

Theory and History of Literature
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Scenes from the Drama
of European Literature

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Foreword by Paolo Valesio

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"FIGURA"

I. From Terence to Quintilian

Originally *figura*, from the same stem as *ingere*, *figulus*, *fictor*, and *effigies*, meant "plastic form." Its earliest occurrence is in Terence, who in *Eunuchus* (317) says that a young girl has a *nova figura oris* ("unaccustomed form of face"). The following fragment of Pacuvius (270-1, in Ribbeck, *Scaen. Roman. Poesis Fragm.*, I, 110) probably dates from about the same period:

*Barbaricam pestem subinis nostris optulit
Nova figura factam . . .*¹

(To our spears she presented an outlandish plague
Fashioned in unaccustomed shape.)

The word was probably unknown to Plautus; he twice uses *fictura* (*Trinummus*, 365; *Miles Gloriosus*, 1189); but both times in a sense closer to the activity of forming than to its result; in later authors *fictura* becomes very rare.² The mention of *fictura* calls our attention to a peculiarity of *figura*: it is derived directly from the stem and not, like *natura* and other words of like ending, from the supine (Ernout-Meillet, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine*, 346). An attempt has been made (Stolz-Schmalz, *Lat.*

Gramm., 5th edition, 219) to explain this as an assimilation to *effigies*: in any case this peculiar formation expresses something living and dynamic, incomplete and playful, and it is equally certain that the word had a graceful sound which fascinated many poets. Perhaps it is no more than an accident that in our two oldest examples *figura* occurs in combination with *nova*; but even if accidental, it is significant, for the notion of the new manifestation, the changing aspect, of the permanent runs through the whole history of the word.

This history begins for us with the Hellenization of Roman education in the last century B.C. Three authors played a decisive part in its beginnings: Varro, Lucretius, and Cicero. Of course we can no longer tell exactly what they may have taken over from earlier material that has been lost; but the contributions of Lucretius and Cicero are so distinctive and original that one cannot but credit them with a considerable part in the creation of its meaning.

Varro shows the least originality of the three. If in his writings *figura* sometimes means "outward appearance" or even "outline"³ and is thus beginning to move away from its earliest signification, the narrower concept of plastic form, this seems to have been the result of a general linguistic process, the causes of which we shall discuss further on. In Varro this development is not even very pronounced. He was an etymologist, well aware of the origin of the word (*fictor cum dicit fingo figuram imponit* ["The image-maker (*fictor*), when he says *fingo* (I shape), puts a *figura* on the thing"]: *De lingua latina*, 6, 78), and thus when he uses the word in connection with living creatures and objects, there is usually a connotation of plastic form. How strong this connotation still was in his time is sometimes hard to decide: for example,

when he says that in buying slaves one should consider not only the *figura* but also the qualities—in horses the age, in cocks the breeding value, in apples the aroma (*ibid.*, 9, 35); or when he says that a star has changed its *colorem, magnitudinem, figuram, cursum* (quoted in Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 21, 8); or when, in *De lingua latina* (5, 117) he compares forked palisade poles with the *figura* of the Latin letter V. The word becomes quite unplastic when he begins to talk of word forms. We have, as he says in *De lingua latina* (9, 21), taken over new forms of vessels from the Greeks; why do people struggle against new word forms, *formae vocabulorum*, as though they were poisonous? *Et tantum inter duos sensus interesse volunt, ut oculis semper aliquas figuras suppellectilis novas conquirant, contra auris expertes velint esse?* ("And do they think there is so much difference between the two senses, that they are always looking for new shapes of furniture for their eyes, but yet wish their ears to avoid such things?"). Here we are not far from the idea that figures exist also for the sense of hearing; and it should also be borne in mind that Varro, like all Latin authors who were not specialists in philosophy endowed with an exact terminology, used *figura* and *forma* interchangeably, in the general sense of form. Strictly speaking, *forma* meant "mold," French "*moule*," and was related to *figura* as the hollow form to the plastic shape that issues from it; but in Varro we seldom find a trace of this distinction, though perhaps we have an exception in the fragment cited in Gellius (III, 10, 7): *semen genitale fit ad capiendam figuram idoneum* ("the life-bearing seed is rendered fit to take on a shape").

As we have intimated, the actual innovation or break with the original meaning, which we first find in Varro, occurs in the field of grammar. It is in

Varro that we first find *figura* used in the sense of grammatical, inflected, or derived form. In Varro *figura multitudinis* means the form of the plural. *Alia nomina quinque habent figuras* (9, 52) means: Some nouns have five case forms. This usage became widespread (cf. *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, VI, s.v. *figura*, part 1, III A, 2a, col. 730 and 2e, col. 734); *forma* was also much used in the same sense, beginning in Varro's time, but *figura* seems to have been more popular and frequent with the Latin grammarians. How is it possible that both words, but particularly *figura*, the form of which was a clear reminder of its origin, should so quickly have taken on a purely abstract meaning? It happened through the Hellenization of Roman education. Greek, with its incomparably richer scientific and rhetorical vocabulary, had a great many words for the concept of form: *morphē*, *eidos*, *schēma*, *typos*, *plasis*, to mention only the most important. In the philosophical and rhetorical elaboration of the language of Plato and Aristotle, a special sphere was assigned to each of these words; a clear dividing line was drawn particularly between *morphē* and *eidos* on the one hand and *schēma* on the other: *morphē* and *eidos* were the form or idea which "informs" matter; *schēma* is the purely perceptual shape; the classical example of this is Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, VII, 3, 1029a, in which he discusses *ousia* (essence); here *morphē* is defined as *schēma tēs ideas*, the ideal form; thus Aristotle employs *schēma* in a purely perceptual sense to designate one of the qualitative categories, and he also uses it in the combinations with *megethos*, *kinēsis*, and *chrōma* that we have already encountered in Varro. It was only natural that *forma* should come to be used in Latin for *morphē* and *eidos*, since it originally conveyed the notion of model; sometimes we also find

exemplar; for *schēma* on the other hand *figura* was usually employed. But since in the learned Greek terminology—in grammar, rhetoric, logic, mathematics, astronomy—*schēma* was widely used in the sense of "outward shape," *figura* was always used for this purpose in Latin. Thus side by side with the original plastic signification and overshadowing it, there appeared a far more general concept of grammatical, rhetorical, logical, mathematical—and later even of musical and choreographic—form. To be sure, the original plastic sense was not entirely lost, for *typos*, "imprint," and *plasis*, *plasma*, "plastic form," were often rendered by *figura* as the radical *fig-* suggested. From the meaning of *typos* developed the use of *figura* as "imprint of the seal," a metaphor with a venerable history running from Aristotle (*De memoria et reminiscentia*, 450a, 31: *hē kinēsis ensēmainetai hoion typon tina tou aisthēmatos* ["the movement implies some impression of the thing sensed"]), through Augustine (*Epist.*, 162, 4 [*Patrologia Latina*, XXXIII, col. 706], and Isidore (*Differentiae*, 1, 528 [*Patrologia Latina*, LXXXIII, col. 63]), to Dante (*come figura in cera si suggella* ["as a seal is stamped in wax"], *Purg.*, 10, 45, or *Par.*, 27, 52).⁴ However, it was not only the plastic sense of *typos*, but also its inclination toward the universal, lawful, and exemplary (cf. the combination with *nomikōs*, Aristotle, *Politics*, II, 7, 1341b, 31) that exerted an influence on *figura*, and this in turn helped to efface the already faint dividing line with *forma*. The connection with words such as *plasis* increased the tendency of *figura*—which was probably present from the very beginning but developed only slowly—to expand in the direction of "statue," "image," "portrait," to impinge on the domain of *statua* and even of *imago*, *effigies*, *species*, *simulacrum*. Thus, though we may say in general that in Latin

usage *figura* takes the place of *schēma*, this does not exhaust the force of the word, the *potestas verbi*: *figura* is broader, sometimes more plastic, in any case more dynamic and radiant than *schēma*. To be sure, *schēma* itself in Greek is more dynamic than the word as we use it; in Aristotle, for example, mimic gestures, especially of actors, are called *schēmata*; the meaning of dynamic form is by no means foreign to *schēma*; but *figura* developed this element of movement and transformation much further.⁵

Lucretius uses *figura* in the Greek philosophical sense, but in an extremely individual, free, and significant way. He starts with the general concept of "figure," which occurs in every possible shading from the plastic figure shaped by man (*manibus tractata figura*, 4, 230) to the purely geometric outline (2, 778; 4, 503); he transposes the term from the plastic and visual to the auditory sphere, when (in 4, 556) he speaks of the *figura verborum* ("the figure of words").⁶ The important transition from the form to its imitation, from model to copy, may best be noted in the passage dealing with the resemblance of children to their parents, the mixture of seeds, and heredity; with children who are *utriusque figurae* ("of both *figurae*"), resembling both father and mother, and who often reflect *proavorum figuras* ("the *figurae* of their ancestors"), and so on: *inde Venus varias producit sorte figuras* ("thence Venus brought forth diverse *figurae* in turn") (4, 1223). Here we see that only *figura* could serve for this play on model and copy; *forma* and *imago* are too solidly anchored in one or the other of the two meanings; *figura* is more concrete and dynamic than *forma*. Here, of course, as in connection with later poets, we should not forget what a fine last foot for a hexameter is provided by *figura* in all its inflectional forms.⁷ A special variant of the

meaning "copy" occurs in Lucretius' doctrine of the structures that peel off things like membranes and float round in the air, his Democritean doctrine of the "film images" (Diels), or *eidola*, which he takes in a materialistic sense. These he calls *simulacra*, *imagines*, *effigies*, and sometimes *figurae*; and consequently it is in Lucretius that we first find the word employed in the sense of "dream image," "figment of fancy," "ghost."

These variants had great vitality, and were to enjoy a significant career; "model," "copy," "figment," "dream image"—all these meanings clung to *figura*. But it was in still another sphere that Lucretius developed his most ingenious use of the word. As we know, he professed the cosmogony of Democritus and Epicurus, according to which the world is built up of atoms. He calls the atoms *primordia*, *principia*, *corpuscula*, *elementa*, *semina*, and in a very general sense, he also called them *corpora*, *quorum concursus motus ordo positura figura*⁸ (1, 685, and 2, 1021) ("bodies whose combination, motion, order, position, *figura*") brings forth the things of the world. But though small, the atoms are material and formed: they have infinitely diverse shapes; and so it comes about that he often calls them "forms," *figurae*, and that conversely one may often translate *figurae*, as Diels has done, by "atoms."⁹ The numerous atoms are in constant motion; they move about in the void, combine and repel one another: a dance of figures. This use of the word does not seem to have gone beyond Lucretius; the *Thesaurus* cites only one other example of it in Claudian (*Rufinum* 1, 17), at the end of the fourth century. In this small sphere, Lucretius' most original creation was without influence; but there is no doubt that of all the authors I have studied in connection with *figura*, it was Lucretius who made the most bril-

liant, though not the most historically important contribution.

In Cicero's frequent and extremely flexible use of the word, every variation of the concept of form that could possibly have been suggested by his political, publicistic, juridical, and philosophical activity, seems to be represented; and his use of the word reveals his lovable, volatile, and vacillating nature. Often he applies it to man, sometimes in tones of pathos. In *Pro S. Roscio* (63), he writes: *portentum atque monstrum certissimum est, esse aliquem humana specie et figura, qui tantum immanitate bestias vicerit, ut . . .* ("it is unquestionably an unnatural and monstrous thing, that a being in human form and *figura* should exist so far surpassing the wild beasts in savagery that . . ."). And in *Pro Q. Roscio* (20) *tacita corporis figura* ("the silent *figura* of a body") is the silent mien whose mere appearance betrays the scoundrel. The limbs and inner organs, animals, utensils, stars, in short all perceptible things have *figura*, and so do the gods and the universe as a whole. The sense of "appearance" and even "semblance" contained in the Greek *schēma* emerges clearly when he says that the tyrant has only *figura hominis* ("the semblance of a man") and that immaterial conceptions of God are without *figura* and *sensus* ("appearance and perception"). Clear distinctions between *figura* and *forma* are rare (e.g., *De natura deorum* I, 90; cf. note 7 above), and neither is confined to the realm of the visual; Cicero speaks of *figura vocis* ("of the voice"), *figura negotii* ("types of occupation"), and quite frequently of *figurae dicendi* ("figures of speech"). Of course geometric and stereometric forms also possess a *figura*. However, *figura* in the sense of copy or image is scarcely developed in Cicero. In *De natura deorum* (I, 71), to be sure, it is said that Cotta, one of the participants in the dia-

logue, might more readily understand the words *quasi corpus* ("a semblance of body") of the gods, *si in cereis fingeretur aut fictilibus figuris* ("if it were waxen images or clay figures"), and in *De divinatione* (1, 23) he speaks of the *figura* of a rock which is not unlike a little Pan. But this does not suffice, for the *figura* of which he is speaking is that of the clay or stone, not of what is represented.¹⁰ Cicero uses the word *imagines* for the *schēmata* of Democritus and Lucretius, which emanate from the body (*a corporibus enim solidis et a certis figuris vult fluere imagines Democritus* ["Democritus would have it that phantoms emanate from solid bodies and from actual *figurae*"]) *De divinatione*, 2, 137,¹¹ and in Cicero the images of the gods are usually called *signa*, never *figurae*. As an example we may cite the malicious joke against Verres (2, 2, 89): Verres planned to steal a precious statue of a god in a Sicilian city, but fell in love with his landlord's wife: *contemnere etiam signum illud Himerae jam videbatur quod eum multo magis figura et lineamenta hospitae delectabant* ("he seemed now even to despise that statue of Himera, so much more did the *figura* and features of his hostess delight him").¹² There is no sign of any such bold innovations as in Lucretius. Cicero's contribution consisted mainly in introducing the word in the sense of perceptible form to the educated language. He used it chiefly in his philosophical and rhetorical works, most frequently in his essay on the nature of the gods. In these works he tried to devise what today we should call an all-embracing concept of form. It is not only because of his well-known preoccupation with well-rounded oratorical periods that he seldom contents himself with *figura* alone, but usually piles up several related words with a view to expressing a whole: *forma et figura, conformatio quaedam et figura totius oris et corporis, habitus et figura,*

humana species et figura, vis et figura ("form and *figura*," "a certain arrangement and *figura* of the whole face and body," "appearance and *figura*," "the human appearance and *figura*," "force and *figura*"), and many more of the same kind. His striving for a comprehensive view of the phenomenal world is unmistakable, and he may have communicated some of it to the Roman reader. But he lacked the right kind of talent and his eclectic attitude made it impossible for him to work out and formulate a compelling idea of form; his concept remained hazy. We must content ourselves with the richness and balance of his words. What is more important for the subsequent development of *figura* is something else: it is in Cicero and the author of the *Ad Herennium* that it occurs for the first time as a technical term in rhetoric, rendering the *schēmata* or *charaktēres lexeōs*, the three levels of style, which in *Ad Herennium* (4, 8, 11) are designated as *figura gravis, mediocris, and extenuata* ("the grand, the middle, the simple *figura*"), and in *De oratore* (3, 199, and 212) as *plena, mediocris, and tenuis* ("full, middle, plain"). However, Cicero (as Emil Vetter, author of the article "*Figura*" in *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* expressly notes [VI, part 1, col. 731, ll. 80 f.]) does not yet use the word as a technical term for the ornamental circumlocutions that we call "figures of speech." Though he knows them and describes them at length, he does not like later writers call them *figurae*, but—again pleonastically—*formae et lumina orationis* ("forms and ornaments of speech"). He does employ the turn *figura dicendi*, or more frequently *forma et figura dicendi*, not in a strict technical sense but simply to denote a mode of eloquence, either in a general sense when he wishes to say that there are innumerable kinds of eloquence (*De oratore*, 3, 34) or

individually when he says that Curio *suam quandam expressit quasi formam figuramque dicendi* ("has expressed as it were his own special pattern and figure of oratory," *ibid.*, 2, 98). The students at the schools of rhetoric, where Cicero's treatises on eloquence soon became a canon, became accustomed to this combination.

