "as if in despite of the notion that there is room in it for habitation. They are arranged within the narrowest plane of space as close as possible to and in strict parallelism with the picture plane; they are against the landscape rather than within it."¹⁷ We recognize here the same will which we have observed in the Altarpiece itself; in the case of the Pieta, the disturbance comes from the fact that the actors seem not to want to associate themselves with the landscape: the latter is there inviting them, and we would want them to inhabit it as in the case of the Avignon Pieta, yet they refuse and align themselves against it, thus openly frustrating our sense of cohesion.

Freedberg also attributes a panel depicting St. Lawrence (Dublin, National Gallery) to this same predella and similarly assigns it to Pontormo. A panel representing (presumably) St. Francis (also in Dublin) is assigned "fairly surely" to Pontormo.

St. Lawrence's head indeed appears strangely dislocated; it gives the effect of having been stuck on the saint's body rather than being an integral part of it. The expression on his face is one of surprise and stupefaction and adds its own oddity to the already abnormal position of the head. The saint's left hand is also most uncomfortably bent in. The figure as a whole conveys a mixture of uneasiness and stiffness. St. Francis, on the other hand, appears relaxed and normal: he is looking at us quite naturally and does not manifest any sign of surprise. If these two panels were really juxtaposed in the predella (as Freedberg is inclined to believe) and if they were both executed by Pontormo, then we have here a perfect manifestation of the new will. For then the incongruity between the attitudes of the two saints becomes striking: the figure of St. Francis, by being juxtaposed to that of St. Lawrence, now makes the latter truly baffling, unexplainable and frustrating.

The new will is again fully active in the St. Anthony Abbott (Florence, Uffizi; 1519-20). Physically, the saint recalls the Prophets of the Sistine Ceiling.¹⁸ His psychological attitude, however, is the exact opposite of the Prophets'. While the latter manifest a purposeful passion which nothing could stop, the saint on the contrary appears literally frightened. "The aged saint is in a state of almost fearful spiritual commotion, which he communicates in his intense yet haunted glance and equally in the urgent inclination of his body."¹⁹ The terrified expression on his face is indeed so genuine and innocent that we instinctively sympathize

with him. Yet at the same time we become aware of a striking contradiction, of a spectacular incongruity. Pontormo here creates a superior type of humanity physically and at the same time he negates it psychologically. The saint looks like a superman physically, yet his mental state is the one of a frightened child. A device typically classic is thus used here to be then conspicuously negated.

We have observed the same happening in Rosso's Assumption, where bizarre types are clothed in monumental robes. We have also observed similar denials in earlier works by Pontormo: how, for example, in the Visdomini Altarpiece he had used the triangular form to then conspicuously negate it in its fundamental characteristics, and how, in the predella of the same work, he had included a deep landscape without allowing the actors to inhabit it. The more we scrutinize Pontormo's and Rosso's works, indeed, the more we realize that the will to frustrate the expectancies of a public eager for idealism is fundamental to the new art. In the Certosa frescoes, as we shall presently see, Pontormo offers us another striking example of such a will.

Vasari tells us that in 1522 Pontormo left Florence in order to escape from the plagues which had just broken out in the city.²⁰ He retired to the Certosa nearby, where during the next three years he did some frescoes representing events from the Passion of Christ. The change, which his style underwent at that point was highly deplored by his contemporaries. Vasari himself, who is usually rather benevolent towards any artist, made clear his disapprobation: "Let no one blame Jacopo for imitating Albert Dürer, because many painters have done it and do so still. But he did wrong in adopting

that stiff style for everything, the draperies, expression and attitudes, which should be avoided when borrowing the ideas, as he had a graceful and beautiful modern style."²¹ And such a change, for him, remained a mystery. He could only feel sympathy for Pontormo "who took such pains to learn what others avoid, abandoning a good style which pleased everyone. Was not Pontormo aware that Germans and Flemings come to learn the Italian style which he made such efforts to shake off as if it was bad?"²²

What actually took place in Pontormo's mind was that the conflict between the new will and the will for Spirituality, which had been apparent in such works as the Visdomini Altarpiece, reached a point of critical acuity. The conflict has here developed into a true crisis. Dürer's manner is decided upon by Pontormo because he recognizes it as capable of satisfying both of his urges. On the one hand he knew that the adoption of the German style by him, who was already famous among Italian artists, would make his works disconcerting and frustrating to the eyes of his contemporaries -- and, therefore, the new will, active in his mind, would be automatically satisfied. On the other hand he saw that the Spirituality present in Dürer's art would maintain itself even though the works were by him and not by Dürer -- and, therefore, the will for Spirituality active in his mind would also be automatically satisfied. The conflict now, instead of being internal, would be, let us say, external.²³

Complications, however, did not take long to develop. The new will, in Pontormo's mind, was finding out that it was conceding too much to Spirituality, and that the irrationality of

Dürer's art, although it would be frustrating for the immediate contemporaries, was intrinsically too naive and not disturbing enough. Consequently it made Pontormo effect a first transformation of Dürer's manner.

Dürer's art, as seen in the Small, Large and Engraved Passions, has practically none of the irrationality characteristic of the new art. The qualities which characterize it best, in comparison with Pontormo's art, are congruity and consistency. Space, for instance, is always either sufficiently rational to be quite habitable by the figures included in it, or else it is so naively overcrowded that the mind immediately accepts its irrationality as an integral part of the whole. This comes to say that the world with which Dürer confronts us is always a closed one at once congruous and consistent with itself. The laws which activate it are readily understood by us and its distance from our world is always clear and well-defined. In such works, for instance, as the Christ Before Pilate of the Small Passion (1509-11) and the Christ Before Pilate of the Engraved Passion (1512), space is clearly defined and the figures stand comfortably in it. There is indeed a will to reduce the space in depth and to gather the figures on a rather narrow ground, but the amount of space present still remains sufficient and rational. The new will active in Pontormo made him introduce in his Christ Before Pilate (at the Certosa) just the right amount of irrationality in the space defined to provoke a disturbance in the beholder. Lavin observes that here Pontormo "introduces a stairway at the bottom of the scene by way of justification for the half-figures appearing above the frame.

But the space thereby created for the figures is not quite sufficient, and we feel all the more the illogicality of their presence. A rational device is employed, while its rational effect is deliberately denied."²⁴

It is again the new will which made Pontormo depict the youth descending the stairs totally differently from the rest of the figures. While the latter are "schematic and unplastic",²⁵ this youth is "much too large and intensely plastic for the distance at which we would assume him to be judging from his position on the steps and within the perspective system as a whole."²⁶ Thus here Pontormo creates a doubly striking incongruity: for the youth, instead of appearing still more "unplastic" than the figures in the foreground (as should be the case, since he is further away in space) appears on the contrary more plastic than they. The result is that "space itself seems to have become malleable, strangely expansible and contractible."²⁷ The consistency of Dürer's art is here completely thrown overboard. We are baffled by the world which Pontormo offers us; The laws governing it escape us. An atmosphere of illogicality, incongruity and contradiction weighs on it. The new will here has marked one more point.

Friedlaender points out that "the seated sleeping figure at the left in the Resurrection is taken from the small woodcut Passion of Dürer, and the figure of the Saviour clearly goes back to the Resurrected figure of the Great Passion."²⁸ In the Small Passion, however, the soldiers are all set in a comfortable space which does not challenge the mind. They are also very secondary in importance and the figure of Christ by far dominates the scene.

The new will operating in Pontormo decided that there was too much ease in this work. So it made him crowd four soldiers on the left and three on the right, in a space quite insufficient for them all. In the Small Passion, while the compression inherent to the bent legs of the seated figure on the left finds itself submerged in the deep space behind, here it becomes a major motif of disturbance. It contributes to emphasize the idea that there is no space available behind and that the soldiers have been forced into the shallow space they are occupying. A sense of malaise is thus here created. We wonder indeed how the three soldiers behind the seated one on the left can manage to sleep. Furthermore, the figure of Christ, although large enough in scale, is no longer dominating like it was in the Small Passion. The uncomfortably crowded soldiers here detract the mind from it and tend to affirm themselves as much as Christ. Like in the Christ Before Pilate (by Pontormo), an atmosphere of abnormality and "illogism" emanates from the work. The new will, here again, has marked another point.

The will for Spirituality, as I have suggested already, was not prepared to give in easily to the wishes of the new will, in those years which Pontormo spent at the Certosa. Therefore, to this first transformation of Dürer's style which I have just described, it answered by making Pontormo simultaneously effect a further transformation of it. In this second transformation, Pontormo became "more archaic and more Gothic."²⁹ than Dürer himself.

The figures which in Dürer were depicted with naturalism, became here disembodied and schematic. The two halberdiers in the foreground of Christ Before Pilate "rise ghostly and bodiless."³⁰ Christ, himself, in this work, is turned to the side "so that his

silhouette is a thin, Gothically swung curve."³¹ In the Resurrection "Dürer's robust male figure, executed in a thoroughly anatomical way, has in Pontormo turned into a swaying, supernaturally elongated figure. All that is physical whether in Andrea del Sarto's or Dürer's sense, has vanished -- there remains only the delicate, bright, almost bodiless appearance, completely transformed into spirit, which sweeps upward in a spaceless existence."³²

Pamofsky speaks of it as "an ultra-Gothic Christ floating upward like a wisp of smoke."³³ The will for Spirituality indeed affirms itself in those frescoes as powerfully as the will for disturbing effects. In probably no other works by Pontormo are these two wills affirmed so distinctly and so intensely.

The imitation of Dürer's manner had, however, failed to solve Pontormo's conflicting urges. It was therefore abandoned and the artist now appealed to his own inspiration to suggest to him the elements of a possible conciliation. The Deposition [Florence, Santa Felicita (Capponi Chapel); 1526-28⁷] came as the result of such an appeal.

The Deposition occupies a unique place in Pontormo's art in that the artist here has temporarily renounced disturbing ambiguities and illogicalities, in order to impose on the beholder with greater power the elusive mystery of a "strange" reality. The world depicted here, through its irrationality, obviously belongs to the domain of unreality. "It is nervous and unreal, colors are off-key, space is crowded and irrational, figures lack mass, faces are masks, movement is strained, proportions are strange."³⁴ Yet

we are not dealing here with a world so consistently unreal as would seem. The space, for instance, is quite rationally defined in the foreground. The proportions of many figures are quite plausible on the whole and their gestures in general are also quite normal. There is no exaggerated display of emotions: the Virgin alone manifests a certain grief, and the latter is quite subdued. Clapp observes that "death has been among them for the first time, and in amazement rather than in tears, they carry to the grave their fairest youth."³⁵ He also observes on the faces "a look more of incredulity than despair."³⁶

The decisive element, however, is the eminently human state of helplessness in which the figures reveal themselves to be and which seems to be directly addressed to us. Three of them (not including the donor on the far right) are looking outwards. They seem to be waiting for someone to tell them what has really happened and what to do next. This is remarkable especially in the man holding Christ's legs. He is bent in a truly "waiting" position and is looking out, obviously aware of our presence and tacitly waiting for some advice. His attitude is the more significant that he is one of the key figures in the work. The youth holding Christ's upper body also seems "lost" and not knowing what to do and where to go: he looks outwards as if in the hope of finding somebody to direct him. The donor himself seems to be appealing to our sympathy.

Now this state of helplessness, combined to the amount of "plausibility" included in the work, has the effect of involving us in the event in a most unusual way. Pontormo makes us feel, very

skillfully and subtly, as if at this critical instant we could help in the situation. And somehow this feeling awakened in us has the effect of imparting a character of amazing reality to the scene. The immediate result of this effect is to transform the unreality of the scene into a "strange reality." What is happening is that we are literally lured into the unreal world of the picture. There is not in this work the brutality of Rosso's works nor the wilful ambiguities or illogicalities which we have detected in Pontormo's earlier works. We cannot talk here of properly disturbing effects by which we could somehow "control" the irrationality present. On the contrary, Pontormo has endeavoured to smooth out as much as possible the transition between the plausible, the real, and the irrational, the unreal. It is not unreasonable to say that the real, here (like in Surrealist painting), merges with the unreal. We are lured into the unreal world of the picture (essentially through the state of helplessness of the figures addressed to us) in a way comparable to what would take place if one passed imperceptibly and gradually from full consciousness into the state of dream. Thus the unreal world which Pontormo offers us here imposes itself in a mysterious yet powerful way as a "strangely real" one.

