

Chapter VI

CHAPTER-VI

Baroque Architecture and Art

The origins of Baroque art are to be found in the field of architecture and the birthplace of Baroque architecture is said to be Rome. Essentially Baroque architecture reflects the great religious and political systems of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, namely the Roman Catholic Church and the political system of the central French state. The aim of all Baroque art and literature was to represent concurrently the rigid organisation of the system and its flexible power and consequently Baroque architecture emerges as a synthesis of systematization and dynamism.

These two apparently contradictory aspects of the Baroque, systematization and dynamism, form an essential totality which becomes meaningful in relation to a center that represents the basic axioms of the system. The various centers of religion, science, economy and politics in the seventeenth century were focuses of radiating forces, which viewed from the center itself had no spatial limits as they had an open, dynamic character. When deviating from a fixed point they could be extended without limitations. This was basic to the Baroque Age - the resulting absolute, but open and dynamic system.¹

Although, etymologically, the term "Baroque" is applied to the visual arts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, certain critics of art and historians have urged that the work of Michelangelo, who died in 1564, must be considered as the beginning of the baroque. It is said that the architectural plans of Michelangelo, especially those for St. Peter's closely resemble the early Baroque plans of many buildings. In any case the earliest Baroque building is "Il Gesu", built by the Jesuits in Rome between 1568 and 1584, which is a basilica centered in a cupola. Thus it combines the longitudinal tradition of medieval churches with the centred buildings of the Renaissance.

Apart from "Il Gesu" which belongs to the sixteenth century, St. Peter's

in Rome is perhaps the best among the early architectural creations of the early Baroque. The new ideas which the early Baroque had developed by the seventeenth century were as follows : a predominant position assigned to the main spatial unit; suppression of separate independent parts, such as chapels in churches and the rhythmical relationship of all spaces within the total complex.

One of the most awesome results of Baroque architecture is the Baroque church. As already mentioned, the most potent parent of the Baroque architecture is the Counter-Reformation. The churches, therefore, had an avowed missionary purpose. The champions of the Counter-Reformation, after an initial period of ascetism - in reaction to the pagan hedonism they identified with the Renaissance - recruited the fine arts in a new campaign to recover the heretic to the faith. A church, therefore, was not simply a preaching box or a place for private meditation, but the House of God, which in pomp and majesty could not rank second to the temporal palace. To sustain the fighting spirit of the Counter - Reformation it was necessary to appeal directly to the eyes and to the emotions of the people by a splendid display of magnificence and drama. The propaganda values of painting and architecture were first exploited by the Jesuits, and the "Il Gesu", their church, gave some indication of what was to follow. Boldness, strength and power became the characteristics of the architecture of the militant Counter-Reformation. ²

From Michelangelo and the Renaissance, from the Gesu and the Counter-Reformation, sprang the drama and the opulent florescence of Baroque in the seventeenth century. It has offended the purists, who coined the word "Baroque" from the Portugese for a deformed pearl. In fact, Baroque architecture is nothing more than an attempt to excite, to uplift and impress; by the dramatic use of mass, light and colour it seeks to create a sense of grandeur and movement which will overwhelm the spectator.

Since propaganda is the art of public proclamation, the exterior design and decoration of the churches acquired an interest and an importance for the Baroque architect which his predecessors of the Renaissance had not always shared. The handling of masses, the swelling domes, the spiral columns, the

curved facades with their exciting patterns of concave - convex surfaces all indicated the sculptural quality of Baroque architecture, and like a piece of sculpture, a Baroque church is an organic whole. The exterior was planned as the focal point of the neighbourhood; within, the unity of the decorative plan was equally essential. If the architect was to succeed in his object of exciting, uplifting and impressing the spirits of the spectators, he had to stage effects with care and deliberation. The sculptured figures are not merely placed on pedestals, or confined to niches along the walls; they seem to have grown there, living parts of the organism, blending not only with their setting but also with the painted figures from which, at a distance they can scarcely be distinguished - by tricks of perspective, and by exploiting the theatrical nature of the setting.

Where the Baroque succeeds it represents a union of the arts of the architect, the painter and the sculptor, working together to attack the emotions of the spectators. Total effect is more important than obedience to formal rules, and in this respect the Baroque is essentially theatrical, not least in its concealment of structural features behind statuary of stucco work and in its skilful understanding of the dramatic qualities of light. Statues and figures were often lit by concealed windows, and the windows themselves were coloured so that the exact hue might be predetermined, as for example, in Bernini's S. Andrea where the panes of the lantern are stained yellow so that even on dull days the light filtering through appears to be daylight. Like most other features of the Baroque lighting was first exploited in the Gesu. The nave is lit by windows over the side chapels, but the last one before the crossing was deliberately made smaller in order to admit less light than the others; this serves to heighten the dramatic effect of the flood of light which pours from the windows of the lantern, to illuminate the crossing and to draw the eye to the altar.