Thus by the end of the republican era, *figura* was firmly ingrained in the language of philosophy and cultivated discourse, and during the first century of the Empire its possibilities continued to develop. As one may well imagine, it is the poets who were most interested in the shades of meaning between model and copy, in changing form and the deceptive likenesses that walk in dreams. Catullus (*Attis*, 62) has the characteristic passage: *Quod enim genus figurae est ego quod non obierim?* ("for what kind of *figura* is there that I had not?") Propertius¹⁸ writes: (3, 24, 5) *mixtam te varia laudavi saepe figura* ("I often praised the blending of thy varied *figura*") or (4, 2, 21) *opportuna meast cunctis natura figuris* ("my nature finds every *figura* suitable"). And speaking, in the magnificent conclusion of his *Panegyricus ad Messalam*, of death's power to change the forms of man, he employs the words *mutata figura* ("changed *figura*"); and Virgil (*Aeneid*, 10, 641) in describing the phantom of Aeneas that appears to Turnus, writes *morte obita qualis fama est volitare figuras* ("*figurae* such as, they say, flit about after death"). But the richest source for *figura* in the sense of changing form is of course Ovid. To be sure, he uses *forma* freely in the same sense when the metre calls for a dissyllabic word; but most often he employs *figura*. He has an impressive store of combinations at his command: *figuram mutare, variare, vertere, retinere, inducere sumere,*

deponere, perdere. The following little collection may give an idea of the countless ways in which he employs the word:

- . . . *tellus . . . partimque figuras / rettulit antiquas* (*Metamorphoses*, 1, 436);
 . . . *se mentitis superos celasse figuris* (*ibid.*, 5, 326);
sunt quibus in plures ius est transire figuras (*ibid.*, 8, 730);
 . . . *artificem simulatoremque figurae / Morpheae* (*ibid.*, 11, 634);
ex aliis alias reparat natura figuras (*ibid.*, 15, 253);
animam . . . in varias doceo migrare figuras (*ibid.*, 15, 172);
lymphe figuras / datque capitque novas (*ibid.*, 15, 308).

(the earth . . . in part restored the ancient shapes; the gods hid themselves in lying shapes; there are some who have power to take on many shapes; Morpheus, the skillful artificer and imitator of [man's] shape; nature builds up forms from other forms; I teach that the soul . . . passes through various forms; water gives and receives new forms).

There is also a fine example of the imprint of the seal:

Utque novis facilis signatur cera figuris
Nec manet ut fuerat nec formas servat easdem,
Sed tamen ipsa eadem est . . . (*ibid.*, 15, 169 ff.).

(And as the soft wax is stamped with new *figurae*, and does not remain as it was nor retain the same forms, though it remains itself the same . . .)

In addition, *figura* already appears quite plainly in Ovid as "copy," as for example, in *Fasti* (9, 278): *globus immensi parva figura poli* ("a globe, a small figure of the vast vault of heaven"), or in *Heroides* (14, 97) and *Ex Ponto* (2, 8, 64); in the sense of "letter"

which had already been given it by Varro, *ducere consuescat multas manus una figuras* (*Ars amoris*, 3, 493) ("let one hand be accustomed to tracing many figures"); finally, as "position" in love play: *Venerem iungunt per mille figuras* ("They embrace in a thousand *figurae*") (*Ars*, 2, 679). Throughout Ovid *figura* is mobile, changeable, multiform, and deceptive. The word is also used skillfully by Manilius, author of the *Astronomica*, who apart from the meanings already mentioned, employs it (as well as *signum* and *forma*) in the sense of "constellation." It occurs in the sense of dream figment in Lucan and Statius.

In Vitruvius the architect we find something very different both from these meanings and from those that we shall find in the rhetoricians. In his writings *figura* is architectural and plastic form, or in any case the reproduction of such form, the architect's plan; here there is no trace of deception or transformation; in his language *figurata similitudine*, (7, 5, 1) does not mean "by dissimulation," but "by creating a likeness." Often *figura* means "ground plan" (*modice picta operis futuri figura*, slightly tinted, a plan of the future work 1, 2, 2), and *universae figurae species* or *summa figuratio*, signifies the general form of a building or a man (he often compares the two from the standpoint of symmetry). Despite his occasional mathematical use of the word, *figura* (as well as *ingere*) has a definitely plastic significance for him and for other technical writers of the period; thus in Festus (98), *crustulum cymbi figura*¹⁴ ("a little cake shaped like a boat") in Celsus, *venter reddit mollia, figurata* (2, 5, 5) ("the belly gives forth soft, formed notions"), in Columella, *ficos comprimunt in figuram stellarum floscularumque* (12, 15, 5) ("they press figs into the shape of stars and little flowers"). Even in this detail Pliny the Elder, who belonged to a different social and

cultural class, is a far richer source; in his work every shading of the concepts of form and species is represented. The transition from form to portrait is clearly discernible in the memorable beginning of his thirty-fifth book, in which he deplors the decline of portrait painting: *Imaginum quidem pictura, qua maxime similes in aevum propagantur figurae . . .* ("The painting of portraits, whereby extremely lifelike *figurae* were transmitted down through the ages"); and somewhat later, when he speaks of the books illustrated with portraits, a technique invented by Varro: *imaginum amorem flagrasse quondam testes sunt . . . et Marcus Varro . . . insertis . . . septingentorum illustrium . . . imaginibus: non passus intercidere figuras, aut vetustatem aevi contra homines valere, inventor muneris etiam diis invidiosi, quando immortalitatem non solum dedit, verum etiam in omnes terras misit, ut praesentes esse ubique credi possent.* ("That there was a keen passion for portraits in olden days . . . is shown by . . . Marcus Varro . . . who inserted in his works portraits of 700 famous people: not allowing their likenesses to disappear or the passing of time to prevail against men, and thus being the inventor of a benefit which even the gods might envy, for he not only bestowed immortality but also sent it all over the world, that those concerned might be felt to be present everywhere.")

The juridical literature of the first century has a few passages in which *figura* means "empty outward form" or "semblance." In *Digest*, 28, 5, 70, we find: *non solum figuras sed vim quoque condicionis continere* (Proculus) and in *Digest*, 50, 16, 116: *Mihi Labeo videtur verborum figuram sequi, Proculus mentem* (Javolenus). ("It seems to me that Labes followed the *figura* of the words, but Proculus their intention.")

But from the standpoint of its future destinies the

most important thing that happened to *figura* in the first century was the refinement of the concept of the rhetorical figure. The result has come down to us in the ninth book of Quintilian. The idea is older, it is Greek; and as we have seen above, it had already been expressed in Latin by Cicero; but Cicero did not yet use the word *figura*, and moreover the technique of the figure of speech seems to have been very much refined after his time in the course of endless discussions on rhetorical questions. When the word was first used in this sense cannot be exactly determined; probably soon after Cicero, as may be presumed from the title of a book (*De figuris sententiarum*, by Annaeus Cornutus) mentioned in Gellius (9, 10, 5), and from the remarks and allusions of both Senecas¹⁵ and of Pliny the Younger. The development was only natural, since the Greek term was *schēma*. In general we must assume that the technical use of the word had developed earlier and more richly than can be demonstrated by the sources that have come down to us; that, for example, the figures of the syllogism (the *schēmata syllogismou* originated with Aristotle himself) must have been mentioned much earlier in Latin than in Boethius or the pseudo-Augustinian *Book of Categories*.

In the last section of the eighth book and in the ninth book of the *Institutio oratoria*, Quintilian gives a detailed account of the theory of tropes and figures. This disquisition, which seems to represent a comprehensive critique of former opinions and works, became the fundamental work on the subject, and all later efforts were based on it. Quintilian distinguishes tropes from figures; trope is the more restricted concept, referring to the use of words and phrases in a sense other than literal; figure, on the other hand, is a form of discourse which deviates from the normal

and most obvious usage. The aim of a figure is not, as in all tropes, to substitute words for other words; figures can be formed from words used in their proper meaning and order. Basically all discourse is a forming, a figure, but the word is employed only for formations that are particularly developed in a poetic or rhetorical sense. Thus he distinguishes between simple (*carens figuris, aschēmatistos* ["lacking in figures"]) and figurative (*figuratus, eschēmatismenos*) modes of speech. The distinction between trope and figure proves to be difficult. Quintilian himself often hesitates before classifying a turn of speech as one or the other; in later usage *figura* is generally regarded as the higher concept, including trope, so that any unliteral or indirect form of expression is said to be as figurative. As tropes Quintilian names and describes metaphor, synecdoche (*mucronem pro gladio; puppim pro navi* ("blade for sword; prow for ship")), metonymy (Mars for war; Virgil for Virgil's works), antonomasia (Pelides for Achilles), and many more; he divides figures into those involving content and those involving words (*figurae sententiarum* and *verborum*). As *figurae sententiarum* he lists: the rhetorical question which the orator himself answers; the various ways of anticipating objections (*prolepsis*); the affectation of drawing judges or audience into one's confidence; *protopoeia*, in which one puts words into the mouths of other persons, such as one's adversary, or of personifications, such as the fatherland; the solemn apostrophe; the embroidering of a narrative with concrete detail, *evidentia* or *illustratio*; the various forms of irony; *aposiopesis* or *obticentia* or *interruptio*, in which one "swallows" part of the phrase; affected repentance over something one has said; and so on; but the figure which was then regarded as the most important and seemed before all others to merit the name

of figure was the hidden allusion in its diverse forms. Roman orators had developed a refined technique of expressing or insinuating something without saying it, in most cases of course something which for political or tactical reasons, or simply for the sake of effect, had best remain secret or at least unspoken. Quintilian speaks of the importance attached to training in this technique in the schools of rhetoric, and tells us how speakers would invent special cases, *controversiae figuratae*, in order to perfect and distinguish themselves in it. As "word figures" he finally mentions intentional solecisms, rhetorical repetitions, antitheses, phonetic resemblances, omissions of a word, *asyndeton*, *climax*, etc.

His exposition of tropes and figures, of which we have given only the barest essentials, is accompanied by an abundance of examples and detailed studies of the different forms and the distinctions between them; it takes up a large part of his eighth and ninth books. The system that he set forth was a very elaborate one; yet it seems likely that for a rhetorician Quintilian was relatively free in his thinking and as disinclined to excessive hairsplitting as the spirit of the times permitted. The art of the hinting, insinuating, obscuring circumlocution, calculated to ornament a statement or to make it more forceful or mordant, had achieved a versatility and perfection that strike us as strange if not absurd. These turns of speech were called *figurae*. The Middle Ages and the Renaissance, as we know, still attached a good deal of importance to the science of figures of speech. For the theorists of style of the twelfth and thirteenth century the *Ad Herennium*¹⁶ was the main source of wisdom.

So much for the history of the word *figura* in pagan antiquity; a few grammatical, rhetorical, and logical extensions follow automatically from the meanings

already stated, and some have been mentioned by other writers.^{17, 18} But the meaning which the Church Fathers gave the word on the basis of the development described in the previous pages was of the greatest historical importance.

II. *Figura in the Phenomenal Prophecy of the Church Fathers*

The strangely new meaning of *figura* in the Christian world is first to be found in Tertullian, who uses it very frequently. In order to clarify its meaning we shall discuss a few passages. In his polemic *Adversus Marcionem* (3, 16) Tertullian speaks of Oshea, son of Nun, whom Moses (according to Num. 13:16) named Jehoshua (Joshua):

. . . *et incipit vocari Jesus. . . Hanc prius dicimus figuram futurorum fuisse. Nam quia Jesus Christus secundum populum, quod sumus nos, nati in saeculi desertis, introducturus erat in terram promissionis, melle et lacte manantem, id est vitae aeternae possessionem, qua nihil dulcius; idque non per Moysen, id est, non per legis disciplinam, sed per Jesum, id est per evangelii gratiam provenire habebat* (Vulgar Latin form for "was to happen"), *circumcisis nobis petrina acie, id est Christi praeceptis; Petra enim Christus; ideo is vir, qui in huius sacramenti imagines parabatur, etiam nominis dominici inauguratus est figura, Jesus cognominatus.*

For the first time he is called Jesus. . . This, then, we first observe, was a figure of things to come. For inasmuch as Jesus Christ was to introduce a new people, that is to say us, who are born in the wilderness of this world, into the promised land flowing with milk and honey, that is to say, into the possession of eternal life, than which nothing is sweeter; and that,

too, was not to come about through Moses, that is to say, through the discipline of the Law, but through Jesus, that is, through the grace of the gospel, our circumcision being performed by a knife of stone, that is to say, by Christ's precepts—for Christ is a rock; therefore that great man, who was prepared as a type of this sacrament, was even consecrated in figure with the Lord's name, and was called Jesus.)

Here the naming of Joshua-Jesus is treated as a prophetic event foreshadowing things to come.¹⁹ Just as Joshua and not Moses led the people of Israel into the promised land of Palestine, so the grace of Jesus, and not the Jewish law, leads the "second people" into the promised land of eternal beatitude. The man who appeared as the prophetic annunciation of this still hidden mystery, *qui in huius sacramenti imagines parabatur*, was introduced under the *figura* of the divine name. Thus the naming of Joshua-Jesus is a phenomenal prophecy or prefiguration of the future Saviour; *figura* is something real and historical which announces something else that is also real and historical. The relation between the two events is revealed by an accord or similarity. Thus, for example, Tertullian says in *Adversus Marcionem* (5, 7): *Quare Pascha Christus, si non Pascha figura Christi per similitudinem sanguinis salutaris et pecoris Christi?* ("How is Christ the Passover, except inasmuch as the Passover is a figure of Christ through the likeness of the saving blood and of the flock of Christ?") Often vague similarities in the structure of events or in their attendant circumstances suffice to make the *figura* recognizable; to find it, one had to be determined to interpret in a certain way. As for example, when (*ibid.*, 3, 17, or *Adv. Iudaeos*, 14) the two sacrificial goats of Lev. 16: 7 ff. are interpreted as figures of the first and second

coming of Christ; or when, as in *De anima*, 43 (cf. also *De Monogamia*, 5) Eve, as *figura Ecclesiae*, is developed from Adam as *figura Christi*: *Si enim Adam de Christo figuram dabat, somnus Adae mors erat Christi dormituri in mortem, ut de iniuria (wound) perinde lateris eius vera mater viventium figuraretur ecclesia.*²⁰ ("For if Adam provided a *figura* of Christ, the sleep of Adam was the death of Christ who was to sleep in death, that precisely by the wound in his side should be figured the Church, the mother of all living.")