The Deposition thus anticipated perhaps more than any other work produced to that date, the creations of the modern Surrealist painters. For the technique of luring the mind into an unreal world so that the latter takes on the character of a "strangely real" world (technique which is fundamental to Surrealist painting) has been worked out in the Deposition, indeed, to an amazing degree.³⁷

The Visitation (Carmignano, Parish Church; 1528-30) is another work by Pontormo in which we can detect the presence of the new will. A comparison of the finished study for this work (Uffizi 461) with the latter proves most interesting.³⁸ The study shows Mary and Elizabeth with their back to us and facing two attendants. One of these stands between Mary and Elizabeth; she is immobile and looks at us. The other one, on the far left, looks sideways; moreover her head is slightly tilted, thus giving her a certain relaxation and at the same time endowing the scene with a note of informality. This note of informality has the effect of giving détente to the group, which otherwise would be rather stiff.

The original essentially includes two small alterations of the study. The head of the woman **on the far left**, which was slightly tilted, has here been brought back to the vertical position; moreover, while in the study this woman was looking sideways, here she is looking straight at us, like her companion near her. These alterations have the affect of completely changing the tone of the work. We now have the uncomfortable feeling of being truly "watched" by the two attending figures, as we behold the Virgin and Elizabeth (who constitute the essential *raison d'être* of the work). The attendants are not participating in the event: they are instead insistently staring at us in a strangely impassible way.³⁹ There is indeed something partaking of the spectre in the figure on the left.⁴⁰ The détente which pervaded Uffizi 461 is here gone. Gone also is the friendly communication which the study allowed between the beholder and the event. A sense of malaise, instead, now invades the beholder. The new will, which was hardly manifested in

Uffizi 461, has here been taken care of by Pontormo.

The last work by Pontormo which I want to examine is the Madonna and Child with St. John Infant (Florence, Palazzo Corsini; 1528-29). The Virgin's face is depicted quite normally: it reflects a normal psychological expression and its features are spaced according to normal standards. With Christ Child, Pontormo has plunged into irrationality. On the one hand, the distance between the Child's mouth and the line of his eyes is less than is the case in the Virgin's face, as should be expected since he is only a child. On the other hand, his forehead is so immeasurably elongated, that his whole head proves to be not only as long but strikingly longer than the Virgin's! The impression we get here, far from being the one of a future Saviour of humanity, is of a deformed child, who has grown abnormally while still in his mother's womb, and whose deformity has not been subsequently rectified by Nature (as often happens) but has kept on developing with him. We are indeed far here from Spirituality.

Both the Virgin and Christ Child (with all his deformity) reflect a fairly normal psychological state. Coming now to St. John at the bottom, we are struck by the strange expression of the latter's eyes. The infant is looking straight at us indeed, yet his look is abnormally eager and fixed and we become aware here that perhaps the child is mentally ill. Examining his smile, we find that it lacks life and partakes much more of artificiality. At this point we realize that the whole face is not alive at all but is a true mask! We get the distinct impression that it is as

if the artist had been trying to infuse life into a mask without quite succeeding. The whole painting now takes on the character of a fantastic comedy: above, the Virgin, belonging to a normal humanity; near her, Christ Child with a head grown to monstrous proportions; and at the bottom, St. John rising abruptly like a puppet on a miniature stage.

The significant thing here is that Pontormo gives us a clear standard of reference in the head of the Virgin, to conspicuously contradict it in the other two heads. He openly and conspicuously refuses to be consistent. The desire for incongruity and inconsistency is nowhere clearer than here. We are not perplexed nor baffled nor intimidated by the world which Pontormo offers us here: we are plainly shocked, for we have the distinct impression that the artist is simply amusing himself at the expense of our naivety. The truth is that the new will, which had emerged as early as 1516 in works such as the Joseph Sold to Potiphar has here been let loose without any concern for Spirituality. For of the latter, it is impossible here to speak at all. The atmosphere emanating is outstandingly one of incongruity, inconsistency, illogically and abnormality.⁴¹

1. Freedberg, op. cit., p. 539.
2. ibid., p. 509. For a detailed analysis of these two works, see Freedberg (ibid.) pp. 504-509.
3. Friedlaender, op. cit., p. 20.
4. There is a great deal of controversy about the dating of the four panels making up the series. F. Clapp believes that none of them was painted before 1517 (in Pontormo: His Life and Work, New Haven, 1916, p. 22). Freedberg dates them by internal evidence from 1515 to 1518, ascribing to the one discussed here the date 1516 (op. cit. p. 510). We know that they were commissioned by Salvi Borgherini as a wedding gift for his son and his wife Margherita Acciaiuoli and were intended for the decoration of their bedchamber. We also know that the marriage took place in 1515. Vasari also tells us that in the so-called Joseph in Egypt (London, National Gallery), Pontormo "introduced Bronzino, his pupil, then a child, at the foot of the scene, seated on some steps, with a basket." (op. cit., III, p. 242). If we believe Vasari and if we take into consideration the actual date of the marriage, then the dating of the panels before 1515 would be quite sensible; for the child depicted as Bronzino does not really appear to be more than twelve years old (Bronzino was born in 1503) and the decoration would have been normally ready before the wedding ceremony. However, in 1515-1516 Pontormo was at the height of his classic period (as we have seen) and this would mean that at the same time he would have been experimenting in a completely different direction. On this evidence, and allowing for the fact that the decoration did not have to be completed before the wedding ceremony could take place, the dating of the Joseph Sold to Potiphar as 1516 and the Joseph in Egypt no later than 1517 (thus allowing for the boy depicted as Bronzino to be of a maximum age of fourteen) seems to constitute the most satisfactory compromise.
5. R. Wischnitzer, "Jacopo Pontormo's Joseph Scenes," Gazette des Beaux-Arts, ser. 6, XLI, March 1953, pp. 145-166.
6. Freedberg, op. cit., p. 511.
7. Freedberg refers to him as a "disturbing" figure (op. cit., p. 511).
8. The iconography of this work is discussed extensively by Wischnitzer (ibid.).
9. It is interesting to compare this work with the spatially rational Dream of Pharaoh (Florence, Pitti) designed for the same Borgherini by Andrea del Sarto also around 1517.
10. Freedberg, op. cit., p. 527.

11. Wischnitzer, op. cit., p. 165.
12. Freedberg, op. cit., p. 527.
13. *ibid.*, p. 526.
14. Pontormo could have easily respected the closed shape of the triangle by simply inverting the position of the four saints. St. James and St. Francis, who are not looking towards the altar, would have been as happy on the left hand side.
15. Freedberg, op. cit., p. 520.
16. S. J. Freedberg and J. C. Rearick, "Pontormo's Predella for the Michele Visdomini Altar", Burlington Magazine, no. 694, vol. 103, January 1961, pp. 7-8.
17. *ibid.*
18. Pointed out by Freedberg, op. cit., p. 535.
19. *ibid.*, p. 534.
20. Vasari, op. cit., III, p. 244.
21. *ibid.*, p. 246.
22. *ibid.*, p. 245.
23. It should be obvious that I am drastically simplifying the problem in order to facilitate the communication of my main point.
24. I. Lavin, "An Observation on Medievalism in Early Sixteenth Century Style", Gazette des Beaux-Arts, ser. 6, L, Sept. 1957, pp. 113-118. Lavin is here comparing Donatello's treatment of space in his Christ Before Pilate (North Pulpit in San Lorenzo; ca. 1460-65) with Pontormo's at the Certosa. He points out that "in Donatello's work, we feel that the space of the figures and that of the background remain separate and consistent within themselves; the contradiction involved in juxtaposing them, however effective, is external and quite naive." In the Pontormo, on the other hand, "the contradiction has now become internal and utterly conscious."
25. Friedlaender, op. cit., p. 24.
26. Lavin, op. cit., p. 115.
27. *ibid.*, p. 115.
28. Friedlaender, op. cit., p. 26.

29. *ibid.*, p. 26.
30. *ibid.*, p. 24.
31. *ibid.*, p. 24.
32. *ibid.*, p. 26.
33. E. Panofsky, Albrecht Dürer, Princeton, 1948, I, p. 144.
34. F. D. Martin, "On Enjoying Decadence", The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, vol. XVII, no. 4, June 1959, p. 445.
35. Clapp, *op. cit.*, p. 46.
36. *ibid.*, p. 46.
37. The success of a Surrealist painting does not come from the simple juxtaposition of incongruous objects, nor from the simple placing of familiar objects in fantastic or incredible situations. It is much more dependent on the artist's ability to give a character of reality to his depictions, so that the scene, although obviously irrational, will at the same time appear strangely real and convincing, somewhat like it would in the state of dream; and this is accomplished, in my opinion, by luring the observer's mind into the world of the picture so that he will find himself at once believing and disbelieving what he sees. The success of The Persistence of Memory by Dali (New York, Museum of Modern Art; 1931) for instance, does not come so much from the simple hanging of huge clocks on trees and rocks, as from the fact that we are mysteriously led into the world of the picture, and compelled, like in the state of dream (but at the same time against our will, since we are awake and conscious of its fantastic irrationality), to share in it as if it were a true experience.
38. The study as well as the dating of the work are taken from Clapp, *op. cit.*, fig. 112.
39. Their look has nothing of the hieratic which belongs to the Byzantine figures. It is much more alive and lucid and this is partly what makes it uncomfortable.
40. The background itself has something ghostly and undefinable.
41. The case of Pontormo is the more significant that we know for a fact that many of his works caused great disappointment among the public of the time. We have seen how the artist's frescoes at the Certosa had provoked violent criticism. Similarly we are told that his treatment of the loggia for Duke Cosimo's

villa, at Castello, aroused much dissatisfaction. And Vasari presently explains why: "The figures are out of proportion and their attitudes seem strange and ill regulated." (op. cit., III, p. 252). Again, when he was asked to submit tapestry cartoons, Pontormo did two, but they provoked the same comments: "The Duke and the masters did not like them, thinking them strange and unsuitable for the medium, and so Jacopo did no more" (ibid., p. 252). His work in San Lorenzo, finally, where he spent the last eleven years of his life, seems to have completely mystified his contemporaries. Vasari does not hide his disapproval: "It seems to me that in this labour of eleven years Jacopo has sought to bewilder both himself and those who see the work." (ibid., p. 254).

VI

SITUATION OF THE ITALIAN CLERGY AT THE HEIGHT OF
THE RENAISSANCE

It is an acknowledged fact that when the Renaissance culminated, a deep corruption was pervading the Italian clergy from top to bottom. As Rodocanachi states it: "Une profonde corruption, d'innombrables abus avaient envahi l'Eglise et toute l'échelle hiérarchique."¹ We shall presently survey the extent of this corruption as it was affecting the different levels of the ecclesiastical body.

The methods adopted for the election of the highest dignitaries were nothing but shocking. Simony and politics, for instance, had become two determining factors in the election of the pope. To know that Julius II owed his election mainly to simony and to an understanding with Cesar Borgia (who was then an acknowledged murderer, without the least scruple)² is enough to make us realize the revolting intrigues on which the election of the supreme Head of Christianity had come to depend.