Among the most remarkable figures in sculpture and architecture was Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680).³ Bernini was not only a sculptor, he was also a devout follower of the "Spiritual Exercises" of the Jesuits. Between 1621 and 1624, by a series of commissions for Cardinal Borghese, which included the "Rape of Prosperina", "David", "Apollo and Daphne", he established a

reputation as the finest artist since Michelangelo, whose temperament and latent violence he shared, but whose concept of architecture he rejected. Instead of letting the figure adhere closely to the block, he tried to liberate it from its material limitation so that it might break through into the world of the spectator. This in essence was the nature of the Baroque; an attempt to shatter the formal distinction between the virtual space that is created by the artist, and the real space inhabited by the spectator. The audience and the action were thus made one.

Bernini was a consummate artist, especially in marble. He also exploited the effects created by using coloured lights and mixed materials, as can be seen in his chapel dedicated to Saint Teresa in the church of S. Maria della Vittoria in Rome. The walls are richly laid with marbles of amber, gold and pink, but the spectator's attention is focused on the heavy coupled columns which frame the altar; these are projected at an angle to the wall to catch the eye and to lead it within the frame, not to the traditional paintings on the altar but to a sculptural group of astonishing vitality. Saint Teresa is depicted as apparently rising through the air, swooning in an agony of pain and blissful ecstasy as the angel raises the arrow of gold with which, in this legend of her vision, he pierced her heart. The effect is heightened by the diagonal tilt of the group, by the golden light admitted from a hidden window, and by the golden beams, gilt metal shafts, which hide the blank wall of the altar niche. In the altarpiece of Saint Teresa, Bernini established an intimate relationship between sculpture and architecture.

The most significant of the Baroque churches is undoubtedly the "Core" of the Roman Catholic world, the Piazza San Pietro in Rome erected in 1675-76, by Bernini. To begin with the piazza has a symbolic basis. Bernini himself said, "for since the church of St. Peter's is the mother of nearly all the others, it had to have colonnades, which would show it as if stretching out its arms maternally to receive Catholics, so as to confirm them in their faith, heretics, to bring them back to the church, and the heathens to enlighten them in the true faith". St Peter's Square is one of the greatest urban spaces conceived. The main oval space is at once closed and open. It is clearly defined, but the oval

shape creates an expression along the transverse axis. Instead of being a static finished form, the square interacts with the world beyond, an intention also expressed by the "transparent" colonnade while the space really becomes the "meeting place" of all mankind, its message radiates to the entire world. The obelisk has an important function as the center where all the directions meet and are connected with the longitudinal axis which leads to the church. An ideal synthesis of concentration and longitudinal direction towards a goal is thus created. The theme is repeated within the church where the movement finds its final motivation in the vertical axis of the heavenly dome. St. Peter's Square is a good example of space composition. Bernini has succeeded in concretizing the essence of the Baroque Age with a unique simplicity. Better than any other examples, St Peter's Square shows that the basis of Baroque is found in general principles rather than in exuberant details. ⁴

The patterns of Baroque churches are variations on the basic types of centralized longitudinal plan and elongated central plan, popular during the last decade of the sixteenth century. Developing from these layouts spatial integration was especially emphasized, and the Baroque church in general served as a testing ground for the development of advanced spatial ideas. The crucial step was taken by Francesco Borromini (1599-1667), who deliberately introduced space as the constituent element of architecture. His spaces are complex totalities given "a priori" as indivisible figures. This feature is stressed above all by the continuity of the bounding walls. His greatest single-handed achievement was the church S. Carlo alle Quattro Fontaine, in Paris (1635-36). The facade he completed just before his death, and the numerous designs he made in an attempt to integrate the separate parts may have indicated the growing lack of confidence which precipitated his suicide. His decoration of the facade has been criticized by many, but few can deny the lively sense of movement it imparts. This is suggested by the pattern of the bays of the lower storey, which are successfully concave, convex, concave, creating an undulation which is emphasized and repeated by the unusually solid entablature between the storeys. But it is the interior which is one of Borromini's greatest triumphs - it is personal and overwhelming. This effect is brought about neither by sumptuous decoration nor by dramatic lighting, but by brilliant mastery of the

structure. The plan is an oval, with an oval dome and with the side and entrance chapels all representing fragments of ovals, so that the complex interrelation though not immediately apparent, is gradually understood by the spectator. The cloister is surrounded by a continuous system of rhythmically placed columns. There are no corners in the usual sense of the term, as the smaller bay of the wall system is carried on in a convex curve where the corners would have been. The space is intended as a unit, which may be articulated. Borromini made a first attempt at making several spatial units mutually interdependent. About the same time François Mansart introduced the idea of spatial interpretation in the church of the Visitation in Paris (1632) where oval chapels on the main axes are interpenetrated by the circular main space so as to break up their forms.