We shall speak later on of how the desire to interpret in this way arose. At all events the aim of this sort of interpretation was to show that the persons and events of the Old Testament were prefigurations of the New Testament and its history of salvation. Here it should be noted that Tertullian expressly denied that the literal and historical validity of the Old Testament was diminished by the figural interpretation. He was definitely hostile to spiritualism and refused to consider the Old Testament as mere allegory; according to him, it had real, literal meaning throughout, and even where there was figural prophecy, the figure had just as much historical reality as what it prophesied. The prophetic figure, he believed, is a concrete historical fact, and it is fulfilled by concrete historical facts. For this Tertullian uses the term *figuram implere* (*Adversus Marcionem*, 4, 40: *figuram sanguinis sui salutaris implere* ["to fulfill the figure of his saving blood"]) or *confirmare* (*De fuga in persecutione*, XI: *Christo confirmante figuras suas* ["Christ confirming his figures"]). From now on we shall refer to the two events as figure and fulfillment.

Tertullian was a staunch realist, as we know in other connections. For him the *figura*, in the simple sense of "form," is a part of the substance, and in *Ad-*

versus Marcionem (5, 20) he equates it with the flesh. Just above (4, 40), he had spoken of bread in the Eucharist:

Corpus illum suum fecit "Hoc est corpus meum" dicendo, "id est, figura corporis mei." Figura autem non fuisset, nisi veritatis esset corpus. Ceterum vacua res, quod est phantasma, figuram capere non posset. Aut si propterea panem corpus sibi finxit, quia corporis carebat veritate, ergo panem debuit tradere pro nobis. Faciebat ad vanitatem Marcionis, ut panis crucifigeretur. Cur autem panem corpus suum appellat, et non magis peponem, quem Marcion cordis loco habuit? Non intelligens veterem fuisse istam figuram corporis Christi, dicentis per Ieremiam [11:19]: Adversus me cogitaverunt cogitatum dicentes, Venite, coniciamus lignum in panem eius, scilicet crucem in corpus eius.

(He made it his own body, saying, "This is my body, that is, the figure of my body." For there could not have been a figure unless there were a true body. An empty thing, that is, a phantom, could not take on a figure. If, therefore, he pretended the bread to be his body, because he lacked the reality of a body, then he must have given bread for us. It would suit Marcion's fantastic claim that the bread should be crucified. But why does he call his body bread and not rather a melon, such as Marcion must have had in place of a heart? He did not understand how ancient was that figure of the body of Christ, who said through Jer. (11:19): They have devised devices against me, saying, Come, let us put wood upon his bread, which means, of course, the cross upon his body.)

These powerful sentences—in the following the wine, *figura sanguinis* ("figure of the blood") is represented no less forcefully as *probatio carnis* ("a proof of the

flesh")²¹—show clearly how concretely both terms were intended in Tertullian's figural interpretation; in every case the only spiritual factor is the understanding, *intellectus spiritualis*, which recognizes the figure in the fulfillment. The Prophets, he says in *De resurrectione carnis* (19 ff.), did not speak only in images; for if they had, we should be unable to recognize the images; a great deal should be taken quite literally, as also in the New Testament: *nec omnia umbrae, sed et corpora; ut in ipsum quoque Dominum insigniora quaeque luce clarius praedicantur; nam et virgo concepit in utero, non figurate; et peperit Emanuelem nobiscum Jesum Christum, non oblique.* ("And not all are shadows, but there are bodies also; so that we have prophecies even about the Lord himself, which are clearer than the day. For it was not figuratively that the Virgin conceived in her womb; and not by a metaphor that she gave birth to Emmanuel, God with us, Christ Jesus.") And he resolutely attacks those who twist the clearly proclaimed resurrection of the dead into an "imaginary meaning" (*in imaginariam significationem distorquent*). There are many passages of this kind, in which he combats the spiritualizing tendencies of contemporary groups. His realism stands out still more clearly in the relation between figure and fulfillment, for sometimes the one and sometimes the other seems to possess a higher degree of historical concreteness. In *Adversus Marcionem* (4, 40), for example (*an ipse erat, qui . . . tamquam ovis coram tendente sic os non aperturus, figuram sanguinis sui salutaris implere concupiscebat?* ["was it not that he, who . . . as a sheep before her shearers, was not to open his mouth, desired so ardently to fulfill the figure of his saving blood?"]), the figure of the servant of God as a lamb seems to be a mere simile; in another passage the Law as a whole is juxtaposed to Christ as

its fulfillment (*ibid.*, 5, 19: *de umbra transfertur ad corpus, id est, de figuris ad veritatem* ["It is transferred from the shadow to the substance, that is, from figures to the reality"]). It might seem that in the first case the simile and in the second case the abstraction give the figure a lesser force of reality. But there is no lack of examples in which the figure has the greater concreteness. In *De baptismo* (5), where the pool of Bethesda appears as a figure of the baptism, we find the sentence: *figura ista medicinae corporalis spiritalium medicinam canebat, ea forma qua semper carnalia in figuram spiritalium antecedunt.* ("This figure of bodily healing told of a spiritual healing, according to the rule by which carnal things come first as a figure of spiritual things.") But the one and the other, the pool of Bethesda and the baptism, are concretely real, and all that is spiritual about them is the interpretation or effect; for the baptism too, as Tertullian himself hastens to add (*ibid.*, 7), is a carnal action: *sic et in nobis carnaliter currit unctio, sed spiritaliter proficit; quomodo et ipsius baptismi carnalis actus, quod in aqua mergimur, spiritalis effectus, quod delictis liberamur.* ("Thus with us also the unction runs down carnally, but its profit is spiritual; in the same way as the act of baptism is carnal, in that we are plunged in water, but its effects are spiritual, namely that we are freed from transgression.") These examples give us the feeling that even in the first two cases Tertullian had in mind not only a metaphorical but also a real lamb, and not only the law in the abstract but also the era of the law as a historical era.

And sometimes two statements are related to one another as figure and fulfillment, as in *De fuga in persecutione*, 11: *certe quidem bonus pastor animam pro pecoribus ponit; ut Moyses, non Domino adhuc Christo revelato, etiam in se figurato, ait: Si perdis*

hunc populum, inquit, et me pariter cum eo disperde [Exod. 32:32]. *Ceterum, Christo confirmante figuras suas, malus pastor est . . .* [John 10:12]. ("Assuredly a good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep, even as Moses said, when the Lord Christ had not yet been revealed, but was shadowed forth in himself: If you destroy this people, said he, destroy me also along with them [Exod. 32:32]. And Christ himself, confirming these figures, says: But the evil shepherd, etc. [John 10:12].") But both statements are historical events, and moreover it is not so much the statements as Moses and Christ themselves who are related as figure and fulfillment.²² The fulfillment is often designated as *veritas*, as in an example above, and the figure correspondingly as *umbra* or *imago*; but both shadow and truth are abstract only in reference to the meaning first concealed, then revealed; they are concrete in reference to the things or persons which appear as vehicles of the meaning. Moses is no less historical and real because he is an *umbra* or *figura* of Christ, and Christ, the fulfillment, is no abstract idea, but also a historical reality. Real historical figures are to be interpreted spiritually (*spiritualiter interpretari*), but the interpretation points to a carnal, hence historical fulfillment (*carnaliter adimpleri: De resurrectione, 20*)—for the truth has become history or flesh.

From the fourth century on, the usage of the word *figura* and the method of interpretation connected with it are fully developed in nearly all the Latin Church writers.²³ Sometimes to be sure—a practice that later became general—common allegory was also termed *figura*; in *Divinae institutiones* (2, 10) Lactantius interprets south and north as *figurae vitae et mortis* ("figures of life and death"), day and night as true and false faith; yet the Christian notion of prefiguration and fulfillment immediately enters in: *etiam in*

hoc praescius futurorum Deus fecit, ut ex iis, et verae religionis, et falsarum superstitionum imago quaedam ostenderetur ("and here also, in his foreknowledge of the future, God caused that an image, as it were, should be displayed in these things both of true religion and of false superstitions"). And thus *figura* often appears in the sense of "deeper meaning in reference to future things": the sufferings of Jesus *non fuerunt inania, sed habuerunt figuram et significationem* ("were not vain but had figure and significance") and he speaks in this connection of divine works in general *quorum vis et potentia valebat quidem in praesens, sed declarabat aliquid in futurum* ("whose force and power were of avail indeed in the present time, but also foreshowed something in the future"). This conception also dominates his eschatology which, following a speculation then widespread, interpreted the six days of Creation as six millennia, which were then almost at an end; the millennial kingdom was imminent (*ibid.*, 7, 14): *saepe diximus, minora et exigua magnorum figuras et praemonstrationes esse; ut hunc diem nostrum qui ortu solis occasuque finitur, diei magni speciem gerere, quem circuitus annorum mille determinat. Eodem modo figuratio terreni hominis caelestis populi praeferebat in posterum fictionem.*²⁴ ("We have frequently said that small and trivial things are figures and foreshadowings of great things; thus, this day of ours, which is bounded by sunrise and sunset, bears the likeness of that great day which is circumscribed by the passing of a thousand years. In the same way the *figuratio* of man on earth carried with it a parable of the heavenly people yet to be.")

In most authors of the same period the figural interpretation and its most familiar examples are current coin,²⁵ as are the opposition between *figura* and

veritas. But sometimes we encounter a more spiritualist, allegorical, and ethical mode of interpretation—as in Origen's Bible commentaries. In one passage, dealing with the sacrifice of Isaac—in other respects this is one of the most famous examples of the realistic type of figural interpretation—Rufinus, the Latin translator of Origen (*Patrologia Graeca*, 12, 209; the Greek original has been lost) has the following: *Sicut in Domino corporeum nihil est, etiam tu in his omnibus corporeum nihil sentias: sed in spiritu generes etiam tu filium Isaac, cum habere coeperis fructum spiritus, gaudium, pacem.* ("As there is no bodily element in the Lord, so do you also see nothing corporal in all these things; but you also may bear your son Isaac in the spirit, when you begin to possess the fruit of the spirit, joy, and peace.") Origen, to be sure, is far from being as abstractly allegorical as, for example, Philo; in his writings, the events of the Old Testament seem alive, with a direct bearing on the reader and his real life; yet in his fine explanation of the three-day journey in Exodus, for example (loc. cit., pp. 313 ff.), mystical and moral considerations seem definitely to overshadow the strictly historical element.²⁶ The difference between Tertullian's more historical and realistic interpretation and Origen's ethical, allegorical approach reflects a current conflict, known to us from other early Christian sources: one party strove to transform the events of the New and still more of the Old Testament into purely spiritual happenings, to "spirit away" their historical character—the other wished to preserve the full historicity of the Scriptures along with the deeper meaning. In the West the latter tendency was victorious, although the spiritualists always maintained a certain influence, as may be seen from the progress of the doctrine of the different meanings of Scripture; for while the adherents of this

doctrine recognize the literal or historical sense, they sever its connection with the equally real prefiguration by setting up other, purely abstract interpretations beside or in place of the prefigural interpretation. St. Augustine played a leading part in the compromise between the two doctrines. On the whole he favored a living, figural interpretation, for his thinking was far too concrete and historical to content itself with pure abstract allegory.

The whole classical tradition was very much alive in St. Augustine, and of this his use of the word *figura* is one more indication. In his writings we find it expressing the general notion of form in all its traditional variants, static and dynamic, outline and body; it is applied to the world, to nature as a whole, and to the particular object; along with *forma*, *color*, and so on, it stands for the outward appearance (*Epist.*, 120, 10, or 146, 3); or it may signify the variable aspect over against the imperishable essence. It is in this last sense that he interprets I Cor. 7:31: *Peracto quippe iudicio tunc esse desinet hoc coelum et haec terra, quando incipiet esse coelum novum et terra nova. Mutatione namque rerum non omni modo interitu transibit hic mundus. Unde et apostolus dicit: praeterit enim figura huius mundi, volo vos sine sollicitudine esse. Figura enim praeterit, non natura* (*De civitate Dei*, 20, 14). ("When the judgment shall be finished, then this heaven and this earth shall cease to be, and a new heaven and a new earth shall begin. But this world will not be utterly consumed; it will only undergo a change; and therefore the Apostle says: The fashion [*figura*] of this world passeth away, and I would have you to be without care. The fashion [*figura*] goes away, not the nature.") [Trans. John Healey, Everyman edition. London, 1950, Vol. II, p. 289.] *Figura* appears also as idol, as dream figure or

vision, as mathematical form; scarcely one of the many known variants is missing. But by far the most often it appears in the sense of prefiguration. Augustine explicitly adopted the figural interpretation of the Old Testament and emphatically recommended its use in sermons and missions (e.g., *De catechizandis rudibus*, III, 6), and developed on the method. Its whole repertory of interpretations passes us by in his work: Noah's ark is *praefiguratio ecclesiae* ("a prefiguration of the Church,") (*De civitate Dei* 15, 27); in several different ways Moses is *figura Christi* (e.g., *De civitate Dei*, 10, 8, or 18, 11); Aaron's *sacerdotium* is *umbra et figura aeterni sacerdotii* ("shadow and figure of the eternal priesthood") (*ibid.*, 17, 6); Hagar, the slave woman, is a *figura* of the Old Testament, of the *terrena Jerusalem* ("earthly Jerusalem"), and Sarah of the New Testament, of the *superna Jerusalem civitas Dei* ("the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of God") (*ibid.*, 16, 31; 17, 3; *Expos. ad Galatas*, 40); Jacob and Esau *figuram praebuerunt duorum populorum in Christianis et Iudeis* ("prefigured the two peoples of Jews and Christians") (*De civitate Dei*, 16, 42); the king of Judaea (*Christi*) *figuram prophetica unctione gestabant* (*ibid.*, 17, 4) ("by being anointed by the prophets bore a prefiguration of the Christ."). These are only a few examples; the whole Old Testament, or at least its important figures and events, are all interpreted figurally; even where hidden meanings are found, as for example in Hannah's prayer of thanksgiving (I Sam. 2:1-10) in *De civ.*, 17, 4, the interpretation is not only allegorical but figural as well; Hannah's song of praise over the birth of her son Samuel is explained as a figure for the transformation of the old earthly kingdom and priesthood into the new heavenly kingdom and priesthood; she herself becomes a *figura ecclesiae*.