The traffic which was made of the other high ecclesiastical dignitiess is no less shocking. Charges were distributed like financial gifts and their cumulation by many individuals proves how little consideration was given to their true significance.³ Too often neither experience of the things of the Church nor ability to govern judiciously were of any importance in the election even of cardinals. Giovanni de'Medici, at the request of his father Lorenzo the Magnificent, was officially promoted

to the cardinalate at the age of sixteen and participated while still sixteen in the conclave on the death of Innocent VIII (July 1492). Pressed by urgent needs of money and by the need to drown the opposition which had risen against him among the Sacred College, this same man (now Leo X), in 1517, created thirty-one cardinals all at once. Aubenas observes about the latter promotion: "Déplorable fut la promotion de cardinaux de 1517: le pape porta son choix soit sur des hommes dont les recommandations politiques étaient impérieuses, soit sur ceux qui lui avaient avancé de fortes sommes d'argent pour cette odieuse guerre d'Urbin qui trainait en longueur. L'effet fut désastreux. Si quelques choix furent heureux, ils étaient éclipsés par d'autres vraiment scandaleux."⁴

Nepotism was also behind many nominations. It often swept away any serious concern for the reputation and welfare of the Church. Rodocanachi mentions this nephew of Julius II, Galeotto, who was made cardinal by the former in 1503: "Il recut un grand nombre de bénéfices et devint vice-chancelier en 1505, à la mort du cardinal Ascanio; cette charge rapportait 12,000 ducats par an; avec ses autres revenus, ce jeune homme disposa bientôt de 50,000 ducats de rente annuelle. On s'étonna, on se scandalisa même à Rome de l'extrême affection que Jules II lui montrait⁵ ...Le jour même de sa mort, son demi-frère Sisto, qu'on disait tout-a-fait illettré, si ce n'est presque idiot, était élu cardinal sous le même titre que lui, devenait évêque de Lucques et recevait la vice-chancellerie et, en outre, la pénitencerie."⁶

Such methods of election could not but lead to the most disastrous results. And indeed the papacy itself was the first to be affected. In Julius II and Leo X we are no longer dealing with popes conscious of their mission as spiritual pastor of the

Christian world. Matters of a purely temporal order, instead, constituted these popes' major concern: "Jules II et Leon X n'ont pas su s'élever au-dessus de préoccupations italiennes, en tout cas de préoccupations purement temporelles."⁷

Julius II was an ambitious pope whose warlike temperament and love of power caused Italy to be devastated by more wars and massacres than had been the case under any of his immediate predecessors. His lack of scruples made him not only break treaties but use such spiritual means as interdict and excommunication in the most illegitimate ways in order to support his own politics and aggressive activities.⁸ In 1506, he set out to militarily conquer Perugia and Bologna. The former gave in fairly easily, but as Bologna was offering resistance, the pope laid the city under an interdict, in order to break the moral resistance of the people. "En conformité des ordres du pape, les églises furent fermées le 13 octobre, les exercices du culte suspendus; tous les prêtres quittèrent la ville, excepté ceux qui devaient veiller à l'entretien des édifices religieux."⁹ The Bolognese authorities finally bowed.

The year 1507 saw Julius II apply himself to foment an alliance of powers against Venice. His intention was to regain some old dependencies of the Holy See, which Venice was occupying and did not want to give up. His efforts finally brought about the formation of the League of Cambrai, which grouped France, Spain and Germany against Venice (1508). Julius II soon joined the League and supported the attack on the Venetian forces by excommunicating the Republic. Having acquired the possessions he

coveted, Julius II raised the excommunication, concluded a separate treaty with the Venetian authorities, and abruptly turned against the French, whom he now wished to expel from Italy. Aubemas observes that "Par là, le pape était entraîné dans des guerres sans fin, et les contemporains -- comme la postérité -- étaient fondés à lui reprocher une attitude qui était beaucoup plus celle d'un souverain ambitieux que celle d'un pacifique pasteur des peuples. Dès ce moment, commencèrent à circuler de nombreux pamphlets représentant Jules II comme un instigateur de guerres sanglantes, méconnaissant le rôle de conciliateur et d'arbitre de la Chrétienté qui eût dû être le sien."¹⁰

The hostile attitude which Julius II took towards France (whose help he had used against Venice) forced Louis XII to device a policy which soon put him into open rebellion with the pope. As Aubemas points out, "il n'avait nullement l'intention de déposséder le pape ou de conquérir ses états, et la perspective d'un schisme lui était insupportable,"¹¹ but he could not bring himself to abandon a position (in Italy) which had been established with such labor. His first object was thus to justify the conduct which he had decided to take against the pope. L'Assemblée de Tours (September 1510), which he convoked, decreted after an analysis of the situation that he was allowed to oppose the pope's request by force and to demand the gathering of a Council. These preliminaries led to the famous Council of Pisa (1511-12) which among others included six cardinals, two archbishops and twenty-two bishops.¹² The pope answered by himself convoking a general

council for April 19, 1512. Although this step automatically annulled any serious chance of success of the Council of Pisa, the latter nonetheless took place and on April 21, 1512, officially suspended Julius II from the pontifical administration.

Meanwhile the pope had declared war on the Duke of Ferrara who was the principal ally of the French in Italy. Like he had done with Venice, he excommunicated the Duke for refusing to accept his terms, thus making here again a most illegitimate use of such an important spiritual means of action. "Rompant pour la seconde fois avec la coutume qui n'autorisait l'emploi des armes spirituelles concurremment avec les temporelles que dans quelques cas précis qu'il n'y avait pas lieu d'invoquer en l'occurrence, Jules II lança contre le duc, le 9 août 1510, l'excommunication."¹³ The difficulties encountered in this campaign made Julius II take drastic steps." Le 20 janvier 1511, malgré les rigueurs d'un terrible hiver, il entra, par la brèche et casque en tête, dans la place forte de la Mirandole, après un pénible siège -- épisode célèbre qui stupéfia, et aussi scandalisa, bien des contemporains."¹⁴

Julius II's efforts to isolate France finally met with success on the international level with the constitution of the Holy League, grouping the Holy See, Spain, Venice and England (October 1511). In front of such a coalition, the French positions in Italy were doomed. After a valiant resistance and an important but ephemeral victory at Ravenna, the French finally had to evacuate Italy completely (summer of 1512).¹⁵

Not satisfied with this result, Julius II "s'apprêtait à reprendre au printemps la guerre ferraraise,"¹⁶ (for he had not

been able to subjugate the Duke and he could not forget the latter's alliance with the French). On the other hand, a dispute between Venice and Germany about some lands saw him sign, in November 1512, "un accord formel avec l'Empereur, par lequel il promettait d'employer en sa faveur les armes spirituelles aussi bien que temporelles, soit contre la Sérénissime République, soit contre le duc de Gueldre."¹⁷

In front of such an attitude, Venice had no other choice but to ally itself with France. The new situation was such indeed that far from being at peace due to the expulsion of the French, "l'Italie des Alpes au Latium, semblait sur le point de se coaliser contre le pape, avec l'aide de la France et de l'Espagne."¹⁸ Fortunately for the Holy See (and for the Christian world in general), death, at this point, struck Julius II (February 1513). One does not wonder why the latter event everywhere must have caused an immense relief.

Julius II's warlike temperament and thirst for temporal power were combined with a love of pomp, personal fame and grandeur of the most unlimited kind. Is it enough to know that hardly had he been sacred pope when he commissioned Michelangelo with a mausoleum which was to be his own and which was to surpass in splendor anything produced during the whole of the Renaissance? Or would one rather read about his entrance into Bologna (November 1506), which followed the surrender of the city? "Ce fut une entrée de triomphateur, digne d'être comparée à celles d'autrefois... Entre la porte de la ville et la cathédrale, il avait été dressé par

ordre vingt-quatre arcs de triomphe garnis d'inscriptions; chaque association avait le sien; les milices formaient tumultueusement la haie; vingt-deux cardinaux, quarante-quatre évêques, les magistrats de la ville et ceux des villes voisines précédaient le souverain pontife. Une garde de soldats habillés de soie entremêlée d'or l'entourait; il était porté dans une litière par les membres du Conseil des Seize, sous un dai que soutenaient les ambassadeurs de France, de Venise, d'Espagne et d'Allemagne; vêtu de blanc, il était coiffé de la mitre et jetait à la foule de la menue monnaie; les cloches sonnaient, des orchestres jouaient au coin des rues...Paris de Grassi (maitre de cérémonies du Vatican) estime, avec une certaine exagération, les cavaliers qui escortèrent le pape a dix mille."¹⁹ Rodocanachi adds that this triumphal entrance "fit comparer le pape Jules II à Jules César, comme on l'avait fait naguère pour César Borgia...Erasme, qui était venu à Bologne y étudier le Grec, fut sur le point de s'en retourner, dépité, en Allemagne; il assista fort mécontent à l'entrée du pape. 'Je ne pouvais m'empêcher de gémir, écrit-il, quand je comparais à la majesté des apôtres convertissant le monde par la doctrine céleste ces triomphes dont des princes laïques auraient rougi.'"²⁰

It may be of interest, finally, to know that just before dying, Julius II attended his own apotheosis (January 1513). "Selon sa volonté sans doute, on organisa une manière de défilé triomphal rappelant les gloires de son pontificat." The pope was represented "sous les traits d'un empereur tenant en main le sceptre et le globe et entouré des Horace, de Camille, de Scipion et d'autres héros de la Rome Antique."²¹ How far indeed we are here from the ideals of humilit

detachment and renunciation preached by Christ need not be commented upon.

Leo X did not have Julius II's passion for military glory, but an unrestrained love of luxury, a deep concern for his family and an excessive generosity likewise too often made him abandon all scruples and take actions of the most deplorable kind. The extensive exploitation which he made of the sales of indulgences is well-known enough. It was indeed only one of the many means adopted by this pope in his general campaign for raising funds. Aubenas observes: "Il serait vain de le nier: les besoins d'argent étaient si grands que la papauté n'hésita pas à employer les expédients les plus fâcheux, tels qu'accroissement des droits de chancellerie, des annates, des taxes de consécration, des levées d'argent sous prétexte de croisade turque et, enfin, multiplication d'indulgences nouvelles."²²

Leo X's lack of scruples is again exemplified in the action he took against the Duke of Urbino. The following is a summary of this event. In his desire to establish his family, Leo X had cast his eyes on the Duchy of Urbino. He offered it to his brother Giuliano who refused because, as he said, "it would be an injustice to the rightful Duke,"²³ whom the pope would have had to dispossess. "Cet acte de dépossession lui déplaisait. Il le trouvait coupable et insista pour qu'il ne fût pas commis."²⁴ For indeed the Duke (Francesco Maria della Rovere) had been the legitimate possessor of the Duchy for years and Leo X, as is agreed by most historians, had no serious legitimate cause of dispossessing him.

The pope then turned to his nephew Lorenzo, who finally agreed, after some hesitation, to his uncle's propositions.²⁵ A brief against the Duke was prepared, in which Leo X "resuscitait l'accusation d'avoir assassiné le cardinal de Pavie, crime dont Jules II l'avait absout et dont lui-même avait signé l'acte de rémission."²⁶ Other crimes and infidelities were imputed to him, and the brief finally was dispossessing him of his States. What followed need only be summarized: Lorenzo was named Duke of Urbino and put at the head of the papal army. Confronted with the latter, Francesco had no other choice than to flee and Leo X's nephew easily took possession of the Duchy (1516).²⁷

It is under Leo X, as is well-known, that "Court life in Rome reached its zenith."²⁸ Here, the transformation of the papal curia into an outwardly purely secular center of administration and power (transformation which had been underway for some time) has been completed. Hauser observes about it that it has become "like the court of an emperor."²⁹ It is not my intention here to elaborate on the semi-pagan character of this court. The reader will find a detailed discussion of it in Rodocanachi's Le Pontificat de Léon X. I would like, however, to say a few words about the way of life which had come to prevail among the pope's most immediate assistants: the cardinals.