In the works of Guarino Guarini (1624-83) the general principle proposed by Borromini are symmetrically worked out. Guarini made complicated patterns with interdependent or interpenetrating cells and produced energetic forms that resemble pulsating life, which render the Baroque ideas of extension and movement. A particularly interesting example is the S. Lorenzo in Turin (1668) where a centralized plan is developed around an octagonal space whose sides are convexly curved towards the inside. A transverse oval presbytery is added to the main axis, according to the principle of interdependence. On the transverse axis similar spaces could have been added, but they ^{are} omitted. Guarini's basic achievement consists in the development of open spatial groups. His ideas were of fundamental importance for the late Baroque architect of Central Europe. Guarini demonstrated the peculiar adaptability of Baroque for secular purposes. The style of the church militant was easily assimilated to the glorification of princes, and the dramatic undulations of the Roman facades were repeated on the palaces of Turin. Guarini to some extent succeeded in analyzing the principles of his style in his "Architectura Civile" and though it was not published before 1737, engravings from it were circulating after 1668 and played an important part in the exciting growth of German architecture. Asam and Nuemann, its greatest masters, worked between 1720 and 1760, but before the seventeenth century was out, the Baroque was already established in Vienna.

The development of the Baroque church culminated in the great sanctuaries and monastic churches of central Europe from the eighteenth century. Here all the basic themes of the history of Christian architecture are unified in a last magnificent synthesis made possible by Borromini's introduction of the spatial element, by the "ars combinatoria" of Guarini, and by the Late Gothic wall pier system which was employed by builders and architects trained within the local tradition of building technique. The decisive step of combining the wall pier system with the spatial groups developed by Guarini led to the creation of a fascinating series of buildings and projects. ⁵

In France, however, it was another story. Though the French were Catholic beyond question and monarchist to excess, they were never swept away by the tide of Baroque exuberance. Italian models were respected, Bernini was invited to Paris, but the Roman style never became dominant. The classical tradition in France was of more recent date and was therefore the less readily abandoned. French Catholicism differed from the Italian in two important respects. The Cistercians and the Jansenists emphasized again the importance of prayer and meditation, and opposed the theatrical quality of Baroque decoration as an unwelcome distraction from spiritual communion. Nonetheless, much of French architecture owes a great deal to the intrusion of Baroque motifs. In Jacques Lemercier's chapel of the Sorbonne the ribs of the drum are heavily emphasized, rising across the line of dome to the lantern where, instead of being rounded off by a gentle cupola, they are drawn vigorously upward by a short spire to point restlessly at the heavens. The effect of this, and of the facade, is both impressive and exuberant. In 1645, Anne of Austria commissioned Francois Mansart, the first of a line of famous French architects, to design the convent and chapel of the Val-de-Grace. It has a dramatic dome whose lofty line was achieved by constructing a false timber dome above the masonry of the inner shell. This same device was adopted by Hardouin Mansart, Francois's great nephew, for the magnificent church of Les Invalides which combined classical proportion and elegance with Baroque splendour. ⁶

In France, where the church was thus of relatively minor importance, it was the palace which came to the fore. The city palace and the villa chateau

tended to be treated in the same way, and as a result both were generally situated at the meeting point of habitat and nature. The Palais du Luxembourg represented the typical French palace. Built for Marie de Medici, its main buildings are flanked by two projecting wings to form a 'cour d'honneur' which is closed on the fourth side by a screen. At first this was to have been the plan for the Louvre, but this was not to be. Between 1610 and 1664 the Louvre was extended from two small buildings forming a right angle to an entirely square block around a courtyard. The problem was then to design a facade which would be majestic enough for so important a palace, and Bernini was called in 1665 to solve it. Relying on the effect of unadorned mass, he proposed to leave the casement and ground floor to run the full length of the palace without decoration, to link the second and third storeys of giant columns detached from the walls, and to crown the facade with a terraced roof ornamented with balustrades and statuary. In front of it all he planned to create a colossal square. By 1667, however, after Bernini's return to Rome, his plans had been replaced by those of Charles Perrault. The flat unbroken line of the facade and the balustraded roof were preserved, but Perrault reduced the other features to a more restrained design. The ground floor, with regular tall windows, became a podium for a single great storey with a free-standing colonnade of pillars grouped in pairs. Baroque principles were thus reconciled with the classical, rational mood of French architecture.

It has already been mentioned that Spain was the true home of the Baroque. By the end of the sixteenth century its austere sense of religious purpose and its centralized autocratic government had been given a solid symbolic substance in the palace monastery of the Escorial (completed in 1584) from which Philip II ruled his immense and far-flung empire bequeathed him by Charles V.⁷ Spain's military might and wealth, its strong championship of Counter-Reformation values and its popular delight in stage and entertainment, were some of the chief features of a national culture which managed to hold in balance many of the spiritual and worldly contrasts associated with the Baroque. But following the reign of Philip IV (1621-65), Spain's power and influence were beginning to decline. By 1640 even Portugal and Catalonia had succeeded in shaking off Spanish rule. In 1659 the decline of Spanish influence in Europe

