LEAP YEAR

BY JEFF DOLVEN

> Promise and fulfillment are real historical events.
>
> —Erich Auerbach, "Figura."[1]

A chimney, breathing a little smoke.
The sun, I can't see
making a bit of pink
I can't quite see in the blue.
The pink of five tulips
at five p.m. on the day before March first.
The green of the tulip stems and leaves
like something I can't remember,
finding a jack-in-the-pulpit
a long time ago and far away.[2]

The last day of February—he won't say whether it is the twenty-eighth or twenty-ninth—finds James Schuyler at his desk, looking out the window of his apartment onto Second Avenue. "Maybe I should get over the idea that the way to write a poem is to look out the window and put it all down," he would write sometime later in a letter to Ron Padgett. "But I don't see why."[3] It is the end of the day, and he is watching the sky change color outside, while inside, on the near side of the glass, five pink tulips stand in a glass of water. Five tulips, five in the afternoon: it is a composed scene, whatever it is composed for. Schuyler is sitting in front of it looking at what is in front of him, and looking, also, at his own looking. He cannot see the sun, which must have fallen below the buildings. What he does see is the pink of its setting—except that no, he cannot see the pink, quite, in all of the blue. So he must be anticipating it, looking ahead just a few minutes into the evening. This patient or only slightly impatient sketch-work makes for some gentle puzzling about perception, expectation, and desire.

Perception, expectation, desire, and memory. The green of the tulip's stems and leaves is like something he can't remember, he says matter-of-factly. There is a feeling of likeness that arrives before whatever is like. (Perhaps like the pink that colors the sky before he can see it.)

Then, he does remember, or perhaps he admits that he remembers, admits that the "can't" was more of a "can't-bring-myself-to." The green reveals itself to be the green of a particular jack-in-the-pulpit. Schuyler was a devoted amateur botanist, and we should picture the plant, its stamen upright in a bowl of green, sheltered by the leaf-tip bending over its head. The name and the picture make a modest invitation to metaphor. A jack-in-the-pulpit has a certain detachment, up and away from the congregation, like Schuyler in the window, however far his tone may be from preacherly. The plant is a little phallic, too, and the poem will make use of that erotic charge. Somewhere past the reach of such associations is the reach of the memory itself, which comes to his desk from some time ago and far away. The particular green transports the poem into the past, so that its composed, present-tense situation is now divided between two moments, with just that filament of green between them.

What to make of the gap that filament crosses? The interval between two moments, between two greens? To ask such questions is one way of identifying what "February" is about, for they are questions posed by a particular kind of poem, a not-yet-entirely-post-Romantic lyric, about the resources of figuration. But "February" is not easily dislodged from the ordinary, daily, unmetaphorical habit of sitting looking out the window. It is like many other Schuyler poems in that regard, and like many of his letters and diary entries and apparently like many of his days. It is also like itself. That is: "February" sounds like itself, and if it has moments of transport, they never displace the poem from the window-seat vantage of its speaking, nor much shake its commitment to the pace of thoughtful observation. It has a consistent style from beginning to end. To say so, to say it has a style, is to speak of certain consolations in its self-similarity. It is also to open a quiet contest between those basic terms, style and metaphor; or more precisely, I will suggest, between style and *figura*—*figura* being a kind of metaphor that makes its leap across a historical difference, but forgets neither where it comes from nor where it is going.

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Why it was December then
and the sun was on the sea
by the temples we'd gone to see.
One green wave moved in the violet sea
like the UN Building on big evenings,

green and wet
while the sky turns violet.
A few almond trees
had a few flowers, like a few snowflakes
out of the blue looking pink in the light.
(4)