Hauser points out that "their houses are reminiscent of small secular courts and those of the other spiritual gentlemen of aristocratic households which try to outbid each other in splendour."³⁰ "L'orateur vénitien Soriano écrivait que les

cardinaux n'étaient pas des saints, mais de vrais et dignes gentilshommes et, de réalité, ils vivaient de la même vie."³¹

Their dignity, indeed, was not preventing them from seeking the fullest enjoyment of the pleasures of life. Rodocanachi admits that in general "ils donnaient l'exemple d'une vie dissipée et ruineuse."³² Several of them had mistresses, like was the case for Galeotto, one of Julius II's, nephews whom this pope had made cardinal: "Les dignités sacerdotales dont il était revêtu ne l'empêchaient pas d'entretenir une maîtresse qu'il couvrait de bijoux. Elle allait à la messe sur une haquenée caparaconnée de velours, vêtue de drap d'or et portant au cou un collier de grosses perles dont le fermoir était rehaussé d'un rubis; elle ornait ses cheveux d'une ferrennière garnie de diamants; devant elle marchaient quatre pages; derrière elle, quatre écuyers; à ses côtés, deux duègnes."³³

The cardinals' recreations consisted mainly of banquets, spectacles, gambling and hunting. "Les festins que donnaient les cardinaux étaient plantureux, interminables et accompagnés de divertissements et de musique."³⁴ Burckhardt narrates that "Franceschetto Cibo, in two games with Cardinal Raffaello Riario lost no less than fourteen thousand ducats, and afterwards complained to the Pope that his opponent had cheated him."³⁵ To satisfy their pleasure of hunting, the cardinals, like the pope, had "des écuries bien garnies et un nombreux personnel."³⁶ Several of them were owners of racing horses: "Leurs chevaux allaient souvent au loin disputer des prix."³⁷

Needless to say that the performance of ecclesiastical ceremonies, for most of those high dignitaries, had become no more than a pure formality. It would be enough indeed to know that Leo X had to be rapidly consecrated priest in order to enable him to exercise his new function.³⁸ He had been a cardinal for twenty-one years, and he, as the one who was now called upon to govern the Church in the name of Christ, had not yet felt the desire to reenact the latter's most meaningful gesture.

In such an atmosphere of disorder, luxury, immorality and irreligion, it was to be expected that intrigues of all kinds would have been freely fomented. The darkest one which the documents of the time allow us to know is the famous conspiracy of the cardinals against Leo X's life. This sad event took place in 1516 but was brought out to light only the following year when it was discovered that no less than five cardinals, among whom the Dean of the Sacred College, had plotted the elimination of Leo X by poison. The unveiling of this intrigue gives us indeed, as Pastor points out, "a deeper knowledge than can anything else into the intense corruption of the highest ecclesiastical body."³⁹

Corruption, as it was stated at the beginning of this chapter, was pervading the Italian clergy from top to bottom. And indeed we can observe the same revolting "relâchement" in the lower orders as in the higher ones. "Du sommet de la hiérarchie ecclésiastique jusque dans le bas clergé, parmi les réguliers comme parmi les séculiers, la méconnaissance des devoirs même les plus impérieux qu'impose le sacerdoce, était fréquente et souvent complète."⁴⁰ Pastor frankly admits "the immorality of the priests in almost every

town of the Italian peninsula" and "the most deplorable condition" of many of the monasteries.⁴¹ The immorality, indeed, "was so gross, that suggestions in favour of allowing priests to marry began to be heard."⁴² Aubenas points out that "particulièrement grave est le cas du prêtre concubinaire, étonnamment fréquent..."⁴³ Rodocanachi writes: "Ce qui prouve surabondamment la license des mœurs d'une partie du clergé et combien peu elle était réprouvée, ce sont les légitimations... Ces légitimations, d'ailleurs fréquentes, avaient lieu dans des formes tout-à-fait officielles devant le collège "Scriptorum Archivii Romanae Curiae," lequel siégeait dans le palais du Vatican."⁴⁴ As an example, the following is given: "En 1517 (16 Septembre), le fils naturel de l'évêque de Bassano est légitimé par les soins d'un notaire qui reçoit cinq giuli; peu après, une fille du même prélat est légitimée moyennant même rétribution."⁴⁵

Aubenas further observes that "l'impression que donnaient trop de monastères était franchement mauvaise... On est bien obligé de constater que l'idéal monastique n'entraînait pas beaucoup dans les préoccupations du clergé régulier. En revanche les appétits temporels se donnaient libre cours et, dans ce domaine, les abus tendaient vraiment à se généraliser, même dans les ordres mendiants, oublieux de leur raison d'être."⁴⁶

The following is taken from Burckhardt: "The way in which the priests befool and plunder the people by means of spurious miracles, added to their own scandalous lives, is enough to drive any thoughtful observer to despair. We read of the Minorite friars

who travelled to collect alms; 'they cheat, steal and fornicate, and when they are at the end of their resources, they set up as saints and work miracles, one displaying the cloak of St. Vincent, another the handwriting of St. Bernardino, a third the bridle of Capistrano's donkey.' Others 'bring with them confederates who pretend to be blind or afflicted with some mortal disease, and after touching the hem of the monk's cowl, or the relics which he carries, are healed before the eyes of the multitude. All then shout "Misericordia", the bells are rung, and the miracle is recorded in a solemn protocol.' Or else the monk in the pulpit is denounced as a liar by another who stands below among the audience; the accuser is immediately possessed by the devil, and then healed by the preacher. The whole thing was a pre-arranged comedy, in which, however, the principal with his assistant made so much money that he was able to buy a bishopric from a Cardinal, on which the two confederates lived comfortably to the end of their days. Masuccio makes no great distinction between Franciscans and Dominicans, finding the one worth as much as the other. 'And yet the foolish people lets itself be drawn into their hatreds and divisions, and quarrels about them in public places, and calls itself "franceschino" or "domenichino."'

"The nuns are the exclusive property of the monks. Those of the former who have anything to do with the laity, are prosecuted and put in prison, while others are wedded in due form to the monks, with the accompaniments of mass, a marriage-contract, and a liberal indulgence in food and wine. 'I myself', says the author,

'have been there not once, but several times, and seen it all with my own eyes. The nuns afterwards bring forth pretty little monks or else use means to hinder that result. And if anyone charges me with falsehood, let him search the nunneries well, and he will find there as many little bones as in Bethlehem at Herod's time.'" Burckhardt adds a little further: "We have been quoting from an author who wrote in earnest, and who by no means stands alone in his judgment."⁴⁷

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1. E. Rodocanachi, Le Pontificat de Jules II, Paris, 1928, p. 161.
 2. "Not being able to elect a pope to his own mind, he (Cesar Borgia) could have hindered any other from being elected pope." N. Machiavelli, The Prince, trans. by W. K. Marriott, London, 1958, p. 42.
 3. On the eve of his election to the throne of St. Peter, Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere (who became Julius II) was simultaneously "évêque de Carpentras, de Lausanne, de Catane, de Messine, d'Avignon, de Coutances, de Viviers, de Mende, de la Sabine, d'Ostie, de Bologne, de Lodève, de Savone, de Verceil." (Rodocanachi, op. cit., p. 3). Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici (who later took the name Leo X), for his part cumulated the following dignities: "Chanoine des cathédrales de Florence, de S. Lorenzo, de Fiesole, d'Arezzo, de Gingoli, de S. Giovanni in Val d'Arno, de S. Pietro a Casale, de S. Marcellino a Cacchiano, Precettore de S. Antonio de Florence, Preposto de Prato, abbé du Mont-Cassin (which he became at the age of twelve), de S. Giovanni di Passignano, de S. Maria di Morimondo, de S. Lorenzo a Coltibuono, de S. Salvatore di Vajano, de S. Julien de Tours, de S. Stefano de Bologne, de S. Michel d'Arezzo, de Chiaravalle de Milan, Archevêque d'Amalfi." (E. Rodocanachi, Le Pontificat de Léon X, Paris, 1931, p. 20). Is it necessary to point out that the fundamental interest of such cumulations consisted in the revenues which the charges provided?

4. R. Aubenas, L'Eglise et la Renaissance, Paris, 1951, p. 182. Pastor points out that the members of the Sacred College gave their adhesion to this promotion "not freely, but constrained by fear." (L. Pastor, History of the Popes, trans. from the original German, vol. VII, London, 1908, p. 200).
5. More will be said about this cardinal on p. 101.
6. Rodocanachi, Le Pontificat de Jules II, p. 15.
7. Aubenas, op. cit., p. 192. It is actually under Sixtus IV (1471-84) that such a state of affairs had begun to gather an important momentum: "Avec ce pape, la papauté commence à changer de caractère...dès lors, le pape tend à devenir un souverain italien plutôt qu'à rester le chef spirituel de la chrétienté; à partir de Sixte IV, chez le pape, 'le prince efface le pontife'." (ibid., p. 75).
8. The use which had come to be made of excommunication proves how little consideration was given to its true significance and how, along with other spiritual means, it had come to serve purely temporal ends. Rodocanachi observes: "L'excommunication était insérée dans la plupart des actes pontificaux portant une défense quelconque, souvent comme complément à une amende extrêmement basse; ainsi défense est faite d'imprimer un ouvrage dont le privilège est concédé à un libraire sous peine de cent ducats d'amende et de l'excommunication; un enfant est excommunié pour avoir acheté du sel ailleurs qu'au dépôt prescrit." (E. Rodocanachi, La Réforme en Italie, I, Paris, 1920, p. 74).
9. Rodocanachi, Le Pontificat de Jules II, p. 73.
10. Aubenas, op. cit., pp. 155-156.
11. ibid., p. 157.
12. ibid., p. 160.
13. Rodocanachi, Le Pontificat de Jules II, p. 111.
14. Aubenas, op. cit., p. 158.
15. Florence, which had been all that time rather favorable to the French, was ordered to accept the conditions of Julius II: namely, the return of the Medici. Upon Soderini's government refusal, the city of Prato (which was a Florentine possession) was taken by assault and "impitoyablement saccagée" by the Spanish troops, which Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici was accompanying (August 1512). "Plus de 5,000 habitants périrent; femmes, enfants, religieux, nonnes, nul ne fut épargné; pendant plus de quinze jours, les soldats espagnols massacrèrent à coeur joie." (Rodocanachi, Le Pontificat de Jules X, p. 170).

According to Sanuto, Cardinal Giovanni (the future Leo X, let us not forget), who apparently had allowed the massacre, wrote that "cette exécution si cruelle serait une leçon salubre." (Quoted by Rodocanachi, *ibid.*, p. 170).

16. *ibid.*, p. 176.
17. *ibid.*, p. 177.
18. *ibid.*, p. 176.
19. *ibid.*, p. 75.
20. *ibid.*, p. 75. To perpetuate the souvenir of his victory, Julius II had two statues of himself made and set up in conspicuous places in the city of Bologna. One was quickly erected and placed "sur la façade du palais du gouvernement" . (*ibid.*, p. 76). The other one was commissioned from Michelangelo who completed it in 1508. It was set up above the portal of the cathedral of S. Petronio (*ibid.*, p. 77). When the pope lost Bologna to the hands of the population in rebellion helped by the French (1511) the two statues were destroyed. About Michelangelo's bronze statue, Rodocanachi narrates that "la foule alluma tout autour un grand feu et, quand le bronze fut brûlant, elle brisa la statue avec des cris de joie." (*ibid.*, p. 132).
21. *ibid.*, p. 177.
22. Aubenas, *op. cit.*, p. 182. The abuses in the sales of indulgences were such that even in Italy they provoked a decrease in the sales. "Michiel rapporte qu'en mars 1515 le Conseil des Dix défendit aux Vénitiens d'acheter désormais des 'pardons'." (Rodocanachi, Le Pontificat de Léon X, p. 247).
23. G. F. Young, The Medici, New York, 1930, p. 287.
24. Rodocanachi, Le Pontificat de Léon X, p. 100.
25. Rodocanachi points out that Lorenzo "hésitait à accepter les propositions de son oncle." He also states that "Léon X hésitait aussi au moment de commettre un acte dont il sentait la gravité et l'injustice." (*ibid.*, p. 101).
26. *ibid.*, p. 99.
27. Pastor admits that "the whole action of the pope...has something repulsive about it. The impression left on the mind is that he cared less that justice take its course, than that the Duchy should become available for his nephew." (*op. cit.*, p. 149).
28. Hauser, *op. cit.*, II, p. 86.