was marked by the marriage of Louis XIV to Philip's daughter; this was also the Italian Cardinal Mazarin's last and greatest contribution to the stability which Europe's central monarchies regained around 1600, and was in many ways the prelude to the most opulent phase of the Baroque. The success or failure of a nation depends on a ruler's ability to project an appropriate image. To do this meant commissioning the right artists to radiate and perpetuate the image. Great palaces were thus constructed. In France, Versailles was gradually transformed from a modest hunting lodge, and magnified into the vast structure of regal splendour. Moreover all over Europe the same desire was at work to create settings appropriate to the now fashionable conception of kingship. Enormous sums were spent, and the result was the "royal palace", often with the whole town in attendance on it. The origin of the Baroque palace went back to the Italian Renaissance, to the Italian chateaux and to descriptions of the palaces of Roman antiquity such as Nero's Golden House and Hadrian's Tivoli. One of the most obvious characteristics of the Baroque palace is that it is a building designed for peacetime. There are no military fortifications; and the moats are stylized into ornamental waters which, like the formal gardens, reflect the rituals that surround a royal person. All over Europe palaces of this new kind arose, and none more regal than those built by Christian IV of Denmark. Every German prince required a palace in the Holy Roman Empire, as each prince ruled in his own right. And those who considered themselves superior to the rest required palaces magnificent enough to justify their claims and satisfy their self-esteem. Thus the Electors, whose function it was to elect the Emperor, started building for themselves town and country residences suited to their status- The Margrave of Brandenburg in Berlin and the Prince-Archbishop of Cologne at Bruhl. Schloss Nymphenburg on the outskirts of Munich, begun in 1664 for the Elector of Bavaria is an impressive example.

In England, too, Charles II had a dream of an equally splendid residence near Winchester to be designed and executed by Christopher Wren, but this palatial dream never got much further than the drawing board. The Palace of Whitehall did not fare better. At the request of Charles I, Inigo Jones drew plans for the complete reconstruction of what was a medieaval and Tudor combination, and at the Restoration his son revived the idea. But only one

component of these large-scale Whitehall schemes got off the ground - the Banqueting House. Its architectural style was old-fashioned by European standards, as Inigo Jones designed it in the manner made famous by Palladio in the 1550s, but on its ceilings allegorical and mythological figures painted by Rubens in the 1630s, float with a Baroque abandon unparalleled in England.

The palace which comes closest to the unfulfilled visions of Winchester and Whitehall and which in spirit and appearance most closely parallels the palaces of Europe, is Blenheim, designed by Vanbrugh. It was begun in 1704 and was dedicated to the great military commander, the Duke of Marlborough, who with the Franco-Austrian Prince Eugene, had won the war of the Spanish Succession and had enabled the new century to open under the joint influence of Austria and Britain. In many ways Blenheim Palace is a significant counterpart to the Belvedere palace in Vienna, designed at the same time for Marlborough's military colleague Prince Eugene by Lucas von Hildebrandt. The motive underlying the construction of Blenheim actually came closer to that which inspired the palace of Baroque kings, and made it unique in England; it is an eulogy in stone, caught midway between static weightiness and dynamic movement, classical proportions and monumental exuberance. Palaces like Blenheim extol the virtues and achievements of their owners.⁸

Baroque architecture is an architecture of inclusion. It does not exclude any aspect of the total architectural experience, but aims at great synthesis. Both the systematic organisation of Renaissance space and Mannerist dynamism are integrated. The basic properties of Baroque are - dominant space, infinite extension and persuasive plastic power. The dominant centre is common to all Baroque systems because it represented the axioms that made the system meaningful.

As Baroque is synthetic it is characterized by simultaneous formal differentiation and integration. Baroque compositions are rich and complex, but they also possess a grand, comprehensive design. Baroque inclusion may also be understood as a synthesis of opposites: space and mass; movement and pause; enclosure and extension; proximity and distance; illusion and reality.

The Baroque world may be called "pluralistic" in so far as it offered man a choice between different alternatives, be they religious, philosophical, economic or political. But all the alternatives had in common the aim of arriving at a complete and secure system based on "a priori" axioms or dogmas. Man wanted absolute security, and he could find it in the tradition of the restored Roman Church, in one of the schools of Protestantism, which was based on the belief in the absolute truth of the Biblical word, in the absolute monarchy "by divine right" or in the great philosophical systems of the age.

Baroque architecture concludes a period which in the history of Western culture is usually called the "age of humanism". During the period people in Europe were still predominantly Christian, but now they wanted to coalesce faith with the understanding of nature and human character inherited from antiquity. During the Renaissance only the divine aspect of man and nature were considered. Divine perfection was found in the human body and in the rest of nature as well. As a result man felt safe and was in harmony with the great cosmic order. Renaissance architecture is therefore characterized by spatial geometrization. Mannerism represents doubts in this simple solution by exclusion. The dark side of man and nature was again experienced as threatening reality. During the Baroque Age, finally, the totality of natural and human aspects were considered. Body and soul were now understood as parts of the dynamic whole, and the experience of meaning was often connected with a state of ecstasy. The Baroque solution to the problem of body and soul consisted in participation. The art of the period concentrates on vivid images of situations, real or imaginary, rather than on absolute form. Participation, however, implied that man become more conscious of his own existence, and in the long run what should have made the system secure, therefore, led to its disintegration.⁹

The same general tendencies which shaped architecture and sculpture in the Baroque period were at work in art and painting. But the Baroque developed certain formal elements peculiar to painting. One of the essential qualities of Baroque painting is naturalistic verisimilitude, though it takes various forms. All Baroque artists adhere to this principle. It was the result of the opposition to the elegant stylization of Late Mannerism.