Style could be an imposing idea for Schuyler. His friends tended to be suspicious or dismissive of it, both its authority and its tedium. "Stylistic preoccupation often makes for sameness," Frank O'Hara wrote in an essay called "Nature and the New Painting"; he warned against "the trap of the look."[4] But there were moments when Schuyler still felt the charisma of an individual style even in its most traditional form. He wrote to his friend, the painter Fairfield Porter: "So much of art is an exercising of an achieved style—there are so many Monets I would like singularly and together, without finding a special uniqueness in any of them. The uniqueness seems to me between the total work and the rest of the world."[5] This idea of style is simultaneously an achievement and an estrangement, a different way of writing that advertises the value of its distinction. It is a regular term of praise when Schuyler writes about art, as he did through the later '50s and into the '60s for *ARTnews* and other journals. Ronald Bladen has "an original temperament and an emerging style"; Elaine de Kooning "has developed this style over a long period of time"; Michael Goldberg "has evolved a style"; looking at Leland Bell, "one is struck by how formed his style already was."[6]

The easy association of style and form in the last remark is particularly revealing. The two words often point in different directions. Form is vertical: it points up to the ideal or the model or the pattern that presides over its instances, without being reducible to them. Style is horizontal: it points all around, coordinating the instances with one another, and it lives nowhere else but on that plane, in that network. When the two are brought together, the agenda is usually to idealize a particular, individual idiom. (The philosopher Richard Wollheim speaks of the "formed style" of the great artist.[7]) A style with form is distinct from the sorts of stylish affinities given to us by fashion or friendship; it borrows form's philosophical dignity to single out a style, almost as though a style itself, or even the maker of it, could be an aesthetically autonomous work of art.

What we see of Schuyler's style is ostensibly modest: plain in diction, even in tone; it is discernibly Romantic in its preoccupations, but it keeps to a middle mood, practicing an offhanded enjambment and

other self-effacing evasions of strict form. He is deferential to what he sees and to nature. The transport of memory, when it visits him, occasions only subdued surprise: "Why it was December then." For all that, the distance he is carried turns out to be significant. Not just time ago and far away in his personal history, but at some archetypal remove, a site of temples by the sea. The memory summoned by that green flower is a point of contact with something ancient and with a tradition of worship and mythopoeia. He recalls the strange image of a green wave in a violet or maybe a wine-dark sea. It is a little difficult to picture, until he compares it to the green glass of the United Nations Building against a violet sky. The antitype is, as it were, resolved by its type, the way a prophecy resolves in retrospect through the focusing lens of its fulfillment. We can better see what we saw before because it is like something we can see now. Perhaps what we see now was even foretold back then? That said, the UN Building is not identical with that green wave, its political powers of unification notwithstanding. It is like that green wave. Likewise the few flowers of the few almond trees, which are like the few snowflakes falling in the February sky. The blue and the pink are like the blue and pink back then, possibly even like each other, "blue looking pink." It is likeness that does the greatest share of the work here.

Like: it is an important word for Schuyler; important enough, characteristic enough, to say it's a notable part of his style. He uses it in preference to, even as a hedge against metaphor, against metaphor's simultaneous claims for transport and for identity. Likeness has advantages over such vaulting ambitions. The word *like* is vested more in perception, more in the seer than in the seen. (We are apt to say that something *looks like* something else or *sounds like* it, to include the subject in explanation of the resemblance.) Likeness does not have particular metaphysical ambitions. It does not, generally, ask for a rearrangement of the world, let alone a transfiguration, so much as it prompts a recognition of how things already are. It is a style word: things that are of the same style are like one another. This kind of style is not the achieved idiosyncrasy of the great artist, not style as a metaphor for the great soul. It is a more modest principle of collation, as simile is modest compared to metaphor, and the *like* of likeness can be more modest still than simile, not a figure at all but just an evident and ordinary kinship. English affords the happy coincidence of the word's two primary senses, like and like, likeness and liking, and this fact too serves Schuyler. For there is the unspoken question, what has happened to the poem's "we"—"the temples we'd gone to

see"? We almost didn't notice it, and already it is gone; someone is gone, someone else is gone. It is as though, just as likeness is being substituted for metaphor, so likeness is also being substituted for love.