29. *ibid.*, p. 86.
 30. *ibid.*, p. 86.
 31. Rodocanachi, Le Pontificat de Léon X, p. 152.
 32. *ibid.*, p. 152.
 33. Rodocanachi, Le Pontificat de Jules II, p. 15.
 34. *ibid.*, p. 84.
 35. J. Burckhardt, The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy, trans. by S.G.C. Middlemore, New York, 1929, p. 429.
 36. Rodocanachi, Le Pontificat de Jules II, p. 85.
 37. *ibid.*, p. 85.
 38. Rodocanachi, Le Pontificat de Léon X, p. 38.
 39. Pastor, *op. cit.*, p. 175.
 40. Rodocanachi, La Réforme en Italie, I, p. 99.
 41. Pastor, *op. cit.*, V, pp. 171-172.
 42. *ibid.*, V, p. 172.
 43. Aubenas, *op. cit.*, p. 333.
 44. Rodocanachi, La Réforme en Italie, I, p. 120.
 45. *ibid.*, p. 121.
 46. Aubenas, *op. cit.*, p. 276.
 47. Burckhardt, *op. cit.*, pp. 446-447.
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VII

THE GREAT SPIRITUAL NEED OF THE HIGH RENAISSANCE

In order to understand the full effects of such an intense corruption as we have described, on the morale of the Italian society of that time, it is essential that we realize the importance of the role which the Church was playing in the everyday existence of all.

There were indeed, at the height of the Renaissance, two major factors which were contributing to make the clergy a vital, organic part of the society. The first one is a sense of intimate dependence on sacraments and religious ceremonies, which the people felt to a very high degree. The clergy as a whole was needed desperately. It was needed to celebrate mass, to hear confession, distribute communion, comfort the suffering, officiate at the civic ceremonies...etc. Although, as we shall see, people deeply resented the depravation of its members, they accepted them as an integral part of their society, necessary to the very life of the society as a whole. Burckhardt sums up this idea when he writes: "The feeling of the upper and middle classes in Italy with regard to the Church at the time when the Renaissance culminated, was compounded of deep and contemptuous aversion, of acquiescence in the outward ecclesiastical customs which entered into daily life, and of a sense of dependence on sacraments and ceremonies."¹

The second factor which was contributing to impose the clergy on the Italian society of that time is the political influence which the Church was exercising on the local governments. The Holy See, under Julius II, had become a powerful temporal power. We have seen what happened to Prato, a Florentine possession, upon

Soderini's refusal to accept the pope's conditions.² Indeed from that time on, and especially from the day of Leo X's accession to the papal throne in 1513 until his death in 1521, a city like Florence could take no important action without the approval of Rome.

The clergy as a whole was thus omnipresent to the Italian people. It is not exaggerated indeed to say that its influence, its control, exercised both in the spiritual and the temporal, were truly pervading the life of society. It can easily be understood, therefore, that in these conditions, such a shocking corruption as we have described above could not but have been deeply resented by the contemporaries. Aubenas makes no compromise about it: "Political intrigue, nepotism beyond all measure, unscrupulousness in all things, simony that was often blatant -- these are things which, from a distance, become rather dimmed by the dazzling radiance of the Renaissance; but for the public of the time, they were unbearable."³ And indeed, in view of the important role played by the Church in the life of the society of that time, it can be said without any reticence that a reformation of the clergy, a return for its members to a life in conformity with the true meaning of their dignity, was the great spiritual need of that age.⁴

The literature of the time, indeed, abounds in attacks and protests against the corruption of the clergy, attacks in which one often feels the bitterest indignation and the most genuine deploring of the existing state of affairs. The historian Guicciardini, for instance, who was for many years in the service of

the Medicean popes, wrote in his Aphorisms (1529): "No man is more disgusted than I am with the ambition, the avarice and the profligacy of the priests, not only because each of these vices is hateful in itself, but because each and all of them are most unbecoming in those who declare themselves to be men in special relations with God, and also because they are vices so opposed to one another, that they can only co-exist in very singular natures. Nevertheless, my position at the court of several popes forced me to desire their greatness for the sake of my own interest. But, had it not been for this, I should have loved Martin Luther as myself, not in order to free myself from the laws which Christianity, as generally understood and explained, lays upon us, but in order to see this swarm of scoundrels (*questa caterva di scellerati*) put back into their proper place, so that they may be forced to live either without vice or without power."⁵

Erasmus also communicated his indignation in several of his writings. In the Praise of Folly (written from 1509 to 1511; first pub. 1511), after scorning the monks, he comes to the Higher clergy:

"Our popes, cardinals, and bishops for some time now have earnestly copied the state and practice of princes, and come near to beating them at their own game. Let a bishop but consider what his alb, the white emblem of sincerity, should teach him, namely, a life in every way blameless; and what is signified on his part by the two-horned miter, the two peaks bound by the same knot -- I suppose it is a perfect knowledge of the Old and New Testaments; what is meant by covering his hands with gloves, a clean administration of the sacraments and one unsullied by any taint of human

concerns; what the crozier symbolizes, most watchful care of the flock put under his charge; what is indicated by the cross that is carried before him, to wit, a victory over all carnal affections. If he would contemplate these and other lessons of the sort, I say, would he not lead a sad and troubled life? But as it is, they do well enough by way of feeding themselves; as for the other, the care of the sheep, they delegate that to Christ himself, or else refer it to their suffragans, as they call them, or other deputies. Nor do they keep in mind the name they bear, or what the word "bishop" means -- labor, vigilance, solicitude. Yet in raking in moneys they truly play the bishop, overseeing everything -- and overlooking nothing.

"In a similar way the cardinals, if they considered the fact that they have succeeded to the places of the apostles, would see that the same works are required of them as were performed by their predecessors; that they are not lords, but stewards, of spiritual things, and that shortly they are to render an exact account of what they hold in trust. Yes, let them too philosophize a bit concerning their vestments, and question themselves in this fashion: "What does the whiteness of this upper garment mean? Is it not a burning love of God? What, again, that outer robe flowing down in broad folds and spreading over the mule of his Exalted Reverence, though it would suffice to cover a camel? Is it not charity ample enough to embrace all men in its helpfulness, by way of teaching, exhorting, chastising, admonishing, ending wars, resisting wicked princes, and freely spending blood -- not money alone -- for the flock of Christ? And wherefore all this money, anyway, for those who hold the places of the needy apostles?" If they would weigh

these things, I repeat, they would not be so ambitious for the post, and would willingly give it up, or at least they would lead a toilsome and watchful life of the sort lived by those ancient apostles.

"As to these Supreme Pontiffs who take the place of Christ, if they tried to emulate His life, I mean His poverty, labors, teaching, cross, and contempt for safety, if even they thought upon the title of Pope -- that is, Father -- or the addition "Most Holy", who on earth would be more afflicted? Who would purchase that seat at the price of every resource and effort? Or who would defend it, when purchased, by the sword, by poison, or by anything else? Were wisdom to descend upon them, how it would inconvenience them! Wisdom, did I say? Nay, even a grain of salt would do it -- a grain of that salt which is spoken of by Christ. It would lose them all that wealth and honour, all those possessions, triumphal progresses, offices, dispensations, tributes, and indulgences; it would lose them so many horses, mules, and retainers; so many pleasures. (See how I have comprehended in a few words many marketsful, a great harvest, a wide ocean, of goods!) In place of these it would bring vigils, fasts, tears, prayers, sermons, studies, sighs, and a thousand troublesome tasks of the sort. Nor should we pass over the circumstance that all those copyists and notaries would be in want, as would all those advocates, promoters, secretaries, mule-teers, grooms, bankers, and pimps -- I was about to add something more tender, though rougher, I am afraid, on the ears. In short, that great host of men which burdens -- I beg your pardon, I mean adorns -- the Roman See would beg for their bread. This would be

inhuman and downright abominable, and, what is more accursed, those very princes of the church and true lights of the world would themselves be reduced to a staff and a wallet.

"As it is now, what labor turns up to be done they hand over to Peter and Paul, who have leisure for it. But the splendor and the pleasure they take care of personally. And so it comes about -- by my doing, remember -- that scarcely any kind of men live more softly or less oppressed with care; believing that they are amply acceptable to Christ if with a mystical and almost theatrical finery, with ceremonies, and with those titles of Beatitude and Reverence and Holyness, along with blessing and cursing, they perform the office of bishops. To work miracles is primitive and old-fashioned, hardly suited to our times; to instruct the people is irksome; to interpret the Holy Scriptures is pedantry; to pray is otiose; to shed tears is distressing and womanish; to live in poverty is sordid; to be beaten in war is dishonorable and less than worthy of one who will hardly admit kings, however great, to kiss his sacred foot; and finally, to die is unpleasant, to die on the cross a disgrace.

"There remains only those weapons and sweet benedictions of which Paul speaks, and the popes are generous enough with these: interdiction, excommunications, re-excommunications, anathematizations, pictured damnations, and the terrific lightning - bolt of the bull, which by its mere flicker sinks the souls of men below the floor of hell. And these most holy fathers in Christ, and vicars of Christ, launch it against no one with more spirit than against those who, at the instigation of the devil, try to impair

or to subtract from the patrimony of Peter. Although this saying of Peter's stands in the Gospel, "We have left all and followed Thee", yet they give the name of his patrimony to lands, towns, tribute, imposts and moneys. On behalf of these things, inflamed by zeal for Christ, they fight with fire and sword, not without shedding of Christian blood; and then they believe they have defended the bride of Christ in apostolic fashion, having scattered what they are pleased to designate as "her enemies." As if the Church had any enemies more pestilential than impious pontiffs who by their silence allow Christ to be forgotten, who enchain Him by mercenary rules, adulterate His teaching by forced interpretations, and crucify Him afresh by their scandalous life!

"Now the Christian Church was founded on blood, strengthened by blood, and augmented by blood; yet nowadays they carry on Christ's cause by the sword just as if He who defends His own by His own means had perished. And although war is so cruel a business that it befits beasts and not men, so frantic that poets feign it is sent with evil purpose by the Furies, so pestilential that it brings with it a general blight upon morals, so iniquitous that it is usually conducted by the worst bandits, so impious that it has no accord with Christ, yet our popes, neglecting all their other concerns, make it their only task. Here you will see feeble old men assuming the strength of youth, not shocked by the expense or tired out by the labor, not at all discouraged, if only they may upset laws, religion, peace, and all humane usages, and turn them heels over head. Learned sycophants will be ofund who will give to this manifest madness the names of zeal, piety, and

fortitude, devising a way whereby it is possible for a man to whip out his sword, stick it into the guts of his brother, and nonetheless dwell in that supreme charity which, according to Christ's precept, a Christian owes to his neighbor."⁶

In his Querela Pacis (1515), Erasmus comes back to the subject clearly referring here again to Julius II: "What have the helmet and mitre in common? What connection is there between the crozier and the sword? between the Holy Gospel and the buckler? How, O bishop standing in the room of the apostles, dare you teach the peoples the things that pertain to war?"⁷

The Julius Exclusus a Coelis, which appeared in 1513 shortly after the death of Julius II, "gives expression in bitter terms to the indignation felt by the enlightened section of the Christian world."⁸ This extremely interesting document, whose real author is unknown although it was thought to have been written by Erasmus, consists in a dialogue between Peter and Julius II at the gates of Heaven. The late pope, upon request, narrates his pontificate to Peter. The latter attempts to disclose in it some actions worthy of a true Vicary of Christ, by constantly referring to the duties of such a person, but everywhere he meets with wars, glory, intrigues and temporal power -- and a practically complete unconcern for the expected duties. The following is taken from the dialogue:

"Jules: Peut-être rêves-tu à cette ancienne Eglise au sein de laquelle, en compagnie de quelques évêques faméliques, tu faisais une triste figure de Pontife, exposé à la pauvreté, à la sueur, aux périls et a mille incommodités. Tout s'est bien amélioré avec le temps, et tout autre est maintenant

le Pontife Romain: car toi, tu n'étais Pontife que par le titre et par le nom. Si tu voyais aujourd'hui tant d'édifices sacrés, construits avec des magnificences royales, de tous côtés des prêtres par milliers, la plupart prodigieusement riches, tous ces évêques qui par la fortune et les armes marchent de pair avec les rois, la splendeur infinie de tant de palais sacerdotaux; si surtout tu voyais maintenant à Rome tant de cardinaux couverts de pourpre, suivis par des légions de serviteurs, tant de chevaux mieux harnachés que des chevaux de rois, toutes ces mules couvertes de lin, d'or, de pierreries, quelques-unes même ferrées d'or et d'argent; et le Souverain Pontife, si tu le contemplais, élevé sur un siège d'or que des soldats portent sur leurs épaules, et toute la foule se prosternant à un geste de sa main; si tu entendais la crépitation des bombardes, le son des trompettes, le bruit des clairons, les détonations foudroyantes des machines de guerre, les applaudissements et les acclamations du peuple; si tu voyais de tous côtés les lueurs des torches, et les plus grands princes eux-mêmes admis à peine à baiser ses bienheureux pieds...que dirais-tu dis-moi, si tu avais vu et entendu tout cela?