Caravaggio (who more than any other may be credited with inaugurating Baroque Naturalism), remarked that the competent painter is one who knows how "to imitate natural things well".¹⁰

The great traditional subjects - mythology, portraiture, and above all sacred art - were transformed and given new content by the naturalistic vision of the Baroque. It was the same vision that made possible the extraordinary achievement of the seventeenth century artists in the field of landscape and still life. Even in the latter years of the century, when academic rules introduced theatrical conceptions into the creative process, the strong naturalistic outlook of the Baroque was never supplanted, as is evident in the portraits of the age of Louis XIV. For all their ornateness, these portraits were firmly committed to the illusion of reality. The new emphasis on visual realism is related to the secularization of knowledge and the growth of science in the seventeenth century.

One can hardly speak of Baroque naturalism without taking notice of Baroque psychology. The preoccupation with "the passion of the soul" is important, and can be seen in both the artists and the philosophers of the period. In what we may call "subject pictures", from simple pieces to multi-figured history paintings on a grand scale, the emotional range is greatly expanded. Portraiture likewise exhibits a positive enrichment of psychic content. Rembrandt is not alone among the seventeenth century masters in his capacity to endow the portrait with an imitation of spiritual as well as corporeal presence.

It may seem paradoxical that some of the outstanding realists of the

Baroque Age-masters whom critics of the nineteenth century hailed as forerunners of Impressionism - should have painted allegorical subjects, often concealed beneath a naturalistic exterior. But there is no inconsistency in this. For Baroque naturalism, though a powerful force, was qualified by a fundamentally metaphysical point of view of the world. Side by side with the growing scientific mode of thought, the emblematic and allegorical cast of mind still persisted. This is paralleled in the literature of the period, especially in the works of John Donne and Richard Crashaw.

It is hardly remarkable that the great humanistic themes derived from classical antiquity were adopted for the purpose of allegory. But the allegorical method was also applied, following a tradition of scriptural interpretation, to the rendering of biblical subjects. In the seventeenth century the Old Testament was still regarded as a prefiguration of the New, and the major artists adhered faithfully to this "medieval symbolism", whereby Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, was understood in a mystical sense to signify the Crucifixion.

Baroque genre paintings once regarded as the simple transcriptions of everyday life, frequently contain allegorical or symbolical meanings. In the same way, a large number of still-life paintings are found on analysis to embody a moralizing theme as "Vanitas", the abstract idea being made more real by being conveyed in the most concrete terms possible. Even landscape paintings may be made to carry symbolic allusions to human transience, as in Poussin's cycle of the "The Four Seasons".

Some of the most magnificent allegorical creations of the Baroque epoch were devoted to the glorification of monarchy. Rubens epic "Medici Cycle" celebrating the career of a notable inept queen, proves that men still had faith in the doctrine of the divine right. The whole gigantic concept of Versailles was conceived as an image, in elaborate emblematic terms of the splendid "Roi Soleil".

The Copernican revolution brought in its train a sense of the infinite which was to permeate seventeenth century art and thought. Nothing reveals more

clearly the consciousness of infinity in this period than the interest in space, time and light.

The principle of coextensive space is an important one in Baroque art. It may be seen in the various devices employed by artists to remove the barriers imposed by the picture frame between the real space of the observer and the perspective space of the painting. The desire to suggest an infinite prolongation of space also finds expression in the great illusionistic ceiling paintings of the period. As a result of such efforts to achieve an integration of real and fictive space, the observer becomes an active participant in the spatial-psychological field created by the work of art. Far from being merely a form of clever theatrical trickery, Baroque illusion has a persuasive purpose - that of transferring the mind of the viewer from material to eternal things.

Naturalism and the concern with space are the chief characteristics in Baroque landscape. The Dutch panoramic view, with its prospect of an immense far-reaching expanse offers the most familiar example of spatial illusionism. But the continuity of space is often suggested by other means, such as the fact that the scene presented to us is only part of an infinitely larger totality.

The idea of spatial continuum is also fundamental to the art of static design which seeks to coordinate the perspective space of the theatre to the real space of the auditorium.

The suggestion of movement, which is characteristic of many works of painting of the seventeenth century may evoke the sense of time as well as of space. The fleeting glance, the momentary gesture, the changing aspects of nature tell of transience, mutability and the passing of time. Time itself may be personified as Destroyer and Revealer: in the hands of such masters as Rubens, Poussin and Bernini, the allegory of "Truth revealed by Time" becomes one of the classic themes of Baroque art. The recurring cycle of day and night and the succession of the seasons offered to artists another way of dealing with the infinity of time.

Among the outstanding features of the new style were "chiaroscuro" (contrast of light and shade); the extensive use of tonal gradation rather than clear colours, combined with the discarding of distinct outlines and the merging of objects into the surrounding background; and finally the employment of large quantities of pigment and the resulting visibility of brush strokes. Light is one of the principal expressive means of the Baroque artist. It is understood, first of all, to be a necessary element of the naturalistic vocabulary; in subjects such as landscape and genre the realistic handling of effects of light is of fundamental importance.