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A gray hush
in which the boxy trucks roll up Second Avenue
into the sky. They're just
going over the hill.
The green leaves of the tulips on my desk
like grass light on flesh,
and a green-copper steeple
and streaks of cloud beginning to glow.
(4)

But now there comes a moment of transport, even though we are back on Second Avenue: the boxy trucks roll up into the sky. We might as well call it a metaphor. The tenor, to adopt I. A. Richards's workmanlike distinction, is an act of assumption, an ascent to heaven.[8] The vehicle is a truck: not justified, just going over the hill. How Schuyler manages the moments of this experience is something of a signature. The same thing happens in his elegy for O'Hara, when he sees, again out the window,

Sandy
billows, or so they look,
of feathery ripe heads of grass[.]
(42)

The waves are, on second glance, really fields. Again, in another poem from his first volume:

the bales of cotton candy
in the slanting light
are ornamental cherry trees.
(3)

These passages have the common property of treating the metaphor as an error of perception, which is corrected, explained away, when the poem takes a moment to rub its eyes. The extravagant movement of the figure is reversed so that it tends homeward instead, a gentle letdown. In the case of the boxy trucks, the revision allows Schuyler to back away from a transport that broached another kind of time, a

brief transcendence. What he returns to is his desk, to the tulips on the desk and what they are like: "like grass light on flesh," like the green copper steeple and the streaks of cloud that are finally beginning to glow in a visible sign of dusk.

A metaphor does not just connect any two convenient parts of the world, as Nelson Goodman reminds us. The figure is activated by the distance it bridges, not just a matter of range, he says, but of realm. Metaphor requires a "migration of concepts, an alienation of categories."[9] To measure this distance is to size up the risk of the figure. Metaphor stretches across differences that may not easily be bridged in ordinary experience. There may be no way, that is, to make the connection real. That risk—the risk run when a metaphor is also a hope—helps make sense of the carefully composed quotidian realm that Schuyler has assembled around himself. It is, as I have said, a realm of likeness, of simile and of simple resemblance. The tulips are like one another and their pink resembles the incipient pink of the sky. There is a steeple, too, which is both an object of perception in itself and a figure for the church of which it is a part. Not a metaphor, however; rather a synecdoche, part for whole, or more generally a metonymy, for they are side by side in experience, in the real world that they inhabit and we inhabit together. That side-by-side relationship obtains subtly of all the elements of Schuyler's composition, those that look like one another and those that do not. It is as though they had the power to imply one another, in a kind of harmony that is not only resemblance, but habitual association, their belonging in the same realm and also evoking, even standing for that realm.

Standing for, again, by metonymy. Metonymy operates and can only operate within a context of familiarity, a particular room of a recognizable kind. It calls upon associations that are already available in the culture and the experience of the reader. Harry Berger has made this case eloquently, in a study that broadly identifies metonymy with what he calls a traditional attitude, and metaphor with a modern attitude. Metonymy operates by continuity and association; its work is to "articulate or reaffirm preexisting states of affairs."[10] Its temporality is a kind of alreadyness, what is already here, already with us. Whereas metaphor (as Aristotle knew) is an occasion of surprise, of innovation; it is, quoting Berger again, a "creative force" against metonymy's "mimetic force."[11] The temporality of metaphor is a sudden and transfiguring *now*, or even a *not yet*—not yet particularly if your hope is that the relation it reveals could be made real and permanent. (Could become, that is, as familiar and reliable and this-worldly as a metonymy.) Berger

draws on Roman Jakobson, whose famous essay on the "Two Aspects of Language" begins with an analysis of varieties of linguistic aphasia and ends with speculation about the figural grounding of literary modes. Metaphor, he proposes, is the signature trope of Romanticism, and of its transcendental longings. Whereas metonymies make for realism: things side by side in writing, just the way they are in life.[12]