Augustine emphatically rejected the purely allegorical interpretation of the Holy Scriptures and dismissed the notion that the Old Testament was a kind of hermetic book that became intelligible only if one discarded the literal historical meaning and the vulgar interpretation. He held that every believer could gradually penetrate its sublime content. In *De trinitate* (11, 2) he writes: . . . *sancta scriptura parvulis congruens nullius generis rerum verba vitavit, ex quibus quasi gradatim ad divina atque sublimia noster intellectus velut nutritus assurgeret* ("the Holy Scriptures, as is fitting for little ones, did not shun any kind of verbal expression through which our understanding might be nourished and rise step by step to divine and sublime things"). And again, referring more plainly to the problem of figures: *Ante omnia, fratres, hoc in nomine Domini et admonemus, et praecipimus, ut quando auditis exponi sacramentum scripturae narrantis quae gesta sunt, prius illud quod lectum est credatis sic gestum, quomodo lectum est; ne substrato fundamento rei gestae, quasi in aere quaeratis aedificare* (*Serm.*, 2, 6)²⁷ ("Before all things, brethren, we admonish and command you in the name of the Lord, that when you hear an exposition of the mystery of the Scriptures telling of things that took place, you believe what is read to have actually taken place as the reading narrates; lest, undermining the foundation of actuality, you seek as it were to build in the air"). He took the view—which had long ago become part of the tradition—that the Old Testament was pure phenomenal prophecy, and he laid more stress than others on certain passages in the Pauline epistles of which we shall have more to say later on. The observances of the law *quas tamquam umbras futuri saeculi nunc respuunt Christiani, id tenentes, quod per*

illas umbras figurate promittebatur ("which Christians now cast aside as mere shadows of the age to come, possessing as they do that which was promised in a figure by those shadows") and the sacraments *quae habuerunt promissivas figuras* ("which served as figures of promise"), are the letter of Scripture, precisely in the sense that their undoubted carnal and historical reality has, no less historically, been revealed and spiritually interpreted by the Christian fulfillment—and as we shall soon see, replaced by a new, more complete, and clearer promise. Consequently a Christian should hold *non ad legem operum, ex qua nemo iustificatur, sed ad legem fidei, ex qua iustus vivit* (*De spiritu et littera*, XIV, 23) ("not the works of the law, by which no man is justified, but to the law of faith, by which the just man lives"). The Jews of the Old Testament, *quando adhuc sacrificium verum, quod fideles norunt, in figuris praenuntiabatur, celebrabant figuram futurae rei; multi scientes, sed plures ignorantes* (*Enarr. in Psalm.*, 39, 12) ("when they still foretold in figures that true sacrifice which the faithful know, were celebrating figures of a reality to come in the future; for they knew many things, but were ignorant of even more"); while the latter-day Jews, and here he strikes a theme which was to run through all subsequent polemics against the Jews,²⁸ refused in their obdurate blindness to recognize this: *Non enim frustra Dominus ait Judaeis: si crederetis Moysi, crederetis et mihi; de me enim ille scripsit* (*Joan.*, 5, 46); *carnaliter quippe accipiendo legem, et eius promissa terrena rerum coelestium figuras esse nescientes* (*De civ.*, 20, 28) ("For the Lord spoke not idly . . . when He told the Jews, saying: 'Had ye believed Moses, you would have believed Me, for he wrote of Me.' For these men accepted the law in a carnal sense and did not understand its earthly promises as types [*figuras*] of heavenly

things.") But the "heavenly" fulfillment is not complete, and consequently, as in certain earlier writers but more definitely in Augustine, the confrontation of the two poles, figure and fulfillment, is sometimes replaced by a development in three stages: the Law or history of the Jews as a prophetic *figura* for the appearance of Christ; the incarnation as fulfillment of this *figura* and at the same time as a new promise of the end of the world and the Last Judgment; and finally, the future occurrence of these events as ultimate fulfillment. In *Serm.*, 4, 8, we read: *Vetus enim Testamentum est promissio figurata, novum Testamentum est promissio spiritualiter intellecta* ("The Old Testament is a promise in figure, the New is a promise understood after the spirit"), and still more clearly in *Contra Faustinum*, 4, 2: *Temporalium quidem rerum promissiones Testamento Veteri contineri, et ideo Vetus Testamentum appellari nemo nostrum ambigit; et quod aeternae vitae promissio regnumque coelorum ad Novum pertinet Testamentum: sed in illis temporalibus figuras fuisse futurorum quae implerentur in nobis, in quos finis saeculorum obvenit, non suspicio mea, sed apostolicus intellectus est, dicente Paulo, cum de talibus loqueretur: Haec omnia . . .* ("For we are all aware that the Old Testament contains promises of temporal things, and that is why it is called the Old Testament; and that the promise of eternal life and the kingdom of heaven belongs to the New Testament: but that in these temporal figures there was the promise of future things, which were to be fulfilled in us, on whom the ends of the world are come, is no fantasy of mine, but the interpretation of the apostles, as Paul says, speaking of these matters: For all these things. . .") And at this point Augustine quotes I Cor. 10:6 and 11. Although here the ultimate fulfillment is regarded as imminent, it is

clear that Augustine has in mind two promises, one concealed and seemingly temporal in the Old Testament, the other clearly expressed and supratemporal in the Gospel. This gives the doctrine of the fourfold meaning of Scripture a far more realistic, historical, and concrete character, for three of the four meanings become concrete, historical, and interrelated, while only one remains purely ethical and allegorical—as Augustine explains in *De genesi ad litteram*, 1, 1: *In libris autem omnibus sanctis intueri oportet, quae ibi aeterna intimentur* (“In all the holy books those things are to be looked for which are indicated as having to do with eternity”)—end of the world and eternal life, analogical interpretation; *quae futura praenuntientur* (“which foretell future events”)—figural meaning in the strict sense, in the Old Testament the prefigurations of the coming of Christ; *quae agenda praecipiantur vel moneantur* (“which command or advise what we are to do”)—ethical meaning.

Even though Augustine rejects abstract allegorical spiritualism and develops his whole interpretation of the Old Testament from the concrete historical reality, he nevertheless has an idealism which removes the concrete event, completely preserved as it is, from time and transposes it into a perspective of eternity. Such ideas were implicit in the notion of the incarnation of the Word; the figural interpretation of history paved the way for them, and they made their appearance at an early day. When Tertullian, for example, says (*Adversus Marcionem*, 3, 5) that in Isa. 50:6 *dorsum meum posui in flagella* (Vulgate, *corpus meum dedi percutientibus*) (“I gave my back to the smiters”), the future is represented figurally by past events, he adds that for God there is no *differentia temporis* (“difference of time”). But none among Augustine’s precursors or contemporaries seems to have developed this

idea so profoundly and completely as Augustine himself. Time and again he stresses the opposition which Tertullian felt only because of the perfect tense employed in the narrative; for example, in *De civ.*, 17, 8: *Scriptura sancta etiam de rebus gestis prophetans quodammodo in eo figuram delineat futurorum* (“the Holy Scripture, even when prophesying of things that are already done, outlines in a certain manner a figure of future things”); or in reference to a discrepancy between Psalm 113, *In exitu*, and the corresponding narrative in Exodus (*Enarr. in Psalm.*, 113, 1): *ne arbitremini nobis narrari praeterita, sed potius futura praedici . . . ut id, quod in fine saeculorum manifestandum reservabatur, figuris rerum atque verborum praecurrentibus nuntiaretur* (“Do not look upon as telling of the past, but rather as foretelling the future . . . that what was reserved to be made manifest at the end of the ages should be announced in material and verbal figures to those who came before”). Perhaps Augustine’s view of the eternal character of the figures is best appreciated in a passage that does not refer expressly to figural interpretation: *Quid enim est praescientia, nisi scientia futurorum? Quid actem futurum est Deo qui omnia supergreditur tempora? Si enim scientia Dei res ipsas habet, non sunt ei futurae, sed praesentes; ac per hoc non jam praescientia, sed tantum scientia dici potest* (*De div. quaest. ad Simplicianum*, II, qu. 2, n. 2) (“For what is foreknowledge but knowledge of the future? But what is future to God who transcends all time? If God’s knowledge contains these things, they are not future to Him but present; therefore it can be termed not foreknowledge, but simply knowledge”).

The figural interpretation was of great practical use for the mission of the fourth and following centuries; it was constantly employed in sermons and religious

instruction, often, to be sure, mixed with purely allegorical and ethical interpretations. The *Formulae spiritalis intelligentiae*²⁹ of Bishop Eucherius of Lyons (early fifth century), educated at Lerins, is a textbook of figural and ethical interpretation; from the sixth century we have the *Instituta regularia divinae legis* of Junilius, *Quaestor sacri palatii* (*Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 68, cols. 15 ff.), which is a translation of a Greek work influenced by the Antioch school; in its first chapter we find the following doctrine: *Veteris Testamenti intentio est Novum figuris praenuntiationibusque monstrare; Novi autem ad aeternae beatitudinis gloriam humanas mentes accendere* ("The intention of the Old Testament is to point to the New by figures and prophecies; that of the New is to kindle the minds of men to the glory of eternal beatitude"). A practical example of how the figural interpretation was used in the instruction of new converts is provided by the explanation of the paschal sacrifice in the second Sermon of Bishop Gaudentius of Brescia (*Patrologia Latina*, 20, col. 855), who gives us a perhaps unconscious expression of figural perspective when he says that the *figura* (preceding in time) is not *veritas*, but *imitatio veritatis*. We find a good many strange and farfetched figural interpretations, often mixed with purely abstract, ethical allegory. But the basic view that the Old Testament, both as a whole and in its most important details, is a concrete historical prefiguration of the Gospel, became a firmly rooted tradition.

Now let us return to our semantic investigation and ask how the Church Fathers arrived at the new sense of *figura*. The earliest works of Christian literature were written in Greek, and the word most often used in them for "prefiguration"—in the *Epistle of Barnabas* for example—is *typos*. This leads to the presump-

tion—which may have come to the reader in connection with some of our quotations, the passages from Lactantius, for example—that *figura* passed directly from its general meaning of "formation" or "form" to its new signification; and indeed the usage of the oldest ecclesiastical writers makes this seem likely. When they write that persons or events of the Old Testament *figuram Christi (ecclesiae, baptismi, etc.) gerunt* or *gestant* ("provide a *figura* of Christ, the Church, baptism, etc."), that the Jewish people in all things *figuram nostram portat* ("bears our *figura*"), that the Holy Scripture *figuram delineat futurorum* ("delineates the *figura* of things to come"), *figura* in these sentences can simply be translated as "form." But then the idea of the *schēma* as molded by pre-Christian poetry and oratory—the rhetorical image or circumlocution that conceals, transforms, and even deceives—enters in. The opposition between *figura* and *veritas*, the interpretation (*exponere*) and unveiling (*aperire, revelare*)³⁰ of figures, the equation of *figura* with *umbra*, of *sub figura* with *sub umbra* (e.g., *ciborum*, ["of foodstuffs"], or in a more general sense, *legis* ["of the law"], the notion of a *figura* under which something other, future, true, lies concealed)—all this shows that the old sense of rhetorical image had survived, though it had moved from the purely nominalistic world of the schools of oratory and of Ovid's half playful myths into a realm both real and spiritual, hence authentic, significant, and existential. The distinction between figures of word and figures of substance that we find in Quintilian is resumed in the distinction between *figura verborum* and *figurae rerum*, word and prophetic events or phenomenal prophecies.

On this new basis the word has vastly extended its range of signification. We find *figura* as "deeper mean-

ing," as for example in Sedulius (*ista res habet egregiam figuram, Carm. pasch., 5, 384 f.* ["this event has an extraordinary *figura*"]) and in Lactantius; as "deception" or "deceptive form" (Filastrius 61, *Liber de Haeresibus, Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 12, col. 1176) (*sub figura confessionis christianae*) ["under the *figura* of the Christian faith"] meaning "alleging to be Christians"), or Sulpicius Severus, *De vita beati Martini*, 21, 1 (*Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 20, col. 172), who says that the Devil *sive [se] in diversas figuras spiritualis nequitiae transtulisset* ("transformed himself into various *figurae* of spiritual wickedness"), or Leo the Great, *Epist.*, 98, 3 (*Patrologia Latina*, 54, 955): *lupum pastorali pelle nudantes, qua prius quoque figura tantummodo convincebatur obtectus* ("stripping the wolf of his sheep's clothing, wherewith formerly in a figure he was shown to be concealed"); as an "empty" or "deceptive manner of speaking" or "evasion" (*per tot figuras ludimur*, Prudentius, *Peristephanon*, 2, 315 ["we are made sport of by all these *figurae*"]), or Rufinus, *Apologia adversus Hieronymus*, 2, 22: *qualibus (Ambrosium) figuris laceret* ("figures with which he mangled Ambrose"); or simply as "discourse" or "word" (*te . . . incauta violare figura* ["I feared to hurt thee with an incautious figure"] Paulinus of Nola, *Carmina*, 11, 12); and finally in variations of the new meaning which scarcely permit of an appropriate translation: in the poetic *De actibus apostolorum* of the sixth-century subdeacon Arator (*Patrologia Latina*, 68, cols. 83 ff.) we find the verses: *tamen illa figura, qua sine nulla vetus (i.e., Veteris Testamenti) subsistit littera, demum hac melius novitate manet* (Bk. 2, el. 361-3) ("but that figure, without which not a letter of the Old Testament exists, now at length endures to better purpose in the New"); and from just about the same time, a passage in the writings of

Bishop Avitus of Vienne (*Poema*, 5, 1. 284, *MG Auct. ant.*, VI, 2)⁸¹ in which he speaks of the Last Judgment; just as God in killing the first-born in Egypt spared the houses daubed with blood, so may He recognize and spare the faithful by the sign of the Eucharist: *Tu cognosce tuam salvanda in plebe figuram* ("recognize thine own figure in the people that are to be saved").