The conception of light as a phenomena that is simultaneously physical and supernatural was first formulated in powerful terms by Caravaggio and was soon adopted everywhere. In the decoration of churches real light is usually introduced to denote divine intervention: the work of Bernini is full of this imaginative use of guided light.

Through artful contrasts of light and dark, painters were able to suggest a variety of other symbolic meanings. Light indicates enlightenment, reason and truth, while dark stands for evil, danger, blindness and death. The sun as the source of universal light was made the subject of many emblematic images. In the court of Versailles, the most complex programme of solar symbolism was devised to glorify Louis XIV.

Closely related to the symbolic use of light to express inner enlightenment is the Baroque painter's ability to suggest consciousness and the life of the mind through a kind of personal radiance. This 'light of the soul' is seen in its richest and most poetic form in the portraits of Rembrandt.

Another influence on Baroque art is classical antiquity. Knowledge of the ancient world was now very extensive and almost all artists of the seventeenth century were affected in one way or another by the images and ideas of the Antique. The pioneers of Baroque classicism were the Bolognese painters led by Annibale Carracci who established themselves in Rome early in the seventeenth century. It was they who formulated the 'classical ideal' that

was to be perfected by Nicolas Poussin, Algardi and Duquesnay and which was to take root in France through the work of sculptors like Girardon.

The practice of imitating ancient models was not, however, confined to 'classic' artists only. Rubens and Bernini both used ancient models, transforming them into new and more sensuous figures. However, classical influence is much less obvious in the work of the naturalistic Caravaggio and his followers. Similarly this influence was not felt in Spain and the northern Netherlands.

It is necessary to discuss the early Baroque and the so-called Mannerism of the late sixteenth century in order to appreciate the art of Baroque painting. The towering genius of Michelangelo would have to be considered together with such masters as Carracci and Caravaggio.

All great nations of Europe, except England and Germany, produced magnificent painters in the period of the Baroque. At the beginning of 1600, we find the Italians in the lead with Guido Reni (1575-1642) who is famous for his Aurora, and another artist Pietro da Cortona (1596-1669) whose frescoes in the Palazzo Barberini were among some of the best creations of the Baroque.¹¹

Whatever the multiple and complex traditions of classicism, realism, and romanticism, of portraiture and landscape, of pagan illustration and of Christian illumination, they were all absorbed and exploited by the universal zest and genius of Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). In 1600 Rubens went to Italy where he learnt the new technique of colour and 'chiaroscuro'. After a term as court painter at Mantua, he returned home in 1608. Apart from occasional employment in diplomatic missions to Holland (1629), Spain (1628), and England (1629), which he used to become acquainted with other artists, notably Hals and Velasquez, his life was based in Antwerp.¹²

His style was never consciously eclectic, but so varied were his interests and activities, that he found it easy to absorb the dramatic sincerity of Caravaggio, or the classically ordered composition of Carracci or the blending of Venetian colour with Flemish realism. What he absorbed he transformed. In addition to

buoyant energy and a sense of joy, he possessed astonishing powers of invention and organisation in the grand manner : "I confess", he wrote, "that my natural inclination is to execute large works rather than little curiosities". He produced thirty-nine ceiling paintings and three altar pieces for the Jesuit church of St. Ignatius Loyola in Antwerp. He was intimately acquainted with the architect and the sculptor who made the external figures. This Baroque quality is to be found for example in his Betrothal of St Catherine in the sculptural, indeed architectural, treatment of space, in the light flooding in behind the Virgin, and the throng of attendant saints and martyrs whose confused spiral pattern answer the stately counterpoint of the ascending staircase. Such a work also illustrates his capacity to introduce endless subsidiary elements without compromising his main theme. ¹³

Rubens was gifted beyond all else with powers of observation and the ability to render what he saw in painting. At first he paid little attention to landscapes. Nevertheless he was getting increasingly interested in this genre. The result is evident in Landscape near Moulins in which he achieved a vivid image of a rather unspectacular landscape. This gift of observation is also displayed in his nudes. Rubens is considered to be last of the great masters to base his art on the human figure. His warm colour was inspired by Titian, his expression of force by Michelangelo, and his clouds, flying drapery and cool colours derived from the Veronese. Between 1600-1608 Rubens was profoundly influenced by Titian and his group. However in his later years Rubens began to move away from the fixed isolated figure of the Renaissance painting. His figures were depicted in more animated relations with each other, and an increasingly unified movement was seen in his great canvases. Simultaneously, the colours achieved richness, variety and interrelationship. Elements of pathos and sensuality combined to inform his canvases with a vitality that shows cosmic unity in all its aspects. Some of his greatest works include the Festival of Venus (1630), The Garden of Love (1635), Venus Facing a Mirror (1618) and The Fall of the Damned (1620).

The prime disciple of Rubens and one who followed and repeated his success in England was Anthony Van Dyck (1599-1644). He was a member of

Rubens's workshop from 1616 to 1620, then went, via England to Italy, and returned to Antwerp in 1627. Van Dyck is said to be the founder of the English school of portraiture, and hence was most renowned for his portraits. In his later period he imposed a strong influence on the Baroque forms. He was more reserved and more subtle than Rubens and exhibited a delicate taste in handling of colour. Among his best works are The Betrayal of Christ (1620), Madonna with St Rosalia (1629), Lamentation (1630), Maria Louise de Tassis (1628) and The Children of Charles I (1637).