All of which will suggest why metonymy is the trope of style. For style is a matter of contiguity and continuity; style is already. Even a new style, an unprecedented, revolutionary style, can only be recognized as a style if we already see what it could be like, if it proposes continuities and associations, even if they are prospective. (Compare this recognition with a judgment of beauty, which is often held neither to depend upon nor to require anything or anyone else, but to be a singular encounter between subject and object.) A style is composed of elements, some of which are like one another in appearance, all of which are potentially metonymies for one another because they are found together. These principles define a style's wholeness, or at least its continuity. A reader must already know the tropes of the baroque to recognize the baroque, must already know the gestures and tics of Mozart to recognize Mozart. Perhaps you already know Schuyler, or if not Schuyler, then William Wordsworth and William Carlos Williams, who can both be heard in his poetry. And even if you know none of them, by the middle of the poem you already know the loose, plain sentence structures of "February," its talky ruminations, its color palette, and so on. It becomes familiar, and that familiarity is very much by design.

The only question is whether it is too familiar. Admirer as he was of the formed style, self-similarity could worry Schuyler too: "Do you think your paintings would keep gaining in quality—as I think they do—if you had been one of those dreary artists who hunt for it in their twenties, find it in their thirties and then do it for the rest of their lives?"[13] He is writing to Porter again. "Oh the acres of Kuniyoshi and Reginald Marsh: I don't say their work is without merit, but I think it's mostly an achieved manner, and manner, en masse, makes for ennui."[14]

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I can't get over
how it all works in together
like a woman who just came to her window
and stands there filling it

jogging her baby in her arms.
She's so far off. Is it the light
that makes the baby pink?
I can see the little fists
and the rocking-horse motion of her breasts.
(5)

"I can't get over": the enjambment for a moment is a gap too imposing to cross: as though Schuyler were saying, "I cannot recover from the loss of that time, the temples by the sea, and the other half of that we"; "I cannot get back there from here," or perhaps, "I cannot get back here from there." But the line's tone hasn't settled before it shifts, corrects itself, from loss to wonder. What he cannot get over is not the past, but the wonderful fullness and unity of the composition before him: it is a term of art from painting, "work[ing] in," how the colors are mixed and the shapes modeled, how everything he sees before him is like one picture. We are carried beyond even metonymy, to a single medium that unifies the elements as color. The woman who fills the window is a miraculous addition. He cannot get over the completeness of it. Cannot get over it, and perhaps cannot get beyond it, in its compositional achievement. It is wonderfully present to his looking.

Still that is not enough. Something more is going on. The woman in the other window, who stands there filling it—she is also his double, another window-looker, and the word "filling" has some of the same painterly energy to it as "working in." If someone is making this scene, the woman has a claim to rival the poet's. With her child, in the window's frame, she also adds a significant focus. The poem holds very loosely the various iconic potentials that constellate around her. Does she recall Schuyler's own childhood, an idyll of infant comfort? (She is so far off; is she also long ago? The poem has already shown it can remember things that it cannot remember.) Or is she another maker, surveying her work? She did make the baby, presumably. Or is this tableau a madonna and child, with all of the past and future of that image, the redemptive promise of a first and a second coming?[15] The poem experiments not only with metaphor, but with *figura*: with the figure once and future, which can both be in history, and also bend history around like a bow to meet itself again in fulfillment of an original potential. She is so far off, but she is also so near, near enough that he can see the little fists and the sway of her breasts. There is a transcendental shiver in the question "Is it the light / that makes the baby pink?" At the same time, the details couldn't be more homely, in some ways more homely than the relatively austere composure of the writing desk.

Such questions are not questions that style can ask. They cannot be compassed by metonymies, which are the tropes of this world, not the next. Something has erupted into the poem's complacency, a figural concentration that seems to impart a new gravity and grandeur. On a certain kind of reading, such concentration would have to be what the poem is for, the transcendental gesture that its ordinariness could only exist to stage. And indeed, the moments when the poem doubles the scene of its composition are important, whether that doubling is historical or transcendental or both. But such doubling is not the only possible source of strong feeling. Recall the Schuyler who considered art itself to be "the exercising of an achieved style. . . . The uniqueness seems to me between the total work and the rest of the world." In a letter to another painter friend, John Button, he elaborates on something like this idea:

