

The Story of Eric Voegelin

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What emerges from these papers is that a wide variety of literary story can be read with Voegelin in mind. Not only that: a wide variety of story can be read critically according to Voegelin's topics (e.g. consciousness.) In short, we may say that Voegelin has articulated the mother-of-all-stories.

One of my favorite texts in this regard is volume 5 (now 18), *In Search of Order*, the pages on Hesiod. Voegelin writes:

The questing struggle for the truth of reality is the struggle of reality for its truth; it occurs within reality and involves the whole of the hierarchy of being, from the basic material structures to the formative experience of the not-experientiable Beyond.

It must be said that this text is itself literature: that is, it employs a number of literary devices, including paradox and a sort of anagogy ("the struggle of reality for its truth"), to tell a story about the story he is telling about the difficulty of writing. It is literature because it is self-reflexive; it is self-reflexive, because Voegelin understood the consciousness as a paradoxical entity both directed beyond itself and constituting a luminous state. Voegelin came to see his writing in terms of consciousness.

Otherwise, to speak as if "reality" quested would be nonsense. Not infrequently does one read a ravishing passage in the late Voegelin and catch oneself passively listening to the music and half in fear of being taken in by it.

One of the great examples of this kind of meta-story telling shows up at the beginning of vol 5, appropriately titled "The Beginning of the Beginning" where Voegelin imagines himself beginning to write a text but starting, like all classic poets, *in medias res*. Or, as he has taught us to say, in consciousness.

In passage after passage, Voegelin shows himself to be a writer's writer. From Laclos to Soseki to postmoderns like Murakami and Nadas and I would say, pace Voegelin himself, Laurence Sterne, that master of reflexive fiction. If there is a more seductive story than the one Voegelin begins to tell about the writer at the beginning of the final part of *Order and History*, I don't know what it is. I think people who read Voegelin just naturally start to see all stories as particular realizations of this mother of all stories. The fact that this panel has representatives from a variety of traditions illustrates the universality of Voegelin's story, which has become a standard by which to judge all stories. Like the Lesbian rule in Plato, his story is a flexible rule and nicely accommodates an enormous range of cultural variants. There is great promise in these pages for scholars of comparative literature.