Born half a century later than El Greco, it was Diego Rodriguez y Silva (1599-1660), who was to dominate Spanish art in the seventeenth century. Velasquez was one of the greatest painters Europe produced. In some ways the Baroque had no greater striking representative than Velasquez. Much of his work consisted of portraiture of persons who were unattractive or even deformed, such as members of the denegrate royal family and the dwarfs and imbeciles kept for the amusement of the court. His life's work centered around the portraits of, court persons and of Philip IV. These are unrivalled embodiments of the divine right of kings and to be honoured as representatives of God on earth. The Maids of Honour represents the young princess and the two ladies-in-waiting, who are so brilliantly painted that they have given the painting its name. The head of Pope Innocent X. with his piercing eyes and tight lips suggests the crafty and ruthless character of the man. In a mythological subject, The Forge of Vulcan we find that the figures are vividly depicted. The Surrender at Breda records the victory of the Spaniards over the Dutch, and includes portraits of persons who actually participated in the ceremony. Velásquez revealed exceptional insight into personality and relationships of individuals and their reactions to situations. His intelligence and understanding of people not only appeared in his fine portraits but also were demonstrated in other complex compositions such as The Tapestry Weavers.

In his combination of naturalism and mysticism B.E.Murillo is characteristically Spanish. Many of his famous canvases belong to the Baroque period like The Flight to Egypt (1648). He used chiaroscuro with exceptional skill, fitting soft pastel colours like cirrus clouds into the sunset of a summer evening.¹⁴

In contrast to the emotionalism of Spanish art, French painting in the seventeenth century was under the rational influence of French philosophers. The two greatest French painters Nicholas Poussin and Claude Lorrain spent a great deal of time in Italy. While in Italy, Poussin tried to absorb something of the Baroque manner, but found that he could not reconcile it with the need for the formal coherence, a need only satisfied by the discipline of the classical tradition. Like the Caracci he tried to purge the visual world of its imperfections and oddities. In 1640 Poussin visited Paris; he found the French court uncongenial and his rivals incompetent, but he secured a number of patrons for whom he worked after his return to Italy. In many ways Poussin was the counterpart of Corneille. His remarkable landscapes, with classical themes, could be easily realized as stage settings for Corneille's stately dramas. The constructed stagy effect was as Baroque as was Corneille's characterization, and the handling of colours and scenery likewise resembled the ornamented diction of the dramatist. Poussin painted wide, open, heroic landscapes which depicted discipline and order. Yet there always seemed to be an undercurrent of passion, of inscrutable subdued tension—a strange apprehension animates these scenes for the spectator, if he takes the time to reflect on them as idealised reality. Among his greatest creations are Bacchanal with the Lute Player (1630), The Parnassus (1630), The Rape of the Sabine Women (1637-39) and The Triumph of Pan (1640). The Winter of the Four Seasons cycle, Landscape with Diognes and Apollo and Daphne were Baroque in conception and execution.¹⁵

Poussin had been attracted by the portrayal of landscape, but with Claude Lorrain it became an obsession. If Nicolaus Poussin can be called an epic painter who depicts the heroic in all its aspects, Claude Lorrain can be called the lyric painter par excellence. He was a painter of light, space, water and air. A great spaciousness extends the horizon; the rays of the setting sun skim the waves and cast long shadows on the shore in the foreground. The architecture is arranged like stage props on the sides, leaving the empty center for the yellow sun. Limitless peace and the cosmic sense emanate from his canvases. The Baroque sense of unity is superbly expressed. Among the best works are Harbour and Mist (1646) and Landscape with Flight to Egypt (1647).

The remarkable creations of the brothers Le Nain, which were concerned with life on farms and in inns exhibited the Baroque spirit of naturalism at work in opposition to the stately, pompous paintings of Phillippe de Champaigne (1602-74). The portraits of Richelieu and Louis XIII were notable examples of the courtly aspect of Baroque art.

All the glory, the theatrical gravity, found perfect expression in the portraits of these two great public figures, who had accomplished so much in the political field. Their achievements which led to the emergence of the modern, national state, made them fit for the symbols of the Baroque sense of power and unity. ¹⁶

In contrast to the worldly, self-assured style of Champaigne, the more bourgeois characteristics of the art of Protestant Holland are remarkably distinct. An entirely new set of values prevailed in Holland, with the most notable variation being in the choice of theme. Scenes drawn from the Old and New Testament replaced those based on classical antiquity and the aristocracy. There was a distinct preference for landscape paintings, genre subjects, and portraits of the burghers themselves.¹⁷ Among the most important painters was Franz Hals (1580-1666). Hals was perhaps the most extreme representative of that lust for life and nature, of the abandon and physical impulse which the Baroque Age offered. His Banquet of Officers (five in all) were his best productions. His method of painting was revolutionary in its impressionistic liveliness. His colours are vibrant but fused and the individual figure in his group pictures lives a distinct life of its own; yet he always achieves a unity through interrelated movement. ¹⁸