> Style in art is not a matter of study, practice, revision or refinement of diction (means) but of vision. The intensity with which you project a painting, the degree to which you make each element in the painting exist not for itself alone but as a part of a complete revelation, will always make my scalp tingle with joy[.][16]

Here style is the ability of subjective perception to project a unity onto the painting and thereby onto the world; style as the revelation of that unity, entire, leaving nothing out, and joyful. Such a style is recognizable in the terms of resemblance and metonymy, but it is also luminous and singular, not because it is formed, but because it is complete. In the letter, he immediately feels vulnerable, or just absurd, voicing such a claim, and he breaks decorum to ease himself back down to earth: "We hold these (belch) truths to be self-evident."[17] The sentence is a more ordinary trick of style, a hackneyed phrase and a parenthetical belch. But what seems to be a defensive letdown communicates its own backhanded ambition, that these truths could be self-evident, obvious; that vision, in its revelatory aspect, might be available as a refinement of ordinary vision, as a style of looking and making. Style in its opposition to *figura* need not be mere familiarity, mere taken-for-grantedness, but can be a luminous gift of the entire present.

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> It's getting grayer and gold and chilly.
> Two dog-sized lions face each other

at the corners of the roof.
It's the yellow just inside the tulips.
It's the shape of a tulip.
It's the water in the drinking glass the tulips are in.
It's a day like any other.

(5)

As the letter comes back to earth, so the poem comes back to the room, and back to the present—back to the present, that is, if the infant somehow stood for an ingathered, figural past and future. Now it is grey and cold and chilly, the lines are resigned to winter and to the end of the day. Except not quite: grey and *gold* and chilly, the line reads, against expectation. Is the gold a sunset streak in the gray? Or is it a memory, or an inference about what must be behind the clouds? By this point, we are accustomed to such questions, and their ambivalence about how much time description takes in. Two dog-sized lion-gargoyles face each other from opposite sides of the cornice. There is a general sense of return or retreat to the space of writing. Likewise to the metonymies of Schuyler's style, the common properties of which have by now come to invoke or imply one another in a way that makes him feel at home with himself and perhaps us with him.

Some version of this effect is available with any writer. It can be a matter of the place or the places the writer constructs, his or her familiar rooms, the way they are constructed, the kind of language with which they are typically built and furnished. It is an individual analogue of the effect of a local or a period style, the way things were at a particular time and place, the way they feel when you remember them. Style, after all, is history—in the felt sense of history as experience of other times and places—something that Lorenzo Valla and Carlo Ginzburg and in some sense all of us know.[18] The variety of styles around us, in buildings or cars or hemlines, are the ways we can tell where and when the elements of the present come from. The result is the past as a series of synchronic affinities, unified moments when everything looked and sounded like everything else, jointly composed by resemblance and metonymy. Even where those styles are polytemporal, made up of stuff from different times, they are the characteristic polytemporality of a given moment. Everything works in together. To see in terms of style is to dispose yourself toward continuity rather than historical rupture. (The metaphors for stylistic change, for the change that comes from within style itself, are traditionally those of the stages of life, early, middle, and late, and more recently the evolution of species.[19]) Schuyler flirts with an alternative, with the capacity of a

metaphor to overcome time, to defeat time; of figure—of *figura*—to bring the past into the present or at least to promise its future return. But style does not work that way. Style tells time, tells where our time comes from, perhaps where it is going; above all, it works things in, and tells what time it is now.