Pierre: Je dirais que j'ai vu un tyran archi-mondain, un ennemi du Christ, la peste de l'Eglise."⁹

"Pierre: En voulant que tout son corps fut d'une pureté irréprochable, le Christ a entendu particulièrement ses ministres, c'est-à-dire les évêques. Et parmi ceux-ci, quiconque est plus élevé, doit être plus semblable au Christ, plus détaché et

plus débarrassé de tous les intérêts du monde. C'est le contraire que je vois à présent: Je vois le plus rapproché du Christ, celui qui veut passer pour son égal, vauté dans les choses les plus sordides, les richesses, la puissance, les troupes, les guerres, les traités, sans parler des vices. Et ensuite, bien que tu sois si différent du Christ, cependant tu abuses du nom du Christ pour en couvrir ta superbe, et, sous le nom de Celui qui a méprisé le royaume du monde, tu te conduis comme un tyran mondain. Véritable ennemi du Christ, tu exiges qu'on te rende les honneurs dus au Christ: maudit, tu bénis les autres; tu ouvres aux autres le ciel dont tu es exclu toi-même; tu consacres et tu es damné; tu excommunies et tu n'as rien de commun avec les saints: car en quoi, si ce n'est que tu te caches sous le nom du Christ, diffères-tu du Sultan des Turcs?"¹⁰

And when Julius claims that the Church, through her being a powerful and impressive temporal power, is more faithfully adhered to, Peter answers:

"Au contraire, si le vulgaire des Chrétiens voyait en toi

les vrais qualités du Christ: à savoir une vie de mœurs pures, la doctrine sacrée, une charité ardente, le don de prophétie, les vertus, il t'admirerait d'autant plus qu'il te saurait plus étranger aux plaisirs mondains. Et la République Chrétienne serait plus florissante si par la pureté de ta vie, par le mépris des plaisirs, des richesses, du pouvoir et de la mort, tu la rendais admirable aux yeux des Gentils. Maintenant non seulement elle est réduite à peu, mais encore si tu veux mieux voir les choses, tu trouveras que la plupart des Chrétiens n'en ont que le nom. Voyons, quand tu étais le Souverain Pasteur de l'Eglise, tu ne te remémorais donc pas par la pensée comment l'Eglise était née, comment elle s'était agrandie, comment elle s'était affermie? Est-ce donc par des guerres, par des richesses, par des chevaux? Non, mais par la patience, par le sang des martyrs et le nôtre, par les emprisonnements et les tortures. Tu prétends avoir agrandi l'Eglise parce que ses ministres sont comblés de l'humaine puissance; tu la dis embellie, parce qu'elle est corrompue par les dignités et les délices mondaines; tu la declares défendue, parce que des guerres épouvantables ont été allumées dans le monde entier pour le bien des prêtres; tu la dis florissante, parce qu'elle est ivre de volupté; tranquille, parce que, tout le monde la laissant faire, elle jouit de ses richesses et, qui pis est, de ses vices. Et par des couleurs, tu en as imposé aux princes qui, suivant tes leçons, appellent "défense du Christ" leurs vastes brigandages et leurs conflicts furieux."¹¹

It is significant that the first ones to admit and resent the corruption of the clergy were themselves members of the clergy. "En 1511, un carme, Battista Spagnoli dit Mantuana, général de son ordre de 1513 à 1516, consacrait bon nombre des 59,000 vers dont il était l'auteur à dénoncer et à blâmer les moeurs du clergé...It raille sans pitié les évêques sur leur luxe et leur dépravation."¹² The situation had become so alarming, indeed, that in the opening session of the Lateran Council (May 1512) which, as we have seen, Julius II had convoked to counteract the Council of Pisa, the orator developed the idea that "la catastrophe de Ravenne et les maux qui affligeaient l'Eglise étaient une marque du courroux divin et montraient que Dieu voulait que la réforme eût lieu incontinent...Il fit un tableau effrayant du dévergondage, du libertinage, de l'impiété, de l'impudicité et de l'ambition des membres du clergé et conclut qu'il fallait y mettre fin sur l'heure."¹³

Rodocanachi further mentions the following incident (in connection with the Lateran Council) which indeed reveals perhaps better than any other document presented so far, how urgently needed a reformation of the clergy had become for the contemporaries: "Giov. Francesco Pico de La Mirandole, neveu de l'érudit omniscient, adressa au pape et au concile une manière de réquisitoire sur les réformes à imposer au clergé; il fut publié en 1519 comme ayant été lu au concile, mais ne figure pas dans ses actes. On y trouve présentés les principaux griefs que formulait l'opinion publique... Il est reproché au clergé de donner de détestables exemples, de n'avoir nulle pudeur, nul souci de mener une vie correcte, de

transformer la piété en superstition, la vertu en vice, de livrer les demeures sacrées à des personnes sans morale. Pico y supplie enfin Léon X de porter remède à ces scandales, de ramener le clergé dans le bon chemin."¹⁴

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In view of the important influence which the Church was exercising on the Italian society of that time, it was unavoidable that the latter be fundamentally shaken in her beliefs and ideals by the revolting spectacle of corruption which the clergy as a whole was offering. The more perspicacious ones could see indeed that this corruption was undermining the spiritual mentality of the whole society. Machiavelli, for instance, who during several years had been an ambassador for the Florentine government, could write between 1513 and 1518 (although with a certain exaggeration): "Owing to the bad example set by the Court of Rome, Italy has lost all devotion and all religion...The first debt which we, Italians, owe to the Church and to the priests, therefore, is that we have become irreligious and perverse."¹⁵

And indeed the ruling class, for instance, would no longer allow any principle of Christian ethics to stand in her way, if it only challenged her interests, Machiavelli's Prince simply theorizes on what had become a situation of fact. Hauser states it categorically: "Every petty Renaissance prince was a ready-made Machiavellian."¹⁶

Faith, as would be expected, was gradually disintegrating among the upper and middle classes, to the point where "in Florence especially it was possible to live as an open and notorious unbeliever if a man only refrained from direct acts of hostility against the Church."¹⁷

Piety among the masses, although still much alive, had come to be pervaded with so much superstition that it is hard indeed to speak of the existence of a truly Christian devotion (even among those masses). Aubenas acknowledges it readily: "Foi aveugle dans les reliques les plus invraisemblables, déviations inquiétantes dans le culte des saints, crédulité extraordinaire dans les miracles les moins assurés, croyance enracinée en la sorcellerie... recherche à la fois naive et intéressée des indulgences, altèrent visiblement la pureté de la dévotion de cette époque."¹⁸

On the whole, Italy was morally degenerating at a rapid rate. Pastor makes it clear: "Italy was rapidly deteriorating...in almost every town of the Italian peninsula, luxury and immorality were on the increase, driving out the old simplicity and purity of manners."¹⁹ The "grave moral crisis" of which Burckhardt speaks was indeed of far greater implications than we might have suggested above: the spiritual destiny of the whole nation was at stake.²⁰

1. Burckhardt, op. cit., p. 445.

2. See p. 106, note 15.

3. The New Cambridge Modern History, vol. 1, The Renaissance, G. R. Potter edit., Cambridge Univ. Press, 1957, p. 93.
4. This point will be better brought home when it is realized that the whole ecclesiastical body, with the pope at its head, was occupying, on the spiritual level to say the least, a position analogous to the one occupied by an administrative body with a ruler at its head, on the temporal level. When, on the latter level, the ruler and his assistants, through a life of disorder and dissipation, become unworthy of the respect which is due to them, when the welfare of the nation ceases to be their primary concern, when they start abusing their power and prerogatives in order to attain purely selfish ends, the need for a change of administration naturally begins to develop in people; resentment against the existing state of affairs then follows, the latter easily becoming, in time, no longer bearable. What was happening in Italy, at the period we are considering, is that on the spiritual level, a series of ill-fated pontificates, mainly, coupled with the shocking state of depravation of the clergy in general, had aroused the indignation of the contemporaries to a similar critical degree, although the comparison must obviously be made with certain reserves. Burckhardt alludes to the urgency of the situation when he writes that Italy, at the beginning of the sixteenth century "found itself in the midst of a grave moral crisis, out of which the best men saw hardly any escape." (op. cit., p. 427).
5. Quoted by Burckhardt, op. cit., p. 449.
6. D. Erasmus, The Praise of Folly, trans. by H. H. Hudson, Princeton, 1941, pp. 97-101.
7. The New Cambridge Modern History, op. cit., p. 82.
8. ibid., p. 82.
9. Julius Exclusus a Coelis, trans, by E. Thion, Paris, 1875, pp. 145-147.
10. ibid., pp. 161-163.
11. ibid., pp. 163-167.
12. Rodocanachi, Le Pontificat de Jules II, p. 161.
13. ibid., p. 162.
14. Rodocanachi, Le Pontificat de Léon X, p. 149. As is well-known, the Council terminated in 1517 without having taken any serious measure of reformation. Rodocanachi categorically states about Leo X that "il ne fit rien pour amender l'Eglise et mettre fin aux scandales que chacun déplorait." (ibid., p. 5).

15. N. Machiavelli, Discourses, I.12.6, trans. by L. J. Walker, Yale, 1950, I, p. 245. I am not claiming that the corruption of the Church was the only factor behind such a transformation. An equally important factor behind the latter (as well as behind the general "relâchement" of the clergy) was certainly the blooming of the Renaissance itself.
 16. Hauser, op. cit., II, p. 118.
 17. Burckhardt, op. cit., p. 510.
 18. Aubenas, op. cit., p. 387.
 19. Pastor, op. cit., V, p. 101. For a more elaborate description of the alarming state of "demoralization" reached by the Italian society as a whole, at the height of the Renaissance, the reader may refer to Burckhardt's chapters on 'Morality and Religion', op. cit., pp. 426-517. The Renaissance, by W. Durant (New York, 1953) also incorporates an important chapter on this subject (pp. 568-609).
 20. It may seem that I have perhaps relied too much on Burckhardt and Pastor in this whole discussion. For it is true that in the meantime a great deal has been written on the history of that period. The fact remains, however, that their opinions were based on numberless quantities of authentic documents which could indeed speak for themselves; and even though a modern historian like Aubenas (op. cit.) may choose to insist on the numerous manifestations of faith and piety rather than on the dark side which they have so conspicuously brought out, I am not aware of any basic disagreement with their opinions regarding this subject.
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VIII

THE REACTION OF ROSSO AND PONTORMO

The Renaissance was a period of awakening, of discovery and of challenge to old beliefs and traditions. It was also, for the individual, a period of self-assertion. The artists' struggle for a better position in society, and their ultimate victory, is one of the best testimonies of such a will.