Beside the opposition between *figura* and fulfillment or truth, there appears another, between *figura* and *historia*; *historia* or *littera* is the literal sense or the event related; *figura* is the same literal meaning or event in reference to the fulfillment cloaked in it, and this fulfillment itself is *veritas*, so that *figura* becomes a middle term between *littera-historia* and *veritas*. In this connection *figura* is roughly equivalent to *spiritus* or *intellectus spiritualis*, sometimes replaced by *figuralitas*, as in the following passage from the *Continentia Vergiliana* of Fulgentius (90, 1): *sub figuralitate historiae plenum hominis monstravimus statum* ("we have shown the whole state of mankind under the figure of history"). Of course *figura* and *historia* may often be used interchangeably (*ab historia in mysterium surgere* ["to rise from *historia* to mystery"]), says Gregory the Great (*Ezech.*, 1, 6, 3) and further on both *historiare* and *figurare* mean "to represent in images," "to illustrate," the first however only in the literal sense, the second also in the sense of "to interpret allegorically."⁸²

Figura is not the only Latin word used for historic prefiguration; often we find the Greek terms *allegoria* and still more frequently *typus*; *allegoria* generally refers to any deeper meaning and not only to phenomenal prophecy, but the boundary is fluid, for *figura* and *figuraliter* often extend beyond figural prophecy. Tertullian uses *allegoria* almost synonymously with

figura, though much less frequently, and in Arnobius (*Adversus nationes* 5, 32; *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 53, col. 1147) we find *historia* opposed to *allegoria*; *allegoria* also benefited by the authority of Gal. 4:24. But *allegoria* could not be used synonymously with *figura* in all contexts, for it did not have the same implication of "form"; one could not write that *Adam est allegoria Christi*. As for *typus*, the only reason why it fell behind *figura* is that it was a foreign word. But this consideration was far from negligible, for in anyone who spoke Latin (or later a Romance language), *figura* more or less consciously evoked all the notions involved in its history, while *typus* remained an imported, lifeless sign. As for the Latin words which were, or at least could be employed for prefiguration in place of *figura*, they are as follows: *ambages*, *effigies*, *exemplum*, *imago*, *similitudo*, *species*, and *umbra*. *Ambages* was dropped as too pejorative; *effigies* in the sense of "copy" was too narrow, and even in comparison with *imago*, seems to have developed little power of expansion; the others cut across the meaning of "figural prophecy" in various ways, but do not fully satisfy it. They are all used occasionally, the most frequent being *imago* and *umbra*. *Imagines*, absolute and without a genitive, was employed for the statues of ancestors in Roman houses; in Christian usage they became the pictures and statues of the saints, so that the meaning developed in a different direction; nevertheless, according to the Vulgate, man was made *ad imaginem Dei* ("in the image of God"), and consequently *imago* long competed with *figura*, though only in passages where the context made the meaning "image" identical with "prefiguration." *Umbra* was supported chiefly by a few passages in the Pauline Epistles (Col. 2:17; Heb. 8:5 and 10:1); it occurs frequently, but more as a metaphoric turn for

figura than as a direct designation. In any event, none of these words combined the elements of the concept so fully as *figura*: the creative, formative principle, change amid the enduring essence, the shades of meaning between copy and archetype. Hence it is not surprising that *figura* should have been most often and most widely used for this purpose.

III. Origin and Analysis of Figural Interpretation

In the last section we involuntarily digressed several times from our purely semantic discussion, because the idea which the word expresses in the Church Fathers is itself in need of explanation. It thus becomes necessary to investigate the origins of this idea in greater detail, to distinguish it from related ideas, and to examine its historical destinies and influence.

The Church Fathers often justify the figural interpretation on the basis of certain passages in early Christian writings, mostly from the Pauline Epistles.⁸³ The most important of these is I Cor. 10:6 and 11, where the Jews in the desert are termed *typoi hēmōn* ("figures of ourselves"), and where it is written that *tauta de typikōs synebainen ekeinois* ("these things befell them as figures"). Another passage often adduced is Gal. 4:21-31, where Paul explains to the freshly baptized Galatians, who, still under the influence of Judaism, wished to be circumcised, the difference between law and grace, the old and the new covenant, servitude and freedom, by the example of Hagar-Ishmael and Sarah-Isaac, linking the narrative in Genesis with Is. 54:1 and interpreting it in terms of figural prophecy. Still others are Col. 2:16 f., saying that the Jewish dietary laws and holidays are only the shadow of things to come, whereas the body is

Christ; Rom. 5:12 ff. and I Cor. 15:21, where Adam appears as the *typos* of the future Christ, and grace is opposed to the law; II Cor. 3:14, which speaks of the veil (*kalymnos*) that covers the Scripture when the Jews read it; and finally Heb. 9:11 ff., where the sacrifice of Christ's blood is represented as the fulfillment of the high priest's sacrifice in the Old Testament.

Certain passages in Acts (e.g., 8:32) show that figural interpretation played an important part in the Christian mission from the very start. It seems only natural that the new Judaeo-Christians should have looked for prefigurations and confirmations of Jesus in the Old Testament and incorporated the interpretations thus arrived at into the tradition; particularly since the notion was current among them that the Messiah would be a second Moses, that his redemption would be a second exodus from Egypt in which the miracles of the first would be repeated.⁸⁴ This would require no further explanation. But an examination of the above-cited passages, particularly if they are considered in connection with Paul's preaching as a whole, shows that in him these Jewish conceptions were combined with a pronounced hostility to the ideas of the Judaeo-Christians, and that it is this attitude which gives them their special significance. Those passages in the Pauline Epistles which contain figural interpretations were almost all written in the course of Paul's bitter struggle in behalf of his mission among the Gentiles; many are answers to the attacks and persecutions of the Judaeo-Christians; nearly all are intended to strip the Old Testament of its normative character and show that it is merely a shadow of things to come. His whole figural interpretation was subordinated to the basic Pauline theme of grace versus law, faith versus works: the old law is an-

nulled; it is shadow and *typos*; observance of it has become useless and even harmful since Christ made his sacrifice; a Christian is justified not by works in observance of the law, but by faith; and in its Jewish and Judaistic legal sense the Old Testament is the letter that kills, while the new Christians are servants of the new covenant, of the spirit that gives life. This was Paul's doctrine, and the former Pharisee and disciple of Gamaliel looked eagerly in the Old Testament for passages in support of it. As a whole it ceased for him to be a book of the law and history of Israel and became from beginning to end a promise and prefiguration of Christ, in which there is no definitive, but only a prophetic meaning which has now been fulfilled, in which everything is written "for our sakes" (I Cor. 9:10, cf. Rom. 15:4) and in which precisely the most important and sacred events, sacraments and laws are provisional forms and figurations of Christ and the Gospel: *etenim Pascha nostrum immolatus est Christi* (I Cor. 5:7) ("for even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us").⁸⁵

In this way his thinking, which eminently combined practical politics with creative poetic faith, transformed the Jewish conception of Moses risen again in the Messiah into a system of figural prophecy, in which the risen one both fulfills and annuls the work of his precursor. What the Old Testament thereby lost as a book of national history, it gained in concrete dramatic actuality. Paul devised no systematic interpretation of the Old Testament, but the few passages about the Exodus, about Adam and Christ, Hagar and Sarah, etc., show sufficiently what his intention was. The Old Testament controversies of the ensuing period kept his conception and interpretation alive; true, the influence of the Judaeo-Christians with their fidelity to the law soon diminished, but a new

opposition came from those who wished either to exclude the Old Testament altogether or to interpret it only abstractly and allegorically—whereby Christianity would necessarily have lost its conception of a providential history, its intrinsic concreteness, and with these no doubt some of its immense persuasive power. In the struggle against those who despised the Old Testament and tried to despoil it of its meaning, the figural method again proved its worth.

In this connection we should bear in mind another factor which became important as Christianity spread through the countries of the western and northern Mediterranean. As we have seen, the figural interpretation changed the Old Testament from a book of laws and a history of the people of Israel into a series of figures of Christ and the Redemption, such as we find later in the procession of prophets in the medieval theater and in the cyclic representations of medieval sculpture. In this form and in this context, from which Jewish history and national character had vanished, the Celtic and Germanic peoples, for example, could accept the Old Testament; it was a part of the universal religion of salvation and a necessary component of the equally magnificent and universal vision of history that was conveyed to them along with this religion. In its original form, as law book and history of so foreign and remote a nation, it would have been beyond their reach. This of course was a later insight, far from the thoughts of the first preachers to the Gentiles and of the Church Fathers. The problem did not arise in the early period, for the first pagan converts lived among the Jews of the Diaspora, and what with the important influence of the Jews and the receptivity of the Hellenistic world of that time to religious experience, they had long been familiar with Jewish history and religion. But

the fact that we can only discern it in retrospect does not make this consideration any less important. It was not until very late, probably not until after the Reformation, that Europeans began to regard the Old Testament as Jewish history and Jewish law; it first came to the newly converted peoples as *figura rerum* or phenomenal prophecy, as a prefiguration of Christ, so giving them a basic conception of history, which derived its compelling force from its inseparable bond with the faith, and which for almost a thousand years remained the only accepted view of history. Consequently the attitude embodied in the figural interpretation became one of the essential elements of the Christian picture of reality, history, and the concrete world in general. This consideration leads us to the second of the tasks we set ourselves at the beginning of this chapter, namely to define figural interpretation more sharply and to distinguish it from other, related forms of interpretation.

Figural interpretation establishes a connection between two events or persons, the first of which signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second encompasses or fulfills the first. The two poles of the figure are separate in time, but both, being real events or figures, are within time, within the stream of historical life. Only the understanding of the two persons or events is a spiritual act, but this spiritual act deals with concrete events whether past, present, or future, and not with concepts or abstractions; these are quite secondary, since promise and fulfillment are real historical events, which have either happened in the incarnation of the Word, or will happen in the second coming. Of course purely spiritual elements enter into the conceptions of the ultimate fulfillment, since "my kingdom is not of this world"; yet it will be a real kingdom, not an immaterial abstraction;

only the *figura*, not the *natura* of this world will pass away (see above p. 37), and the flesh will rise again. Since in figural interpretation one thing stands for another, since one thing represents and signifies the other, figural interpretation is "allegorical" in the widest sense. But it differs from most of the allegorical forms known to us by the historicity both of the sign and what it signifies. Most of the allegories we find in literature or art represent a virtue (e.g., wisdom), or a passion (jealousy), an institution (justice), or at most a very general synthesis of historical phenomena (peace, the fatherland)—never a definite event in its full historicity. Such are the allegories of late antiquity and the Middle Ages, extending roughly from the *Psychomachia*³⁶ of Prudentius to Alain de Lille and the *Roman de la Rose*. We find something very similar (or diametrically opposite if one prefers) in the allegorical interpretations of historical events,³⁷ which were usually interpreted as obscure illustrations of philosophical doctrines. In biblical exegesis this allegorical method long competed with the figural interpretation; it was the method of Philo³⁸ and the catechetical school of Alexandria, which was under his influence. It was rooted in a much older tradition. Various philosophical schools had long interpreted the Greek myths, particularly Homer and Hesiod, as veiled expositions of their own physico-cosmological system. And various later influences, no longer purely rationalistic but more mystical and religious, were also at work. All the numerous sects and occult doctrines of late antiquity cultivated the allegorical interpretation of myths, signs, and texts, and in their interpretations the physical and cosmological aspect gradually gave way to the ethical and mystical. Philo himself, who in keeping with the Jewish tradition constructed his philosophy as a commentary on Scripture,

interpreted the various events of the Bible as phases in the development of the soul and its relation to the intelligible world; in the destinies of Israel as a whole and of the protagonists of Jewish history, he saw an allegory of the movement of the sinful soul in need of salvation, its fall, hope, and ultimate redemption. This clearly spiritual and extrahistorical form of interpretation enjoyed great influence in late antiquity, in part because it was merely the most respectable manifestation of an immense spiritualist movement centered in Alexandria; not only texts and events, but also natural phenomena, stars, animals, stones, were stripped of their concrete reality and interpreted allegorically or on occasion somewhat figurally. The spiritualist-ethical-allegorical method was taken up by the catechetical school of Alexandria and found its outstanding Christian exponent in Origen. As we know, it continued into the Middle Ages side by side with the figural method. But despite the existence of numerous hybrid forms, it is very different from figural interpretation. It too transforms the Old Testament; in it too the law and history of Israel lose their national and popular character; but these are replaced by a mystical or ethical system, and the text loses far more of its concrete history than in the figural system. This type of exegesis long maintained its position; in the doctrine of the fourfold meaning of Scripture, it wholly determined one of the four meanings, the ethical, and partly accounted for another, the analogical. And yet I believe, though I can offer no strict proof of it, that independently, that is to say, without the support of the figural method, it would have had little influence on the freshly converted peoples. There is something scholarly, indirect, even abstruse about it, except on the rare occasions when a gifted mystic breathes force into it. By its origin and nature,

it was limited to a relatively small circle of intellectuals and initiates; they alone could find pleasure and nourishment in it. Figural phenomenal prophecy, however, had grown out of a definite historical situation, the Christian break with Judaism and the Christian mission among the Gentiles; it had a historical function. Its integral, firmly teleological view of history and the providential order of the world gave it the power to capture the imagination and innermost feeling of the convert nations. By its success it paved the way for less concrete schools of allegorism, such as that of the Alexandrians. But although this and other spiritualistic methods of interpretation may be older than the figural method of the apostles and Church Fathers, they are unmistakably late forms, while the figural interpretation with its living historicity, though scarcely primitive or archaic, was assuredly a fresh beginning and rebirth of man's creative powers.

Aside from the allegorical form we have just been discussing there are still other ways of representing one thing by another that may be compared with figural prophecy: namely the so-called symbolic or mythical forms, which are often regarded as characteristic of primitive cultures, and which in any case are often found in them; so much material concerning these forms has been brought to light in recent years, and the process of sifting and explaining this material is so far from complete that we can speak of them only with caution. These forms were first recognized and described by Vico. Their characteristic feature is that the thing represented must always be something very important and holy for those concerned, something affecting their whole life and thinking, and that this something is not only expressed or imitated in the sign or symbol, but considered to be itself present

and contained in it. Thus the symbol itself can act and be acted upon in its place; to act upon the symbol is conceived as tantamount to acting on the thing symbolized, and consequently magical powers are imputed to the symbol. Such symbolic or mythical forms still existed in the Mediterranean countries in late antiquity, but for the most part they had lost their magical force and had paled to allegory; very much as vestiges of them, the symbols of justice in heraldry and national emblems, for example, have lived on in our modern cultures, though on the other hand, as we may observe, both in late antiquity and in modern times, new ideas of universal appeal never cease to create symbols which act as magical realities. These symbolic or mythical forms have certain points of contact with the figural interpretation; both aspire to interpret and order life as a whole; both are conceivable only in religious or related spheres. But the differences are self-evident. The symbol must possess magic power, not the *figura*; the *figura*, on the other hand, must always be historical, but not the symbol. Of course Christianity has no lack of magic symbols; but the *figura* as such is not one of them.⁸⁹ What actually makes the two forms completely different is that figural prophecy relates to an interpretation of history—indeed it is by nature a textual interpretation—while the symbol is a direct interpretation of life and originally no doubt for the most part, of nature. Thus figural interpretation is a product of late cultures, far more indirect, complex, and charged with history than the symbol or myth. Indeed, seen from this point of view, it has something vastly old about it: a great culture had to reach its culmination and indeed to show signs of old age, before an interpretive tradition could produce something on the order of figural prophecy.