That recognition might be precisely a resting point, the poem's answer to itself in its own style. But it has one more move to make. "It's getting grayer." The final turn, back to the desk, the poem's here and now, is accomplished by that ordinary and peculiar construction "[i]t's"—what the linguists call a dummy pronoun, having no referent. In fact its referent is everything. Here is a strong, grammatical statement of the unity of the situation, how it can be compassed in an *it*, an *it* with which it is identical. For this equation there is no need of stylistic recognition, no need of mimesis nor metonymy, no split time to gather or bridge, just ontology. Is that enough? The construction returns in the poem's last four lines as matter for renewed meditation. "It's the yellow dust inside the tulips." That existential *it* is crossed here with the *it's* of an explanation, as though there were still some pending question, as though to say that what's really going on here, or what really makes the difference, is the yellow in the pink tulips. "It's the shape of the tulip." The same double "[i]t's," summing and pointing, now offering up as its answer the constant of form itself. "It's the water in the drinking glass the tulips are in." A beautiful, demotic, mock-careless Schuylerian line, with its dangling preposition; it extends the possibility of a stabilizing constant now to the lens of the water glass. These lines are all answers. None of them, apparently, is quite good enough.

Until we come to "It's a day like any other."[20] Ah: finally, the return of "like," after all that "is." What comes to console us, and I think it is, on balance, intended as a consolation, is likeness, not identity. It *is* a day, but a day *like* any other. Similar to other days, having features that will be familiar. Also, a day metonymic of the others, the days of a life; as day itself is one of the most familiar metonymies for just about everything we can put in it; as we say, "It was a good day." To adapt a phrase Schuyler would use much later, that day is the day of the poem, surveyed from the hour of sunset. What it offers us is the sufficiency of Schuyler's style in a time that is, at present, just enough.

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> 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.[21]

Erich Auerbach's *figura* is implicit throughout the preceding pages. The term is one way of talking about a temptation that Schuyler refuses, the temptation to bridge two moments in time in such a way as to remember and experience them both, and to find between them a relation of anticipation and fulfillment. "February" twice hints at such possibility, and twice draws back. I have suggested the risk of such a wager: What if the promise cannot be kept? What if the second moment can neither recover nor redeem the first? That December by the temples in Agrigento was spent in the company of his lover of five years, Bill Aalto, a poet who had fought in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, and lost a hand training soldiers back in the States. They split before Schuyler returned to New York.[22] Alone at his desk, Schuyler seeks the local consolations of a style. That strong, exclusive choice, however—between style and *figura*—is not inevitable. Schuyler constructs it out of need, protecting the present from the injuries of time. It is perhaps from equal need, albeit of a different kind, that Auerbach works to establish their collaboration, their complementarity, and so let me conclude with a coda on the relation of *figura* and style in his masterpiece, *Mimesis*.

What is style for Auerbach? It is a term at least as important for him as *figura*. Primary is its usual sense of a way of writing, under the aspect of decorum, the fit or friction between language and its situations. The plot of *Mimesis* is the evolving encounter between two ideas about that relation. The first idea is the ancient and neoclassical doctrine of the separation of styles: the idea that a high style (generically, the style appropriate to tragedy or epic) is fit for noble subjects, and that a low style (the style of comedy, satire, or pastoral) is fit for common subjects. Style so understood encodes and enforces a separation of social class. The second idea is the spectacular affront of Christ's incarnation: the challenge to artistic and social order, the ongoing existential challenge of the fact that God's only begotten son is a poor man who goes among the poor and speaks to them in their language. With varying emphases, this contest is played out over 20

chapters, which describe the gradual, sometimes halting, but fundamentally progressive development of literary resources for treating the lives of ordinary people with full seriousness.

What allows Auerbach to plot this story is the assumption that each of the authors he studies has a style that will allow him to see whole the moment of writing. Each chapter of *Mimesis* begins with a long quotation, a touchstone subjected to an unsystematic but endlessly resourceful analysis of its diction and syntax, stylistic markers that Auerbach understands as the basic tools of literary representation. There is behind this strategy the basic, humanist idea that style is an index of history. But more than that, an almost mystical conviction there is a unity of style in any given historical epoch, such that its diverse products can be recognized as belonging together; and more radically, that any given detail can serve as a microcosm of the whole, whether that whole is a literary work, an author's corpus, or the place and moment when he or she writes.