Their claim to be accepted as members of the Humanist Society was perhaps the most important of their demands. Blunt summarizes the significance of the numerous arguments brought up in its favour when he writes: "Implied in these arguments is a belief in the superiority of the intellectual over the manual or mechanical, which corresponds to the desire of the artists at this time to shake themselves free from the accusation of being merely craftsmen, manual labour being considered in the society of the Renaissance as ignoble as it had been in the Middle Ages."¹ As is well-known, the great deal of controversy which such a claim occasioned finally brought success: "The upshot of all these disputes was that the painter, sculptor, and architect obtained recognition as educated men, as members of the Humanist Society. Painting, sculpture, and architecture were accepted as liberal arts."²

The second constraint which the Renaissance artists succeeded in fighting off is the domination of the guilds, on which they had been dependent for centuries. The results achieved are summed up by Blunt: "The arguments about the liberal arts were, therefore, the theoretical side of the artists' struggle for a better position. The practical side of this was a struggle against the old

organization of the guilds, by which artists felt themselves tied... By the end of the fifteenth century they had almost thrown off restraint, and the painter had become a free, educated individual cooperating with other men of learning."³

It is hardly possible to exaggerate the importance which the disputes about the liberal arts, in particular, must have had for the public of the time. Blunt writes: "It is hard for us to realize the importance of these disputes about the liberal arts, but it is brought home to us by a story told by Baccio Bandinelli, who records in his *Memoriale* a duel fought between his cousin and the Vidame de Chartres because the latter accused the Florentine nobles of practising manual arts in that they took an active interest in painting and sculpture."⁴ The attention which Leonardo devoted to the problem is a further testimony of its importance for the contemporaries.

Now it will be readily understood that such disputes, accompanied by the gradual recognition of painting and sculpture as activities partaking primarily of the intellect, would have easily awakened a new pride, a new sense of dignity in the professional artist. Hauser speaks of a "new self-consciousness"⁵ having been awakened in him. And this is very understandable indeed, when we realize that in his new status, the artist was no longer "a simple purveyor of goods which anybody could order "but" a free educated individual cooperating with other men of learning."⁶

Now for artists primarily concerned with scientific experiments or with the development of their talent (as was the case for instance with Leonardo, Raphael and Michelangelo at that time)

such a newly-acquired status would not have been a source of much disturbance. In others already particularly self-conscious, however, it would have easily given rise to a certain kind of speculation which we shall presently examine.

Let us suppose that you are essentially a painter of religious subjects⁷ and that you are also of a particularly self-conscious nature. Let us also assume that your social status is the one of a craftsman. As such, you will not be inclined to philosophize much about your activity, just like a carpenter is not. You will be essentially concerned with doing a good job, with being a good designer of religious works. One day you find yourself in an entirely new situation: your friends, the people around you, your employer suddenly cease to consider you as a mere craftsman. You suddenly find yourself recognized as "a free individual, co-operating with other men of learning" and contributing your share of intellectual work to society. You are no longer "a simple purveyor of goods which anybody could order": you are now a liberal artist.

As should be expected, a new dignity, a new sense of importance is awakened in you. You become proud of your activity, and since the latter consists in the production not only of art but of religious works of art, you say to yourself: "I am proud of being a painter; I am proud of producing religious paintings." It is at this point that speculation begins to take place in your mind. Since you are of a particularly self-conscious nature, you want to know more about the nature of your contribution. You want to find

out why really you should be proud of what you are doing. Thus a subject which as a mere craftsman you would have most likely considered only superficially, suddenly becomes of a major importance for you. Your mind then begins to dig and you gradually realize that your work, along with the rest of Christian art, is ultimately meant to stimulate the spiritual advancement of society (as understood within the requirements of the Christian religion), like a Book of prayers or a sermon delivered by a preacher, and that this indeed is your true contribution (as a designer of religious works of art) to society.

Now this conclusion theoretically would take place by itself in your mind. For on the other hand, assuming that you would be living in Italy around 1515, you could not fail of course, along with your contemporaries, to deeply feel the need for a reformation of the clergy. And you might go on for some time like this, undisturbed by your awareness on the one hand of the role which your art is meant to fulfil in the life of society, and on the other hand of the great spiritual need of your time...until a certain event (or a series of events) would suddenly establish the contact between the two. The sudden confrontation of these two realities would act like a flash. In a moment of intense lucidity, you would realize that your work, meant for the spiritual welfare of society, is not really helping to solve the great spiritual demand of your age; that although art has just reached a peak and is giving the best of itself to the Court of Rome, the latter continues to be the very seat of the immorality prevailing. You would at the same time observe more clearly now that luxury and immorality

are gaining more and more ground around you, and that the whole of the lay society indeed is gradually deteriorating in the same line as the clergy is. The feeling here that art is failing to be of any significant help to society would abruptly arise in you.

Set into action by this discovery, your mind would explore further possible abnormalities and you would gradually develop the feeling that by providing the clergy with visual means of propaganda, you are tacitly supporting it along with its diseases.⁸ You would also awaken to the fact that the depravation of the clergy is indeed acting like an open contradiction, an open denial of the highest ideals which your art is ultimately meant to promote. You would finally become conscious of being used, of your art in general (along with the rest of Christian art), behind a mask of hypocritical piety, primarily serving ends at the exact opposite of such Christian ideals as detachment and humility, namely the gaining of fame and immortality for the patron.⁹

My contention is that in Pontormo and Rosso we are dealing with two artists in whom actually took place a "prise de conscience" of the kind just described. Now it may very well be that only one or two of the points enumerated above would have made their way through those artists' mind, for I am not claiming of course that everything would have happened in the same clear and logical way as I have presented it. Neither am I arguing that this "prise de conscience" would have been totally lucid and cold-blooded: for indeed I am even prepared to concede that it actually remained at the pre-conscious level.¹⁰

Be it as it may, we know enough about Pontormo's nature to deduce that it would have easily predisposed him to such speculations as we have described. Vasari tells us that he was "solitary beyond belief."¹¹ And he adds: "Sometimes when he went to work he would fall into such deep thought that he came away at the end of the day without having done anything but think."¹² Talking about his house, Vasari further observes that "it has rather the appearance of the dwelling of a fantastic and solitary man than a well-considered house. The room where he slept and sometimes worked was approached by a wooden ladder which he drew up after him, so that no one could come up without his knowledge or permission."¹³ The fact, finally, that he guarded his work-in-progress with an unusual jealousy conclusively points to a particularly self-conscious nature. Vasari, for instance, narrates that "having shut himself up alone in the chapel (of San Lorenzo), Jacopo kept the place closed for eleven years, so that not a living soul entered it except himself."¹⁴ He further reports that upon hearing that some boys on a certain occasion had lifted the tiles of the roof and seen everything, "he took it very ill."¹⁵

Rosso does not seem to have shared Pontormo's strange habits of life. His suicide, however, at the discovery that he had falsely accused a friend of his of having robbed him,¹⁶ seems to point to a similarly deep self-consciousness.

I have suggested above that the new sense of dignity awakened in the artist by his recent recognition as liberal would have been the key-factor which would have provoked in Pontormo and Rosso

such a "prise de conscience" as I have described. That this recognition was by no means a universally accepted fact (and therefore that it was capable of stirring the mind of young artists) even around 1515, is proven by the argument brought up by Castiglione in his "Book of the Courtier" (written between 1513 and 1518). For indeed after insisting that the Courtier should know how to draw and be acquainted with the art of painting itself, Castiglione feels the need to support his demand: "Do not marvel if I require this accomplishment, which perhaps nowadays may seem mechanical and ill-suited to a gentleman; for I recall reading that the ancients, especially throughout Greece, required boys of gentle birth to learn painting in school, as a decorous and necessary thing, and admitted it to first rank among the liberal arts; then by public edict they prohibited the teaching of it to slaves."¹⁷

Among the other factors which would have induced Pontormo and Rosso to reflect on the meaning of their activity, the fact that art had just reached a peak is certainly a major one (as has already been suggested). It must have been realized by all artists that Nature had finally been conquered, while Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling and Raphael's Stanzas and Tapestry Cartoons must certainly have been, among artists, a passionate subject of discussion, as marking a high point in the history of Italian painting. The fact that the Court of Rome had replaced Florence as the center of art must also have contributed a certain influence: the very best artists of the day, Raphael, Michelangelo and Bramante were all employed at the papal court. And art which had reached an unprecedented degree of perfection was thus, under the mask of piety,

giving the best of itself to immortalizing the very center of diffusion of a disease which was affecting the whole Italian society. Is it any surprise that some particularly self-conscious artists would have awakened to such a state of affairs?

Now as I said above, it is most probable that the "prise de conscience" which I have described as having taken place in Pontormo and Rosso, would have remained at the pre-conscious level. Such a "prise de conscience", in any case, even at the pre-conscious level, was bound to provoke a reaction.

The most radical way in which such a reaction could have manifested itself is by a refusal to paint, a refusal to collaborate any further in a situation where the true meaning of one's activity had been not only practically lost but fundamentally distorted. The eventual and definitive departure of Rosso for France could be partly interpreted as suggesting that this artist was inclined in that direction. As for Pontormo, his reluctance at working for noblemen¹⁸ and his long delays in completing works for which he had been commissioned also strongly point to such an inclination. When, for instance, Clement VII directed Ottaviano de Medici to have the hall of Poggio a Caiano completed, Pontormo was given the commission. He could not, however, be induced to do anything but cartoons "in spite of the entreaties of Ottaviano the Magnificent and Duke Alessandro."¹⁹ Similarly, having been commissioned to paint a loggia for Duke Cosimo's villa at Castello, Pontormo kept the work hidden for five years and agreed to unveil it only upon a summons from the owner.²⁰ It may be of interest to know, finally, that when Pontormo died, after eleven years of

work in San Lorenzo, it was found that the decoration for which he had been commissioned was still not completed.

Since, however, they still had to paint (painting being their trade), a reaction of such a nature as to affect their work fundamentally would have taken place in Pontormo and Rosso. In order to understand the full meaning of this reaction, it is necessary that we temporarily make abstraction of the "new will" as we have defined it in the preceding part of this essay, and that we consider in themselves the abnormalities and distortions which we have detected in the art of these artists.

In the light of what has been said so far, three major explanations can be given of the revolutionary character of those artists' works. We may say, as a first hypothesis, that under the effect of a bitter disillusion at seeing that art was not helping society as it should, Pontormo and Rosso would have gradually conceived the idea of disfiguring it, of deforming its very structure. Since it was ultimately of no help, what was the good of it any way? What was the good especially, of endeavouring to permeate it with Spirituality and perfection, since society was remaining blind (morally, that is) to those values? The anti-classic nature of their works suggests that such an intention may have very well been at the root of the new art. It was only natural indeed, if such was the case, that the very ideals which were considered to be the ones of the highest art should be directly gone against. Coming at a time when the purity and perfection of classic art had gained the admiration and approval of all, the new art truly appears as intent on destroying whatever value the

work of art had succeeded in acquiring. For indeed while classic art breathes clarity, order, logic and "rationality", the new art, as we have seen, promotes ambiguity, illogicality, incongruity, strangeness; to the perfect worlds of classic art, it substitutes abnormal, perplexing and strange worlds; the ideal reality promoted by classic art gives way in the new art to a strange, abnormal, inconsistent reality.

The destructive character of the new art takes on a double significance when we observe, as we have done, that the existence of Spirituality itself is mortally affected in it. In this sense, it can be said that unlike Botticelli's art, which through its ascetic Spirituality, manifests a positive hope at reforming society, Pontormo's and Rosso's art manifests an utter despair. For these artists the struggle is over. The battle is lost. There is no sense in carrying on. The only thing left to do is to destroy those values now meaningless.