These two comparisons, with allegory on the one hand and with the symbolical, mythical forms on the other, disclose figural prophecy in a twofold light: youthful and newborn as a purposive, creative, concrete interpretation of universal history; infinitely old as the late interpretation of a venerable text, charged with history, that had grown for hundreds of years. Its youthful vitality gave it the almost unequalled persuasive power with which it captivated not only the late cultures of the Mediterranean, but also the relatively youthful peoples of the West and North; what was old in it gave the thinking of those peoples and their understanding of history a peculiarly puzzling quality, which we shall now attempt to elucidate. Figural prophecy implies the interpretation of one worldly event through another; the first signifies the second, the second fulfills the first. Both remain historical events; yet both, looked at in this way, have something provisional and incomplete about them; they point to one another and both point to something in the future, something still to come, which will be the actual, real, and definitive event. This is true not only of Old Testament prefiguration, which points forward to the incarnation and the proclamation of the gospel, but also of these latter events, for they too are not the ultimate fulfillment, but themselves a promise of the end of time and the true kingdom of God. Thus history, with all its concrete force, remains forever a figure, cloaked and needful of interpretation. In this light the history of no epoch ever has the practical self-sufficiency which, from the standpoint both of primitive man and of modern science, resides in the accomplished fact; all history, rather, remains open and questionable, points to something still concealed, and the tentativeness of events in the figural interpretation is fundamentally different from

the tentativeness of events in the modern view of historical development. In the modern view, the provisional event is treated as a step in an unbroken horizontal process; in the figural system the interpretation is always sought from above; events are considered not in their unbroken relation to one another, but torn apart, individually, each in relation to something other that is promised and not yet present. Whereas in the modern view the event is always self-sufficient and secure, while the interpretation is fundamentally incomplete, in the figural interpretation the fact is subordinated to an interpretation which is fully secured to begin with: the event is enacted according to an ideal model which is a prototype situated in the future and thus far only promised. This model situated in the future and imitated in the figures (one is reminded of the term *imitatio veritatis* ["imitation of the truth"], p. 44 above) recalls Platonistic notions. It carries us still further. For every future model, though incomplete as history, is already fulfilled in God and has existed from all eternity in His providence. The figures in which He cloaked it, and the incarnation in which He revealed its meaning, are therefore prophecies of something that has always been, but which will remain veiled for men until the day when they behold the Saviour *revelata facie*, with the senses as well as in spirit. Thus the figures are not only tentative; they are also the tentative form of something eternal and timeless; they point not only to the concrete future, but also to something that always has been and always will be; they point to something which is in need of interpretation, which will indeed be fulfilled in the concrete future, but which is at all times present, fulfilled in God's providence, which knows no difference of time. This eternal thing is already figured in them, and thus they are both tenta-

tive fragmentary reality, and veiled eternal reality. This becomes eminently clear in the sacrament of the sacrifice, the Last Supper, the *pascha nostrum*, which is *figura Christi*.⁴⁰

This sacrament, which is figure as well as symbol, and which has long existed historically—namely, since it was first established in the old covenant—gives us the purest picture of the concretely present, the veiled and tentative, the eternal and supratemporal elements contained in the figures.

IV. Figural Art in the Middle Ages

The figural interpretation, or to put it more completely, the figural view of history was widespread and deeply influential up to the Middle Ages, and beyond. This has not escaped the attention of scholars. Not only theological works on the history of hermeneutics but also studies on the history of art and literature have met with figural conceptions on their way, and dealt with them. This is particularly true of the history of art in connection with medieval iconography, and of the history of literature in connection with the religious theater of the Middle Ages. But the special nature of the problem does not seem to have been recognized; the figural or typological or phenomenal structure is not sharply distinguished from other, allegorical or symbolical, forms. A beginning is to be found in T. C. Goode's instructive dissertation on Gonzalo de Berceo's *El Sacrificio de la Misa* (Washington, 1933); although he does not go into fundamental questions, H. Pflaum shows a clear understanding of the situation in his *Die religiöse Disputation in der europäischen Dichtung des Mittelalters* (Geneva-Florence, 1935). Recently (in *Ro-*

mania, LXIII) his sound understanding of the word *figure* enabled him to give a correct interpretation of some Old French verses that had been misunderstood by the editor and to restore the text. Perhaps other examples have escaped me,⁴¹ but I do not think that there is any systematic treatment of the subject. Yet such an investigation strikes me as indispensable for an understanding of the mixture of spirituality and sense of reality which characterizes the European Middle Ages and which seems so baffling to us.⁴² In most European countries figural interpretation was active up to the eighteenth century; we find traces of it not only in Bossuet as might be expected, but many years later in the religious authors whom Groethuysen quotes in *Les Origines de la France bourgeoise*.⁴³ A clear knowledge of its character and how it differed from related but differently structured forms would generally sharpen and deepen our understanding of the documents of late antiquity and the Middle Ages, and solve a good many puzzles. Might the themes that recur so frequently on early Christian sarcophagi and in the catacombs not be figures of the Resurrection? Or to cite an example from Mâle's great work, might not the legend of Maria Aegyptiaca, the representations of which in the Toulouse Museum he describes (op. cit., p. 240 ff.), be a figure of the people of Israel going out of Egypt, hence to be interpreted exactly as the Psalm *In exitu Israel de Aegypto* was generally interpreted in the Middle Ages?

But individual interpretations do not exhaust the importance of the figural method. No student of the Middle Ages can fail to see how it provides the medieval interpretation of history with its general foundation and often enters into the medieval view of everyday reality. The analogism that reaches into every sphere of medieval thought is closely bound up

with the figural structure; in the interpretation of the Trinity that extends roughly from Augustine's *De Trinitate* to St. Thomas, I, q. 45, art. 7, man himself, as the image of God, takes on the character of a *figura Trinitatis*. It is not quite clear to me how far aesthetic ideas were determined by figural conceptions—to what extent the work of art was viewed as the *figura* of a still unattainable fulfillment in reality. The question of the imitation of nature in art aroused little theoretical interest in the Middle Ages; but all the more attention was accorded to the notion that the artist, as a kind of figure for God the Creator, realized an archetype that was alive in his spirit.⁴⁴ These, as we see, are ideas of Neoplatonic origin. But the question remains: to what extent were this archetype and the work of art produced from it regarded as figures for a reality and truth fulfilled in God? I have found no conclusive answer in the texts available to me here and the most important works of the specialized literature are lacking. But I should like to quote a few passages which happen to be at hand, and which point somewhat in the direction I have in mind. In an article on the representation of musical tones in the capitals of the Abbey of Cluny (*Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift*, 7, p. 264) L. Schrade quotes an explanation of the word *imitari* by Remigius of Auxerre: *scilicet persequi, quia veram musicam non potest humana musica imitari* ("that is, to follow after, for the music of man cannot imitate the true music"). This is probably based on the notion that the artist's work is an imitation or at least a shadowy figuration of a true and likewise sensuous reality (the music of the heavenly choirs). In the *Purgatorio* Dante praises the works of art created by God himself, representing examples of virtues and vices, for their perfectly fulfilled sensuous truth, beside which human art and even nature

pales (*Purg.*, 10 and 12); his invocation to Apollo (*Par.*, 1) includes the lines:

*O divina virtù, se mi ti presti
tanto che l'ombra del beato regno
segnata nel mio capo io manifesti*

(O divine Virtue, if thou dost so far lend thyself to me, that I make manifest the shadow of the blessed realm imprinted on my brain.) (Temple Classics ed., p. 5.)

Here his poetry is characterized as an *umbra* of truth, engraved in his mind, and his theory of inspiration is sometimes expressed in statements that may be explained along the same lines. But these are only suggestions; an investigation purporting to explain the relation between Neoplatonic and figural elements in medieval aesthetics would require broader foundations. Still, the present remarks suffice, I believe, to show the need for distinguishing the figural structure from the other forms of imagery. We may say roughly that the figural method in Europe goes back to Christian influences, while the allegorical method derives from ancient pagan sources, and also that the one is applied primarily to Christian, the other to ancient material. Nor shall we be going too far afield in terming the figural view the predominantly Christian-medieval one, while the allegorical view, modeled on pagan or not inwardly Christianized authors of late antiquity, tends to appear where ancient, pagan, or strongly secular influences are dominant. But such observations are too general and imprecise, for the many phenomena that reflect an intermingling of different cultures over a thousand years do not admit of such simple classifications. At a very early date profane and pagan material was also interpreted figurally;

Gregory of Tours, for example, uses the legend of the Seven Sleepers as a figure for the Resurrection; the waking of Lazarus from the dead and Jonah's rescue from the belly of the whale were also commonly interpreted in this sense. In the high Middle Ages, the Sybils, Virgil, the characters of the *Aeneid*, and even those of the Breton legend cycle (e.g., Galahad in the quest for the Holy Grail) were drawn into the figural interpretation, and moreover there were all sorts of mixtures between figural, allegoric, and symbolic forms. All these forms, applied to classical as well as Christian material, occur in the work which concludes and sums up the culture of the Middle Ages: the *Divine Comedy*. But I shall now attempt to show that basically it is the figural forms which predominate and determine the whole structure of the poem.

At the foot of the mountain of Purgatory, Dante and Virgil meet a man of venerable mien, whose countenance is illumined by four stars signifying the four cardinal virtues. He inquires sternly into the legitimacy of their journey and from Virgil's respectful reply—after he has told Dante to kneel before this man—we learn that it is Cato of Utica. For after explaining his divine mission, Virgil continues as follows (*Purg.*, 1, 70-5):

*Or ti piaccia gradir la sua venuta.
libertà va cercando, che è sì cara,
come sa chi per lei vita rifiuta.
Tu il sai, chè non ti fu per lei amara
in Utica la morte, ove lasciasti
la vesta che al gran dì sarà sì chiara.*

(Now may it please thee to be gracious unto his coming: he seeketh freedom, which is so precious, as he knows who giveth up life for her.

Thou knowest it; since for her sake death was not

bitter to thee in Utica, where thou leftest the raiment which at the great day shall be so bright.)

(Temple Classics ed., p. 7.)

Virgil goes on, asking Cato to favor him for the sake of the memory of Marcia, his former wife. This plea Cato rejects with undiminished severity; but if such is the desire of the *donna del ciel* (Beatrice), that suffices; and he orders that before his ascent Dante's face be cleansed of the stains of Hell and that he be girded with reeds. Cato appears again at the end of the second canto, where he sternly rebukes the souls just arrived at the foot of the mountain, who are listening in self-forgetfulness to Casella's song, and reminds them to get on with their journey.

It is Cato of Utica whom God has here appointed guardian at the foot of Purgatory: a pagan, an enemy of Caesar, and a suicide. This is startling, and the very first commentators, such as Benvenuto of Imola, expressed their bewilderment. Dante mentions only a very few pagans who were freed from Hell by Christ; and among them we find an enemy of Caesar, whose associates, Caesar's murderers, are with Judas in the jaws of Lucifer, who as a suicide seems no less guilty than those others "who have done themselves violence" and who for the same sin are suffering the most frightful torments in the seventh circle of Hell. The riddle is solved by the words of Virgil, who says that Dante is seeking freedom, which is so precious as you yourself know who have despised life for its sake. The story of Cato is removed from its earthly and political context, just as the stories of Isaac, Jacob, etc., were removed from theirs by the patristic exegetes of the Old Testament, and made into a *figura futurorum*. Cato is a *figura*, or rather the earthly Cato, who renounced his life for freedom, was a *figura*, and the

Cato who appears here in the *Purgatorio* is the revealed or fulfilled figure, the truth of that figural event. The political and earthly freedom for which he died was only an *umbra futurorum*: a prefiguration of the Christian freedom whose guardian he is here appointed, and for the sake of which he here again opposes all earthly temptation; the Christian freedom from all evil impulses, which leads to true domination of self, the freedom for the acquisition of which Dante is girded with the rushes of humility, until, on the summit of the mountain, he actually achieves it and is crowned by Virgil as lord over himself. Cato's voluntary choice of death rather than political servitude is here introduced as a *figura* for the eternal freedom of the children of God, in behalf of which all earthly things are to be despised, for the liberation of the soul from the servitude of sin. Dante's choice of Cato for this role is explained by the position "above the parties" that Cato occupies according to the Roman authors, who held him up as a model of virtue, justice, piety, and love of freedom. Dante found him praised equally in Cicero, Virgil, Lucan, Seneca, and Valerius Maximus; particularly Virgil's *secretosque pios his dantem iura Catonem* (*Aeneid*, 8, 670) ("the righteous in a place apart, with Cato their lawgiver"), coming as it did from a poet of the Empire, must have made a great impression on him. His admiration for Cato may be judged from several passages in the *Convivio*, and in his *De Monarchia* (2, 5) he has a quotation from Cicero⁴⁵ saying that Cato's voluntary death should be judged in a special light and connecting it with the examples of Roman political virtue to which Dante attached so much importance; in this passage Dante tries to show that Roman rule was legitimized by Roman virtue; that it fostered the justice and freedom of all mankind. The chapter con-

tains this sentence: *Romanum imperium de fonte nascitur pietatis* ("the Roman Empire springs from the fount of justice").⁴⁶

Dante believed in a predetermined concordance between the Christian story of salvation and the Roman secular monarchy; thus it is not surprising that he should apply the figural interpretation to a pagan Roman—in general he draws his symbols, allegories, and figures from both worlds without distinction. Beyond any doubt Cato is a *figura*; not an allegory like the characters from the *Roman de la Rose*, but a figure that has become the truth. The *Comedy* is a vision which regards and proclaims the figural truth as already fulfilled, and what constitutes its distinctive character is precisely that, fully in the spirit of figural interpretation, it attaches the truth perceived in the vision to historical, earthly events. The character of Cato as a severe, righteous, and pious man, who in a significant moment in his own destiny and in the providential history of the world sets freedom above life, is preserved in its full historical and personal force; it does not become an allegory for freedom; no, Cato of Utica stands there as a unique individual, just as Dante saw him; but he is lifted out of the tentative earthly state in which he regarded political freedom as the highest good (just as the Jews singled out strict observance of the Law), and transposed into a state of definitive fulfillment, concerned no longer with the earthly works of civic virtue or the law, but with the *ben dell'intelletto*, the highest good, the freedom of the immortal soul in the sight of God.

Let us attempt the same demonstration in a somewhat more difficult case. Virgil has been taken by almost all commentators as an allegory for reason—the human, natural reason which leads to the right

earthly order, that is, in Dante's view, the secular monarchy. The older commentators had no objection to a purely allegorical interpretation, for they did not, as we do today, feel that allegory was incompatible with authentic poetry. Many modern critics have argued against this idea, stressing the poetic, human, personal quality of Dante's Virgil; still, they have been unable either to deny that he "means something" or to find a satisfactory relation between this meaning and the human reality. Recently (and not only in connection with Virgil) a number of writers (L. Valli and Mandonnet, for example) have gone back to the purely allegorical or symbolic aspect and attempted to reject the historical reality as "positivistic" or "romantic." But actually there is no choice between historical and hidden meaning; both are present. The figural structure preserves the historical event while interpreting it as revelation; and must preserve it in order to interpret it.