> When people realize that epochs and societies are not to be judged in terms of a pattern concept of what is desirable absolutely speaking but rather in every case in terms of their own premises; . . . when they come to appreciate the vital unity of individual epochs, so that each epoch appears as a whole whose character is reflected in each of its manifestations; . . . it is only there that one can grasp what is unique, what is animated by inner forces, and what, in both a more concrete and a more profound sense, is universally valid.[23]

This passage suggests both the beauty and some of the limitations of his premise. As Edward Said puts it, introducing the book on the fiftieth anniversary of its English translation, Auerbach "resolutely sticks to his practice of working from disconnected fragments: each of the book's chapters is marked not only by a new author who bears little overt relationship to earlier ones, but also by a new beginning, in terms of the author's perspective and stylistic outlook."[24] It is not clear how you get from one chapter to the next, except by beginning again with a new sample. Nor is there a clear account of how and why one of these integral epochs gives way to another. Auerbach knows history as difference, and he knows it as climate; but what does he have to say about its relation to time and the forces of change?

Figura is not an answer to that question that will satisfy all historical curiosities. It makes time matter as the medium of the fulfillment of promises. It is not so much that the following of event upon event is explained, as that such local causation and change ceases to matter,

because it is overcome by the capacity of figuration to bridge the in-between. Auerbach is a student of this structure, as a feature especially of the medieval literary imagination. His account took shape first in his study of Dante Alighieri. But I think it is fair to say that it also shaped his own imagination and his method. One might go so far as to project it across the arc of *Mimesis* itself, to understand the plot of the book as getting under way with the singular event of the incarnation, the fusion of high and low in the person of Christ; and discovering its fulfillment in a second coming. That second coming is not of one greater man, Gustave Flaubert or Marcel Proust or even Virginia Woolf; but of a style: of the styles of modern realism as a diffused, distributed, linguistically immanent realization of the basic lesson that Christ taught.

Auerbach published his essay and his book on either side of the Second World War, and both of them from his exile in Turkey, where he taught at the Istanbul State University. His epilogue is a famously moving account of his hope that the story he tells, across languages whose speakers were so violently at odds, might contribute to their reconciliation: a reconciliation without cultural loss. One can imagine how his sense of style was shaped by the humane urgency of that work. We are all citizens, he tells us, of a common reality, which it is our common work to know. Style allows us to recognize how we all work in together, at least when we take enough distance on the problem, as a period style will seem, from the vantage of the present, to contain all the factions and fashions of its moment. *Figura* is the diachronic projection of this synchronic, stylistic monism; it is, as he puts it in *Mimesis*, a demonstration not of "chronological or causal development but . . . a oneness with the divine plan, of which all occurrences are parts and reflections."[25] *Figura* cannot be reduced to the microcosm-macrocosm relation that defines his concept of style. Its force depends on what it does not contain, on the gap in between, the difference, the interlude of wandering and exile and war; it depends on the possibility that the past might erupt into the present, in defiance of the momentum of events. One can understand why Auerbach needed to account for that exile, and why he looked for a promise that it could be bridged, indeed overcome, without forgetting. For him, metonymy was not enough: he needed metaphor. Similarity was not enough: he needed the identity of prophetic fulfillment, the antitype which is the type without being any less itself. Not a day like any other, or a year like the last year: but a leap year, or even an Easter Day.

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[1] Erich Auerbach, "Figura," in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984), 53.

[2] James Schuyler, *Collected Poems* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), 4. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number. "February" is quoted in its entirety, in five sections, at the beginning of the first five sections of this essay.

[3] Schuyler to Ron Padgett, 21 July 1968, in *Just the Thing: Selected Letters of James Schuyler 1951–1991*, ed. William Corbett (New York: Turtle Point Press, 2004), 204.

[4] Frank O'Hara, *Standing Still and Walking in New York*, ed. Donald Allen (Berkeley: Grey Fox Press, 1983), 46.

[5] Schuyler to Fairfield Porter, 16 July 1954, in *Letters*, 9.

[6] Schuyler, *Selected Art Writings*, ed. Simon Pettet (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1998), 234, 201, 218, 163.