A second hypothesis is that Pontormo and Rosso would have become aware that the purity and perfection of classic art were not suited to the situation of the time. They would have realized that such an art would belong to another age, to an age of order and moral prosperity, when the Christian society would be genuinely endeavouring to live in conformity with her ideals. The will to create an art which would fit the abnormal situation of the time would then have germinated in them. And indeed the picture of strangeness, illogicality, abnormality...etc. which their art offers can be interpreted as the direct manifestation of such a will. It truly constitutes a concrete equivalent to the fundamentally abnormal and contradictory state in which the Italian

society was finding herself. In this sense we can say that unlike Botticelli who rejected some of the achievements of the Renaissance because of their too sensual nature, Pontormo and Rosso rejected classic art because they considered it "unfit" for the situation of the time.

What the new art more ultimately reveals, however, is, as we have observed in the preceding section, a will to perplex, disturb, frustrate and even shock the beholder (which we have defined as the new will). We may say here that his disillusion at seeing that art was not truly helping society and his revolt at being used, at seeing that Christian art in general was serving purposes standing at the exact opposite of ideals which it was meant to promote, would have engendered in the artist a bitter resentment certainly against the clergy and the nobility in particular, but more ultimately against society in general which was failing to respond as it should to the artist's message. The will to turn the work of art against society by making it disturbing, frustrating and even shocking would have been the direct result of such a resentment.

This third hypothesis is obviously the most plausible one in view especially of the fact that such works as Portrait of a Young Man by Rosso could not be easily explained by any of the first two. It is not impossible, however, that they all played a certain part. The safest conclusion we can draw, since no categorical judgment is possible, is that each one may have possibly contributed a certain share (however limited) to the advent of the new art.²¹

Now I am not contending, here again, that Pontormo's and

Rosso's reaction, as we have analyzed it, would have been utterly conscious and cold-blooded. Like was the case for their "prise de conscience" of the important abnormalities to which their art was subjected, it is much more probable here also that most of it remained at the pre-conscious level (although their works were to be fundamentally affected).

The poor excuses given by Pontormo on certain occasions, for instance, seem to indicate that he could not really explain what was preventing him from giving satisfaction to his patrons (although he could have undoubtedly done so). At Poggio a Caiano, for instance, he blamed his inertia on "a long sickness."²² Again, at Castello, when the patron was expressing his great disappointment, he excused himself, according to Vasari, by saying that he did not like the place, because "being outside the city, it was exposed to the fury of the soldiers and other accidents."²³

There are indications, however, that Pontormo was well aware of his not producing what he really thought was the best art. His reluctance to accept money, for instance, seems to suggest that he felt a certain guilt at being rewarded for works which to him were not properly "true". Vasari tells us that on a certain occasion, when Duke Alessandro wanted to pay him for some paintings done, "he only asked for enough money to redeem a mantle which he had pawned. When the Duke heard this he laughed, and gave him fifty gold crowns and the offer of a pension, though Nicenlo (the Duke's servant) had hard work to make him accept it."²⁴

The new art, through the new will, indeed constitutes a reaction which in many respects recalls the Dadaist movement of

our own time. Although the comparison must be made with great reserve, it can be said first of all that both originated partly out of disillusion and despair. Verkauf writes that "the great anguish caused in sensitive artistic natures by the senseless massacres "in the name of the most sacred possessions of humanity" exploded in the dadaist outcry...Dada was an outbreak of despair on the part of the artist, who felt the ever-deepening rift between himself and the society of a time which crystallized in senseless mass-murder."²⁵

Both Dada and the new art can also be said to have represented a revolt and a protest, on the part of the artist, ultimately against society. Verkauf once again makes this clear about Dada: "Although art history has often described dadaism as one of the movements in art and more especially as a precursor of surrealism, which followed it, this definition is not quite conclusive. Dadaism was no new trend in art, but a specific expression of the opposition of artists - poets, sculptors, painters, musicians -- to the cultural creations of a society capable of slaughtering millions of people, and that at the beginning of the twentieth century, for purely selfish reasons."²⁶ Hauser paraphrases this idea when he writes that Dadaism was "a protest against the civilization that had led to the war."²⁷

We may finally observe important similarities of intention between the new art and Dadaism. For indeed as we have detected in the new art what could be called an important urge to destroy whatever value the work of art (through the achievements of the classic artists) had succeeded in acquiring, likewise in the case

of Dadaism "the canonized forms of art were to be negated and razed to the ground."²⁸ As to the will to turn the work of art against society (by making it disturbing, frustrating and even shocking), which we have deduced above, concerning Rosso and Pontormo, it is also found eminently present in the program of the Dadaists. Read makes it clear about the latter: "They were out to shock the bourgeoisie (whom they held responsible for the war)."²⁹

The new art, like Dadaism, thus represented a moment of intense crisis in the history of art, in that it saw the artist turn aggressively against society and in the fact that the whole structure of art itself appeared challenged. For Dada, the crisis was ultimately solved when a new, positive purpose was found and a new direction devised: thus the Dadaists found a new interest in the systematic exploration of the subconscious and turned to Surrealism.³⁰ In the sixteenth century (if I may be allowed to continue the parallel), one could say that the crisis would have theoretically come to an end with the advent of the Council of Trent, when art was called upon to support the ambitious programme of the Counter-Reformation.³¹

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1. A. Blunt, Artistic Theory in Italy 1450-1600, Oxford, 2nd edit. rev., 1956, p. 55.
 2. *ibid.*, p. 55.

3. *ibid.*, pp. 55-56.
4. *ibid.*, p. 48.
5. Hauser, *op. cit.*, II, p. 66.
6. Blunt, *op. cit.*, p. 56.
7. It should not be necessary to demonstrate here that the production of "secular" painting in Italy, although on the increase at the height of the Renaissance, was still much less than the production of religious painting. The painter was before all a producer of religious works. It is as such that he must have felt and it is as such that he will be considered in the following discussion.
8. One may visualize here what would have meant a strike of painters, sculptors and architects in protest against the corruption of the clergy.
9. Hauser observes that "piety was by no means any longer the most important motive behind the endowments of Church art... The wealthy and distinguished citizens of the city republics wanted to make sure of their posthumous fame, although they had to exercise a certain degree of restraint in their way of life, out of consideration for their fellow-citizens. Ecclesiastical endowments were the most suitable method by which to secure eternal fame without challenging public criticism." (Hauser, *op. cit.*, II, p. 43). As an unequivocal example that the role played by piety in the commissioning of Church art was no longer of any serious importance, Hauser gives the following: "Castello Quaratesi wanted to provide the church of S. Croce with a façade, but as he was refused permission to put his coat of arms on it, he gave up the whole project." (*ibid.*, p. 43). The papacy itself, as can easily be deduced, was not exempt from such a weakness: "With every church, chapel, altarpiece, and baptismal font, the Popes' chief intention seems to have been to immortalize themselves, thinking more of their own glory than of the glory of God." (*ibid.*, p. 86).
10. For an illuminating discussion of the pre-conscious and of its role in the creative process, see J. Maritain, Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry, New York, 1953.
11. Vasari, *op. cit.*, III, p. 255.
12. *ibid.*, p. 255.
13. *ibid.*, p. 250.

14. *ibid.*, p. 253.
15. *ibid.*, p. 253.
16. Vasari, *op. cit.*, II, p. 363.
17. B. Castiglione, The Book of the Courtier, first pub. 1528, trans. by C. S. Singleton, Anchor Books, New York, 1959, p. 77.
18. Vasari tells us that "being often requested to do things for noblemen, and notably on one occasion by M. Ottaviano de Medici, he would not serve them, but would then begin something for some plebeian instead at a low price." (Vasari, *op. cit.*, III, p. 250).
19. *ibid.*, p. 249.
20. *ibid.*, p. 252.
21. As I have stated it previously, my aim here has been essentially to explain what may have provoked the advent of the new will. It is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss the influence which such an event as the Reformation may have had upon Pontormo and Rosso. It would also constitute the subject of another essay to determine up to what point the presence of the "new will" can be recognized in the works of other artists of that time. What is certain at any rate about the Reformation is that it must be entirely left out when discussing the advent of the new art, since the latter as we have seen made its appearance as early as 1516, when the Reformation had not even begun. The most that can be said indeed about this movement as regards the advent of the new art is that like the latter, it was primarily provoked by the intolerable situation which the corruption of the Church had brought about. Hauser is categorical about the Reformation: "The decisive fact for the sociology of the Reformation is that the movement started in a wave of indignation against the corruption of the Church, and that the avarice of the clergy, the trading in indulgences and ecclesiastical offices, was the immediate cause by which it was set in motion." (Hauser, *op. cit.*, II, p. 112).
22. Vasari, *op. cit.*, III, p. 249.
23. Vasari, *ibid.*, p. 252.
24. *ibid.* p.
25. W. Verkauf, Dada, New York, 1957, p. 10.
26. *ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

27. Hauser, op. cit., IV, p. 231. The founder of the famous Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, Hugo Ball, wrote the following (which is indeed very significant for our argument), in his book "Flucht aus der Zeit": "Our cabaret is a gesture. Every word spoken or sung here says at least one thing, that these humiliating times have not succeeded in wresting respect from us!" (Quoted by Verkauf, op. cit., p. 12).
 28. Verkauf, op. cit., p. 10.
 29. H. Read, A Concise History of Modern Painting, New York, 1959, p. 119. It would appear that one of the main differences between the new art and Dadaism is that the latter was an utterly conscious reaction while the new art was not. That is partly why the art of Pontormo and Rosso appears so complex, at times contradictory, and on the whole quite inconsistent: precisely because the new will was not always operating with the same energy, and that other forces, equally if not more powerful, were certainly competing strongly with it.
 30. As is well-known, it is André Breton who guided the transition from Dada to Surrealism (Read, op. cit., p. 129). For an exposé of the positive, constructive aims of the new movement, the reader may refer to Breton's first Manifeste du Surréalisme (1924).
 31. This is indeed a very free observation and would presuppose that the "new will" would have continued to manifest itself until then. This subject is, however, far beyond the scope of this essay.
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The circumstances surrounding the writing of this thesis have made it impossible for me to consult the whole of the literature related in some way or other to my argument. On the other hand, I cannot bring myself (for the mere sake of completeness) to list a series of books with which I am not personally acquainted. Therefore, in order to guide the reader for further reading, I shall presently point out a few works which seem to me to incorporate comprehensive and relatively up-to-date bibliographies on the main ideas treated. For a survey of the historical and current views concerning post-classic art and the meaning of Mannerism, Smyth's Mannerism and Maniera (New York, 1962) is perhaps the most interesting work of its kind. Briganti's Italian Mannerism (London, 1962) is also very useful in this respect. So is Bousquet's Mannerism, the Painting and Style of the Late Renaissance (New York, 1964). The latter work also incorporates an interesting bibliography on the historical and social background of the so-called Mannerist period. For a more exhaustive (though not so up-to-date) bibliography on these latter aspects and also on the religious situation in Italy from 1492 to 1534, the reader may refer to Weill's Religious Life in Italy from 1492 to 1534 (M.A. Thesis, New York Univ. 1940). Aubenas' "L'Eglise et la Renaissance (Paris, 1951) however remains perhaps the most comprehensive work in this respect and is particularly interesting in that it assesses the value of the source material and of the major studies which have been done on this problem. Freedberg's Painting of the High Renaissance in Rome and Florence (2 vols., Cambridge, Mass., 1961)

is now the standard work on classic painting (bibliography-wise at any rate). It also incorporates important bibliographies on Pontormo and Rosso. For a more exhaustive bibliography on Rosso, Barocchi's Il Rosso Fiorentino (Rome, 1950) should be consulted. As to Pontormo, the recent work by J. C. Rearick on The Drawings of Pontormo (2 vols., Cambridge, Mass., 1964) seems to list all the works of significance which have been written on this artist.

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