In Dante's eyes the historical Virgil is both poet and guide. He is a poet and a guide because in the righteous Aeneas' journey to the underworld he prophesies and glorifies universal peace under the Roman Empire, the political order which Dante regards as exemplary, as the *terrena Jerusalem*;⁴⁷ and because in his poem the founding of Rome, predestined seat of the secular and spiritual power, is celebrated in the light of its future mission. Above all he is poet and guide because all the great poets who came after him have been inflamed and inspired by his work; Dante not only states this for himself, but brings in a second poet, Statius, to proclaim the same thing most emphatically: in the meeting with Sordello and perhaps also in the highly controversial verse about Guido Cavalcanti (*Inf.*, 10, 63) the same theme is sounded. In addition, Virgil is a guide because, beyond his

temporal prophecy, he also—in the Fourth Eclogue—proclaimed the eternal transcendent order, the appearance of Christ which would usher in the renewal of the temporal world without, to be sure, suspecting the significance of his own words, but nevertheless in such a way that posterity might derive inspiration from his light. Virgil the poet was a guide because he had described the realm of the dead—thus he knew the way thither. But also as a Roman and a man, he was destined to be a guide, for not only was he a master of eloquent discourse and lofty wisdom but also possessed the qualities that fit a man for guidance and leadership, the qualities that characterize his hero Aeneas and Rome in general: *iustitia* and *pietas*. For Dante the historical Virgil embodied this fullness of earthly perfection and was therefore capable of guiding him to the very threshold of insight into the divine and eternal perfection; the historic Virgil was for him a *figura* of the poet-prophet-guide, now fulfilled in the other world. The historical Virgil is "fulfilled" by the dweller in limbo, the companion of the great poets of antiquity, who at the wish of Beatrice undertakes to guide Dante. As a Roman and poet Virgil had sent Aeneas down to the underworld in search of divine counsel to learn the destiny of the Roman world; and now Virgil is summoned by the heavenly powers to exercise a no less important guidance; for there is no doubt that Dante saw himself in a mission no less important than that of Aeneas: elected to divulge to a world out of joint the right order, which is revealed to him upon his way. Virgil is elected to point out and interpret for him the true earthly order, whose laws are carried out and whose essence is fulfilled in the other world, and at the same time to direct him toward its goal, the heavenly community of the blessed, which he has presaged in his poetry—yet

not into the heart of the kingdom of God, for the meaning of his presage was not revealed to him during his earthly lifetime, and without such illumination he has died an unbeliever. Thus God does not wish Dante to enter His kingdom with Virgil's help; Virgil can lead him only to the threshold of the kingdom, only as far as the limit which his noble and righteous poetry was able to discern. "Thou first," says Statius to Virgil, "didst send me towards Parnassus to drink in its caves, and then didst light me on to God. Thou didst like one who goes by night, and carries the light behind him, and profits not himself, but maketh persons wise that follow him. . . . Through thee I was a poet, through thee a Christian."⁴⁸ And just as the earthly Virgil led Statius to salvation, so now, as a fulfilled figure, he leads Dante: for Dante too has received from him the lofty style of poetry, through him he is saved from eternal damnation and set on the way of salvation; and just as he once illumined Statius, without himself seeing the light that he bore and proclaimed, so now he leads Dante to the threshold of the light, which he knows of but may not himself behold.

Thus Virgil is not an allegory of an attribute, virtue, capacity, power, or historical institution. He is neither reason nor poetry nor the Empire. He is Virgil himself. Yet he is not himself in the same way as the historical characters whom later poets have set out to portray in all their historical involvement, as for example, Shakespeare's Caesar or Schiller's Wallenstein. These poets disclose their historical characters in the thick of their earthly existence; they bring an important epoch to life before our eyes, and look for the meaning of the epoch itself. For Dante the meaning of every life has its place in the providential history of the world, the general lines of which are

laid down in the Revelation which has been given to every Christian, and which is interpreted for him in the vision of the *Comedy*. Thus Virgil in the *Divine Comedy* is the historical Virgil himself, but then again he is not; for the historical Virgil is only a *figura* of the fulfilled truth that the poem reveals, and this fulfillment is more real, more significant than the *figura*. With Dante, unlike modern poets, the more fully the figure is interpreted and the more closely it is integrated with the eternal plan of salvation, the more real it becomes. And for him, unlike the ancient poets of the underworld, who represented earthly life as real and the life after death as shadow, for him the other world is the true reality, while this world is only *umbra futurorum*—though indeed the *umbra* is the prefiguration of the transcendent reality and must recur fully in it.

For what has been said here of Cato and Virgil applies to the *Comedy* as a whole. It is wholly based on a figural conception. In my study of Dante as a poet of the earthly world (1929) I attempted to show that in the *Comedy* Dante undertook "to conceive the whole earthly historical world . . . as already subjected to God's final judgment and thus put in its proper place as decreed by the divine judgment, to represent it as a world already judged . . . in so doing, he does not destroy or weaken the earthly nature of his characters, but captures the fullest intensity of their individual earthly-historical being and identifies it with the ultimate state of things" (p. 108). At that time I lacked a solid historical grounding for this view, which is already to be found in Hegel and which is the basis of my interpretation of the *Divine Comedy*; it is suggested rather than formulated in the introductory chapters of the book. I believe that I have now found this historical grounding; it is pre-

cisely the figural interpretation of reality which, though in constant conflict with purely spiritualist and Neoplatonic tendencies, was the dominant view in the European Middle Ages: the idea that earthly life is thoroughly real, with the reality of the flesh into which the Logos entered, but that with all its reality it is only *umbra* and *figura* of the authentic, future, ultimate truth, the real reality that will unveil and preserve the *figura*. In this way the individual earthly event is not regarded as a definitive self-sufficient reality, nor as a link in a chain of development in which single events or combinations of events perpetually give rise to new events, but viewed primarily in immediate vertical connection with a divine order which encompasses it, which on some future day will itself be concrete reality; so that the earthly event is a prophecy or *figura* of a part of a wholly divine reality that will be enacted in the future. But this reality is not only future; it is always present in the eye of God and in the other world, which is to say that in transcendence the revealed and true reality is present at all times, or timelessly. Dante's work is an attempt to give a poetic and at the same time systematic picture of the world in this light. Divine grace comes to the help of a man menaced by earthly confusion and ruin—this is the framework of the vision. From early youth he had been favored by special grace, because he was destined for a special task; at an early age he had been privileged to see revelation incarnated in a living being, Beatrice—and here as so often figural structure and Neoplatonism are intertwined. In her lifetime she had, though covertly, favored him with a salutation of her eyes and mouth; and in dying she had distinguished him in an unspoken mysterious way.⁴⁹ When he strays from the right path, the departed Beatrice, who for him was revelation incarnate,

finds the only possible salvation for him; indirectly she is his guide and in Paradise directly; it is she who shows him the unveiled order, the truth of the earthly figures. What he sees and learns in the three realms is true, concrete reality, in which the earthly *figura* is contained and interpreted; by seeing the fulfilled truth while still alive, he himself is saved, while at the same time he is enabled to tell the world what he has seen and guide it to the right path.

Insight into the figural character of the *Comedy* does not offer a universal method by which to interpret every controversial passage; but we can derive certain principles of interpretation from it. We may be certain that every historical or mythical character occurring in the poem can only mean something closely connected with what Dante knew of his historical or mythical existence, and that the relation is one of fulfillment and figure; we must always be careful not to deny their earthly historical existence altogether, not to confine ourselves to an abstract, allegorical interpretation. This applies particularly to Beatrice. The romantic realism of the nineteenth century overemphasized the human Beatrice, tending to make the *Vita Nova* a kind of sentimental novel. Since then a reaction has set in; the new tendency is to do away with her entirely, to dissolve her in an assortment of increasingly subtle theological concepts. But actually there is no reality in such a choice. For Dante the literal meaning or historical reality of a figure stands in no contradiction to its profounder meaning, but precisely "figures" it; the historical reality is not annulled, but confirmed and fulfilled by the deeper meaning. The Beatrice of the *Vita Nova* is an earthly person; she really appeared to Dante, she really saluted him, really withheld her salutation later on, mocked him, mourned for a dead friend and for

her father, and really died. Of course this reality can only be the reality of Dante's experience—for a poet forms and transforms the events of his life in his consciousness, and we can take account only of what lived in his consciousness and not of the outward reality. It should also be borne in mind that from the first day of her appearance the earthly Beatrice was for Dante a miracle sent from Heaven, an incarnation of divine truth. Thus the reality of her earthly person is not, as in the case of Virgil or Cato, derived from the facts of a historic tradition, but from Dante's own experience: this experience showed him the earthly Beatrice as a miracle.⁵⁰ But an incarnation, a miracle are real happenings; miracles happen on earth, and incarnation is flesh. The strangeness of the medieval view of reality has prevented modern scholars from distinguishing between figuration and allegory and led them for the most part to perceive only the latter.⁵¹ Even so acute a theological critic as Mandonnet (op. cit., pp. 218-19) considers only two possibilities: either Beatrice is a mere allegory (and this is his opinion) or she is *la petite Bice Portinari*, a notion that he ridicules. Quite aside from the misunderstanding of poetic reality that such a judgment shows, it is surprising to find so deep a chasm between reality and meaning. Is the *terrena Jerusalem* without historical reality because it is a *figura aeternae Jerusalem*?

In the *Vita Nova*, then, Beatrice is a living woman from the reality of Dante's experience—and in the *Comedy* she is no *intellectus separatus*, no angel, but a blessed human being who will rise again in the flesh at the Last Judgment. Actually there is no dogmatic concept that would wholly describe her; certain events in the *Vita Nova* would not fit into any allegory, and in regard to the *Comedy* there is the additional problem of drawing an exact distinction be-

tween her and various other persons of the *Paradiso*, such as the Apostle-Examiners and St. Bernard. Nor can the special character of her relation to Dante be fully understood in this way. Most of the older commentators interpreted Beatrice as theology; more recent ones have sought subtler formulations; but this has led to exaggeration and mistakes: even Mandonnet, who applies to Beatrice the extremely broad notion of *ordre surnaturel*, derived from the contrast with Virgil, comes up with hairsplitting subdivisions, makes mistakes,⁵² and forces his concepts. The role that Dante attributes to her is perfectly clear from her actions and the epithets attached to her. She is a figuration or incarnation of revelation (*Inf.*, 2, 76): *sola per cui l'umana spezie eccede ogni contento da quel ciel, che ha minor li cerchi sui* ("through whom alone mankind excels all that is contained within the heaven which has the smallest circles"); (*Purg.*, 6, 45): *che lume fia tra il vero e l'intelletto* ("who shall be a light between truth and intellect") which, out of love (*Inf.*, 2, 72), divine grace sends to man for his salvation, and which guides him to the *visio Dei*. Mandonnet forgets to say that she is precisely an incarnation of divine revelation and not revelation pure and simple, although he quotes the pertinent passages from the *Vita Nova* and from St. Thomas, and the above-mentioned invocation, *O Donna di virtù, sola per cui, etc.* One cannot address the "supernatural order" as such, one can only address its incarnate revelation, that part of the divine plan of salvation which precisely is the miracle whereby men are raised above other earthly creatures. Beatrice is incarnation, she is *figura* or *idolo Christi* (her eyes reflect her twofold nature, *Purg.*, 31, 126) and thus she is not exhausted by such explanations; her relation to Dante cannot fully be explained by dogmatic considerations. Our

remarks are intended only to show that theological interpretation, while always useful and even indispensable, does not compel us to abandon the historical reality of Beatrice—on the contrary.

With this we close for the present our study of *figura*. Our purpose was to show how on the basis of its semantic development a word may grow into a historical situation and give rise to structures that will be effective for many centuries. The historical situation that drove St. Paul to preach among the Gentiles developed figural interpretation and prepared it for the influence it was to exert in late antiquity and the Middle Ages.

ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI IN
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Scenes from the Drama
of European Literature

Erich Auerbach

Foreword by Paolo Valesio

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NOTES

"Figura"

¹ As P. Friedlaender informs me, the *barbarica pestis* is probably the sting of a ray, by which Odysseus was mortally wounded; *subinis* is uncertain. [As is my translation of it. TRANS.]

² In late antiquity (Chalcidius, Isidore) and in the Middle Ages it reappears in a play on words with *pictura*. Cf. E. R. Curtius in *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie*, 58 (1938), 45.

³ Many later definitions take this direction. Cf. *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, VI, part 1, col. 722, l. 54.

⁴ In Aristotle (and in Plato) *typōi* means "in general," "in broad outlines," "as a rule." His phrase *pachulōs kai typōi* (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094b, 20), or *kath' holou lechthen kai typōi* was handed down by way of Irenaeus (2, 76) and Boethius (*Topicorum Aristoteles interpretatio*, 1, 1 [*Patrologia Latina*, LXIV, col. 911]) to the French and Italian, cf. Godefroy, s.v. *figural*: *Il convient que la manière de procéder en ceste œuvre soit grosse et figurele*. Or s.v. *figuralment*: *Car la manière de produyre/ Ne se peut monstrier ne deduyre/ Par effect, si non seulement/ Grosselement et figuraulment* (Greban). In Italian the understanding for the combination *sommariamente e figuramente* seems to have been lost at an early date; cf. the examples in Tommaseo-Bellini, *Dizionario della Lingua Italiana* (1869), II, part 1, p. 789, s.v. *figura* 18.

⁵ *Schēma* has meanings that do not occur or that did not persist in *figura*, as, for example, the meaning of "constitution."

⁶ Cf. also the shaping of tones in 2, 412-13: *per chordas orga-*

nici quae/ mobilibus digitis expergefata figurant ("which harpers with nimble fingers arouse and shape on the strings").

[†] Accordingly, *forma* usually appears where two syllables are needed. Even in Lucretius the relation between the two words is rather loose and vacillating. There are passages, however, particularly in Lucretius, where the two concepts are sharply distinguished; as when he speaks of the primal elements:

*quare . . . necessesit
natura quoniam constant neque facta manu sunt
unius ad certam formam primordia rerum
dissimili inter se quadam volitare figura.
(2, 377-80)*

(And so it must be that the first beginning of things, existing as they do by nature and not being hand-made after the definite form of one single pattern, must some of them have different shapes as they fly about.)

Like the *formai servare figuram* of 4, 69, this clearly expresses the well-known relation between *morphē* and *schēma*, which Ernout-Meillet, loc. cit. suggests with *la configuration du moule*. Cf. Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I, 90.

[‡] The last three words (as Munro has pointed out) reflect the formula of Democritus and Leucippus: *rysmos, tropē, diathigē* (Cf. Diels, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 2, 4th edition, p. 22). Aristotle employs *schēma* in explaining *rysmos* (*Metaphysics*, 985b, 16 and 1042b, 11; *Physics*, 188a, 24). Lucretius translated the term by *figura*.

[§] A few passages: 2, 385, 514, 679, 682; 3, 190, 246; 6, 770.

[¶] The transition from "*figura* of the material" to "*figura* of the reproduced object" was effected only very gradually, first in the poets. Cf. (aside from Lucretius) Catullus, 64, 50, and 64, 265; Propertius, 2, 6, 33. In Velleius Paterculus, 1, 11, 4, *Expressa similitudine figurarum* means "portraitlike."

^{||} Cf. also *Ad familiares*, 15, 16. On the other hand, Quintilian, 10, 2, 15: *illas Epicuri figuras . . .* ("those *figurae* of Epicurus").

^{|||} Later *figura* becomes quite frequent in the sense of "divine image"—and, in the Christian authors, of "idol"—or of the image on a coin.

^{||||} In Propertius and also in Ovid, *figurae* ("forms") at times

means "kind," "manner," as opposed to "class," "sort"; this is the same evolution as *species-espèce*.