[7] Richard Wollheim, "Pictorial Style: Two Views," in *The Concept of Style*, ed. Berel Lang (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1979), 133. Wollheim makes a strong case for what he calls the "psychological reality" of style, treating it as a basically expressive phenomenon: "only the paintings of painters are decipherable," on his view, and a painter is "someone with a formed style," that is, someone whose style has consistency and shape as the expression (but not merely transcription) of his or her psychological makeup (133).

[8] For an explanation of his distinction between the vehicle of the metaphor (the given image) and the tenor (the meaning to which the image transports the reader) see I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1936), 93–100.

[9] Nelson Goodman, *The Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968), 126.

[10] Harry Berger, Jr., *Figures of a Changing World* (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2015), 12.

[11] Berger, 17.

[12] See Roman Jakobson, "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances," in *Language in Literature*, ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1990), 113–14.

[13] Schuyler to Porter, Fall 1955, in *Letters*, 29.

[14] Schuyler to Porter, Fall 1955, in *Letters*, 29.

[15] In 1969, nearly 20 years after he wrote the poem, Schuyler answered a letter from "Miss Batie," addressing her now-lost queries about "February." She evidently asked about its religious significance, and he responds, "I had no religious intention, though I see why a poem whose 'idea,' if we may call it such, is that of an essential harmony, or perhaps congruity is a better word, might suggest one" (Schuyler, "Letter to Miss Batie," *Lingo* 8 [1998]: 9).

[16] Schuyler to John Button, 4 May 1956, in *Letters*, 35. The letter to Miss Batie, not included in the *Letters*, emphasizes the idea of completeness in the poem: "I know that I like an art where disparate elements form an entity. DeKooning's work, which I greatly admire, has less to do with it than that of Kurt Schwitter, whose collages are made of commercial bits and 'found' pieces but which always compose a whole striking completeness" (9).

[17] Schuyler to Button, 4 May 1956, in *Letters*, 35.

[18] Lorenzo Valla's *De Falso Credita et Ementita Constantini Donatione Declamatio* (1439) identified the Donation of Constantine, a supposed fourth-century gift of the western Roman Empire to the papacy, as a eighth-century forgery; Carlo Ginzburg, one of the most acute theorists of style and history, discusses the Donation and the

history of style-as-history in "Style: Inclusion and Exclusion," in *Wooden Eyes: Nine Reflections on Distance* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2001), 109–38.

[19] George Kubler's *The Shape of Time* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2008) surveys the metaphors of stylistic development in the course of a critique of style itself; see also James Ackerman, "Art and Evolution," in *The Nature and Art of Motion*, ed. Gyorgy Kepes (New York: George Braziller, 1963), 32–40.

[20] In the letter to Miss Batie, Schulyer suggests that the line was the original title: "The day on which I wrote the poem I had been trying to write a poem in a regular form about (I think) Palermo, the Palazzo Abatelli, which has splendid carved stone ropes around its doors and windows, and the chapels decorated by Serpotta with clouds of plaster cherubs; the poem turned out to be laborious and flat, and looking out the window I saw that something marvelous was happening to the light, transforming everything. It then occurred to me that this happened more often than not (a beautiful sunset I mean) and that it was 'a day like any other,' which I put down as a title. The rest of the poem popped out of its own accord. Or so it seems now" (9–10).

[21] Auerbach, "Figura," 53.

[22] Truman Capote, who also spent time in the Auden household on Ischia, recounts the split in a letter to Donald Windham in April of 1949; see Capote to Windham, 12 April 1949, in *Too Brief a Treat: The Letters of Truman Capote*, ed. Gerald Clarke (New York: Vintage, 2005), 74. Thanks to William Corbett for identifying Bill Aalto, and pointing me to the letter to Miss Batie. In that letter, from its many years' distance, Schuyler manages to treat the trip offhandedly, "a rather dusty and disappointing affair at the time" that was still "a pleasure to recollect" (9).

[23] Auerbach, *Mimesis*, trans. Willard Trask (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2003), 443–44.

[24] Auerbach, *Mimesis*, xx.

[25] Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 555.