Jan Vermeer (1632-1675) of Delft was also a painter of great ability. Vermeer produced the full visual effect of daylight. Often his costumes introduced a colour harmony of blue, yellow, and gray, as in the Young Woman with a String of Pearls: and The Woman Weighing Gold. Vermeer's interiors make one aware of each foot of depth; in clarity and truthfulness, they have never been surpassed. In the Girl with the Red Hat there is a suggestion of still-life; the immobile features, the smooth surface, and the carefully spotted high lights give this portrait the permanence of inanimate objects.¹⁹

There were also the great painters of landscape like Jacob Ruysdael (1628-1682) and Meyndaert Hobbema (1638-1709).

Foremost among the Baroque painters of Holland was Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669). In the work of Rembrandt, Baroque painting rose to universal significance and appeal.²⁰ To his knowledge of the art of the past was added his sense of connoisseurship, implying the highest degree of selectivity as distinguished from mere eclecticism. The development of Rembrandt's personal style from early opulence to later introspection was in harmony with his nationality and in keeping with the times and association with thoughtful men. Holland was wealthy, liberal and democratic, and the artist knew clergymen, scholars, poets and art dealers. Rembrandt managed to transmute natural forms into perfect expressions, whether of landscape or historical theme, by a fusion of the universal (idealized) and the particular (convincing detail). His sense of the dramatic, conveying intensity and suspense, appeared in secular as well as religious themes. Rembrandt was clearly and strongly linked to the Baroque in such masterpieces as The Night Watch, which has been called the greatest Baroque painting. In this painting Rembrandt developed a complex interplay of advancing and receding figures and motifs, that aid in the suggestion of depth of space. Some illumination is natural, but there are also brilliant areas that glow with no apparent source of light. Elements of realism combine with imaginative ones, as seen in the costumes that Rembrandt introduced for purely artistic reasons.

Starting with the cult of "realism" Rembrandt eventually achieved a new spirituality by investing all that is human with an element of inner life. His handling of light and dark, and his Baroque efforts at unity and universality through the complete dissolving of specific outline were unique. Colour and light, surface and space were made to render visible the inner life of man. In Rembrandt's work, nature became animated and spiritualized.

Among his greatest paintings besides The Night Watch, The Anatomy of Dr Tulip is worth mentioning. It is a group picture which seems to have a life of its own in the situation it portrays: an intense interest in the problem of science.

Hence light is concentrated on the arm of the corpse. The best chiaroscuro effect is achieved in his work Samson's Wedding. The bride is flooded with light and is surrounded by a flowing, waving commotion of human activity. "Rembrandt's bold innovation in transforming a group portrait into a dramatically animated crowd stemmed from truly Baroque impulse. He created a tremendous burst of movement of utmost complexity, brushing aside all remnants of the more static order which the Renaissance tradition had continued to impose upon his forerunners. The Baroque favoured both complexity and unification of movement, and Rembrandt succeeded in expressing both, subtly subordinating the diversity of action to concentric trend within the whole" ²¹

In his final phase of painting, the surrounding space and the decorative detail tended to disappear. The famous Portrait of the Old Woman (1654) wholly concentrates on the face of the old woman, lost in meditation. We find a peculiar treatment of light in this and the following painting The Man with the Golden Helmet. Light does not have a clear source. It is rather like a misty fluid issuing from an atmosphere of darkness. By far his best work is The Return of the Prodigal Son (1668-69). The scene is pictured at the moment when father and son are reunited. The benign father stoops with deep compassion over the emaciated body of his son; a servant, sensing excitement, opens the shutter, and the kitchen boy in his tall hat leans forward, afraid of missing a word of what is taking place. The inner light of Protestant faith animates not only the painter, but also the face of the father, and the reverent attitude of the onlookers in darkness. This is the very essence of the spirit of the Baroque. Rembrandt's insight into his subjects was remarkable and modern. He depicted his human beings in intimate poses, and his miracles were shown not as supernatural happenings but as kindly, humane acts. Rembrandt, alone of all the great portrait painters, was able to create on canvas a whole personality with all his individualities.

The two centuries between the end of the Renaissance and the French Revolution marked a culmination in architecture, sculpture and painting. The classical heritage, developed by the Renaissance, achieved its most vital expression. In sculpture, the possibilities of the medium were extended to the

utmost; in architecture, the classical orders were enriched through the use of curves and a striving for effect of light and shade. Painting further developed in its style and in subject matter added new categories. In the largest project painting, like architecture and sculpture, many assistants were engaged under the direction of a master. Paris superseded Rome as the art capital of Europe, and under royal patronage France made the arts a function of state. The major arts, still united, aimed at glorifying the client as much as to erect a memorial to the artist. Bernini and Rubens reflected the past but brought it to new heights. Velasquez and Vermeer were their equals, but included in their styles elements that pointed to the future. It was Holland that produced Rembrandt-one of the most individual artists of any period. ²²

CHAPTER VI

NOTES

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