^{|||} In connection with pastry, cf. also Martial, 14, 222, 1; Festus, 129, *ficta quaedam ex farina in hominum figuras* ("things made of dough in the shapes of men"); and Petronius, 33, 6, *ova ex farina figurata* ("eggs fashioned of meal"). The pastry-cook was often regarded and employed as a sculptor and decorator, an attitude revived by later periods, particularly the Renaissance, and the baroque and rococo periods; Cf. Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre*, Book 3, Chapter 7, and Creizenach's note on this passage in the Jubiläumsausgabe, Vol. 17, p. 344.

^{||||} In *Epist.*, 65, 7, Seneca has a passage significant in another connection, where *figura* stands for archetype, idea, *forma*, but in the Neoplatonic sense of the inner model of the forms in the mind of the artist. In this passage he also makes the comparison, which later became so frequent, between the artist and the Creator: the sculptor, says Seneca, can find the model (*exemplar*) of his work in himself or outside; it can be provided him by his eyes or his mind; and God has within him all the *exemplaria* of things: *plenus his figuris est quas Plato ideas appellat immortales* ("He is full of those figures that Plato calls immortal ideas"). Cf. Dürer: "For a good painter is inwardly full of figures (*voller Figur*); cf. E. Panofsky, *Idea* (1924), p. 70.

^{|||||} See Faral, *Les Arts poétiques du 12ème et du 13ème siècle* (Paris, 1924), pp. 48 ff. and 99 ff.

^{|||||} A noteworthy variant occurs in Ammianus Marcellinus, who uses the word for the topography of battlefields. Cf. *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, VI, part 1, 726, 37 ff.

^{|||||} In Sedulius, *Carmen Paschale*, 5, 101-2, there is a passage in which *figura* can hardly mean anything other than "face," as in modern French:

*Namque per hos colaphos caput est sanabile nostrum;
Haec sputa per Dominum nostram lavere figuram.*

(For our head can be healed by these blows. This spittle has washed our face in the Lord's person.)

Since the poet had spoken previously of *spuere in faciem* ("spitting in the face") and *colaphis pulsare caput* ("plying the head with blows"), the meaning of "face" cannot be doubted;

still, it is possible that Sedulius was led to choose the more general *figura* by the need for a trisyllable with a long middle syllable with which to conclude the line. In any event it is the only certain ancient example known to us of Latin *figura* for "face." Jeanneret's presumption, in *La Langue des tablettes d'exécration latines* (Neuchâtel, 1918), p. 108, that *figura* in the Minturnian tablet of execration means "face," is certainly unfounded, if only because of the juxtaposition with *membra* and *colorem*, which is very frequent. In the sense of "form" it belongs to the general attributes (or parts) of the body, with which the curse begins: then follow the special attributes. Jeanneret's contention is also rejected by Wartburg in FEW, *ad v. figura*, 9. The question remains unsettled in regard to a fragment of Laberius: *figura humana inimico (nimio) ardore ignescitur*, Ribbeck, 2, p. 343.

¹⁹ In the Septuagint Joshua is already called Jesus, which is a contraction of Joshua. Cf. the illustrations of the Vatican Scroll of Joshua, which is thought to be a sixth-century copy of a fourth-century original. The only part of it now available to me is a page in K. Pfister's *Mittelalterlicher Buchmalerei* (Munich, 1922), representing the setting up of the twelve stones (Josh. 4:20-1); in text and inscription Joshua is called *Iêsous ho tou Nauê* ("Jesus [the son] of Nave"), bears a halo, and is plainly intended to suggest Christ. Later allusions to the "figure" of Joshua are frequent; cf. Hildebert of Tours, *Sermones de diversis*, XXIII, *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 171, cols. 842 ff.

²⁰ *Figuraretur* means here at once "would be formed" and "would be figured," the latter by blood and water, the Lord's Supper and baptism. The juxtaposition of the two wounds in the side long remained an important theme. Cf. Burdach, *Vorspiel*, I, 1 (1925), pp. 162 and 212; Dante, *Par.*, 13, 37 ff.

²¹ *Ita et nunc sanguinem suum in vino consecravit qui tunc vinum in sanguine figuravit* ("so now also he consecrated his blood in wine who then had figured wine in blood").

²² Moses is in general a figuration of Christ, e.g., in the crossing of the Red Sea or the transformation of the bitter water into sweet water for baptism. But this does not prevent him, in the first example, from figuring the law in contradiction to his figuration of Christ.

²³ Cf. Hilary of Poitiers, *Tractatus mysteriorum*, 1 (*Corp. Vind.*, Vol. 65, p. 3), quoted in Labriolle, *History and Literature of Christianity* (London and New York, 1924), p. 243.

²⁴ Cf. Hilarian, *De cursu temporum*, *Patrologia Latina*, 13, col. 173, 2: *sabbati aeterni imaginem et figuram tenet sabbatus temporalis* ("the temporal sabbath is an image and figure of the eternal sabbath").

²⁵ How deeply ingrained the habit of interpretation had become in this world may be seen from the half jesting interpretation of gifts in the correspondence of St. Jerome (Letter 44, *Selected Letters of St. Jerome*, M. F. A. Wright [London and New York, 1933], pp. 176-7).

²⁶ St. Jerome attacks Origen for this, saying that he is *allegoricus semper interpres et historiae fugiens veritatem . . . nos simplicem et veram sequamur historiam ne quibusdam nubibus atque praestigiis involvamur* (Jeremiah 27, 3, 4; *Patrologia Latina*, 24, col. 849) ("always an allegorical exegete, shunning historical truth . . . as for us, let us simply follow the true history and not involve ourselves in phantasms and charlatanism"). On the relation of the Alexandrians, particularly Origen, to figural interpretation, cf. A. Freiherr von Ungern-Sternberg, *Der traditionelle Alttestamentl. Schriftbeweis . . .* (Halle, 1913), pp. 154 ff. On p. 160 he says of Origen: "He did not live in the biblical realism of scriptural proof."

²⁷ Cf. also *De civ.*, 15, 27; *ibid.*, 20, 21 (*Ad Isaiam*, 65, 17ff.).

²⁸ A. Rüstow calls my attention to the following stanza in a Shrovetide play by Hans Folz (about 1500):

Hör Jud, so merk dir und verstee
Dass alle Geschicht der alten Ee
Und aller Propheten Red gemein
Ein Figur der neuen Ee ist allein.

(Hear, Jew, take note and understand that the whole history of the old covenant and all the sayings of the Prophets are only a figure for the new covenant.)

²⁹ *Corp. Vind.*, Vol. 31, cf. Labriolle, *op. cit.*, p. 424.

³⁰ In addition, of course, we find *claudere* ("to close, conceal"), in recollection of Isa. 22:22 and Rev. 3:7. Cf. at a later day Peter Lombard, *Commentarium in Ps.*, 146, 6 (*Patrologia*

Latina, Vol. 191, col. 1276): *clausa Dei* "what God has concealed by obscurity of expression," and *prov. clus.*

²¹ Quoted according to *Patrologia Latina*, 59, col. 360.

²² Cf. Du Cange and Dante, *Purg.*, 10, 73, and 12, 22; Alain de Lille, *De planctu naturae*, *Patrologia Latina*, 210, 438; many passages might be found. Amyot says in *Thém.*, 52: *La parole de l'homme ressemble proprement à une tapisserie historiée et figurée* ("the speech of man truly resembles a figured and storied tapestry").

²³ Suggestions of figural prophecy are not entirely lacking in the Synoptic Gospels; as for example when Jesus likens himself to Jonah, Matt. 12:39 ff., Luke 11:29 ff. In St. John one might mention 5:46. But next to the passages in the Epistles, these are no more than feeble intimations.

²⁴ This was pointed out to me by R. Bultmann; the specialized literature is not available to me at the moment. Cf. among other passages Deut. 18:15; John 1:45; 6:14; 6:26 ff.; Acts 3:22 f.

²⁵ Sedulius, *Eleg.*, 1, 87: *Pellitur umbra die, Christo veniente figura* ("The shadow is dispelled by the day, the figure by Christ's coming").

²⁶ Though Prudentius does not seem to recognize figural interpretation, examples of it occur in his *Dittochaëon* (see Prudentius, ed. H. J. Thomson, 2 vols. [London and Cambridge (Mass.), 1949-53], Vol. 2, pp. 346 ff.).

²⁷ This includes legendary and mythical as well as strictly historical events. Whether the material to be interpreted is really historical or only passes as such is immaterial for our purpose.

²⁸ Cf. Emile Bréhier, *Les idées philosophiques de Philon d'Alexandrie*, 2d. ed. (Paris, 1925), pp. 35 ff.

²⁹ There are many intermediate forms combining figure and symbol; above all the Eucharist in which Christ is felt to be concretely present, and the cross as tree of life, *arbor vitae crucifixae*, which played a significant role extending roughly from the fourth-century poem "*De cruce*," cf. Labriolle, op. cit., p. 318, to the "spiritual" Franciscan Ubertino de Casale or Dante and beyond.

³⁰ In the prayer corresponding to the *Quam oblationem* of the present-day Roman mass, the book *De sacramentis* (fourth cen-

tury) has the following text: *Fac nobis hanc oblationem ascriptam, ratam, rationabilem, acceptabilem, quod figura est corporis et sanguinis Christi. Qui pridie . . .* ("Make for us this offering consecrated, approved, reasonable, and acceptable, which is a figure of the body and blood of Christ. Who on the day before he suffered . . ."). See Dom F. Cabrol in *Liturgia: Encyclopédie populaire des connaissances liturgiques*, ed. R. Aigrain (Paris, 1930), p. 543. Cf. also a much later text, the *Rhythmus ad Sanctam Eucharistiam* (thirteenth century):

*Adoro te devote, latens deitas
Quae sub his figuris vere latitas*

(Humbly I adore thee, hidden Deity
which beneath these figures art concealed from me)

and later:

*Jesu quem velatum nunc adspicio,
Oro fiat illud quod tam sitio,
Ut te revelata cernens facie
Visu sim beatus tuae gloriae.*

(Jesus whom thus veiled I must see below,
When shall that be given which I long for so,
That at last beholding thy uncovered face,
Thou shalt satisfy me with thy fullest grace?)

(Trans. J. M. Neale, *Collected Hymns*
[London, 1914], p. 63.)

³¹ Many allusions may be found in Gilson, *Les idées et les lettres*, esp. pp. 68 ff. and 155 ff. In his article, "*Le moyen âge et l'histoire*" (in *L'Esprit de la philosophie médiévale*, Paris, 1932) he refers to the figural element in the medieval philosophy of history, but with no great emphasis, since his main concern was to uncover the medieval roots of modern conceptions. Cf. also, for the German religious drama, T. Weber, *Die Praefigurationen in geistlichen Drama Deutschlands*, Marburg Dissertation 1909, and L. Wolff, "*Die Verschmelzung des Dargestellten mit der Gegenwartswirklichkeit im deutschen geistlichen Drama des Mittelalters*," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 7, p. 267 ff. On figural

elements in the portrayal of Charlemagne in the *Chanson de Roland*, cf. A. Pauphilet's well-known article in *Romania*, LIX, esp. pp. 183 ff.

⁴³ Of course there are numerous analyses of the fourfold meaning of Scripture, but they do not bring out what strikes me as indispensable. It is natural that medieval theology, while distinctly differentiating the various forms of allegory (e.g., Petrus Comestor in the prologue to his *Historia scholastica*), should attribute no fundamental importance, but only a kind of technical interest to these distinctions. But even so outstanding a modern theologian as the Dominican Père Mandonnet, who gives an outline of the history of symbolism in his *Dante le Théologien* (Paris, 1935, pp. 163 ff.), regards the knowledge of these differentiations as a mere technical instrument for the understanding of texts, and takes no account of the different conceptions of reality involved.

⁴⁴ By that time of course the foundations of figural interpretation had already been destroyed; even many ecclesiastics no longer understood it. As Emile Mâle tells us (*L'Art religieux du 12ème siècle en France*, 3d ed., 1928, p. 391) Montfaucon interpreted the rows of Old Testament figures at the sides of certain church porches as Merovingian kings. In a letter from Leibniz to Burnett (1696, Gerhardt edition, III, 306) we find the following: "M. Mercurius van Helmont believed that the soul of Jesus Christ was that of Adam and that the new Adam repairing what the first had ruined was the same personage paying his old debt. I think one does well to spare oneself the trouble of refuting such ideas."

⁴⁵ In speaking of the architect, St. Thomas says *quasi idea* (*Quodlibetales*, IV, 1, 1). Cf. Panofsky, *Idea* (Leipzig, 1924), p. 20 ff. and note, p. 85; cf. also the quotation from Seneca in our note 15.

⁴⁶ See Zingarelli, *Dante*, 3d ed., 1931, pp. 1029 ff., and the literature cited in the note.

⁴⁷ Cf. J. Balogh in *Deutsches Dante-Jahrbuch*, 10, 1928, p. 202.

⁴⁸ Accordingly Dante, *Purg.*, 32, 102, describes *quella Roma onde Cristo è Romano* ("that Rome whereof Christ is a Roman") as the fulfilled kingdom of God.

⁴⁹ *Purg.*, 22, 69-73, Temple Classics ed. The fact that in the

Middle Ages Virgil often appears among the prophets of Christ has been several times discussed in detail since Comparetti. A certain amount of new material is to be found in the festival volume, *Virgilio nel medio evo*, of the *Studi medievali* (N.S.V., 1932); I should like to make special mention of K. Strecker's *Iam nova progenies caelo dimittitur alto*, p. 167, where a bibliography and some material on figural structure in general may be found; further E. Mâle, *Virgile dans l'art du moyen âge*, p. 325, particularly plate 1; and Luigi Suttina, *L'effigie di Virgilio nella Cattedrale di Zamorra*, p. 342.

⁵⁰ The words *mi converrebbe essere laudatore di me medesimo* ("it would behove me to be a praiser of myself"), *Vita Nuova*, (Temple Classics ed., p. 109) 29, are an allusion to II Cor. 12:1. Cf. Grandgent in *Romania*, 31, 14, and Scherillo's commentary.

⁵¹ This is indicated by the title of the book, by his first designation of her as *la gloriosa donna de la mia mente* ("the glorious lady of my mind"), by the name-mysticism, the trinitarian significance of the number nine, by the effects emanating from her, etc., etc. Sometimes she appears as a *figura Christi*; one need only consider the interpretation of her appearance behind Mo'na Vanna (24); the events accompanying the vision of her death (23); eclipse, earthquake, the hosannas of the angels; and the effect of her appearance in *Purg.*, 30. Cf. Galahad in the "*Queste del Saint Graal*," Gilson, *Les idées et les lettres*, p. 71.

⁵² To avoid misunderstandings it should be mentioned here that Dante and his contemporaries termed the figural meaning "allegory," while they referred to what is here called allegory as "ethical" or "tropological" meaning. The reader will surely understand why in this historical study we have stuck to the terminology created and favored by the Church Fathers.

⁵³ He denies that she ever smiles in spite of *Purg.*, 31, 133 ff., and 32, beginning. His remarks on Beatrice may be found in op. cit., pp. 212 ff.

St. Francis of Assisi in Dante's "Commedia"

¹ Modern edition by P. Eduardus Alenconiensis in the *Analecta Ord. Min. Cap.* (1900).