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ET IN ARCADIA EGO: POUSSIN AND THE ELEGIAC TRADITION

1 In 1769 Sir Joshua Reynolds showed to his friend Dr. Johnson his latest picture: the double portrait of Mrs. Bouverie and Mrs. Crewe, still to be seen in Crewe Hall in England.¹ It shows the two lovely ladies seated before a tombstone and sentimentalizing over its inscription: one points out the text to the other, who meditates thereon in the then fashionable pose of Tragic Muses and Melancholias.² The text of the inscription reads: "*Et in Arcadia ego.*"

"What can this mean?" exclaimed Dr. Johnson. "It seems very nonsensical—I am in Arcadia." "The King could have told you," replied Sir Joshua. "He saw it yesterday and said at once: 'Oh, there is a tombstone in the background: Ay, ay, death is even in Arcadia.'"³

To the modern reader the angry discomfiture of Dr. Johnson is very puzzling. But no less puzzling is the quick understanding of George III, who instantly grasped the purport of the Latin phrase but interpreted it in a manner dissimilar to that which seems self-evident to most of us. In contrast to Dr. Johnson, we are no longer stumped by the phrase *Et in Arcadia ego*. But in contrast to George III, we are accustomed to reading a very different meaning into it. For us, the formula

¹ C. R. Leslie and Tom Taylor, *Life and Times of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, London, 1865, I, p. 325.

² See E. Wind, "Humanitätsidee und heroisiertes Porträt in der englischen Kultur des 18. Jahrhunderts," *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg*, 1930–1931, p. 156 ff., especially p. 222 ff.

³ Leslie and Taylor, *loc. cit.*

Et in Arcadia ego has come to be synonymous with such paraphrases as "Et tu in Arcadia vixisti," "I, too, was born in Arcadia," "Ego fui in Arcadia,"⁴ "Auch ich war in Arkadien geboren,"⁵ "Moi aussi je fus pasteur en Arcadie";⁶ and all these and many similar versions amount to what Mrs. Felicia Hemans expressed in the immortal words: "I, too, shepherds, in Arcadia dwelt."⁷ They conjure up the retrospective vision of an unsurpassable happiness, enjoyed in the past, unattainable ever after, yet enduringly alive in the memory: a bygone happiness ended by death; and not, as George III's paraphrase implies, a present happiness menaced by death.

I shall try to show that this royal rendering—"Death is even in Arcadia"—represents a grammatically correct, in fact, the only grammatically correct, interpretation of the Latin phrase *Et in Arcadia ego*, and that our modern reading of its message—"I, too, was born, or lived, in Arcady"—is in reality a mistranslation. Then I shall try to show that this mistranslation, indefensible though it is from a philological point of view, yet did not come about by "pure ignorance" but, on the contrary, expressed and sanctioned, at the expense of grammar but in the interest of truth, a basic change in interpretation. Finally, I shall try to fix the ultimate responsibility for this

⁴ This form of the phrase is found in Richard Wilson's picture (in the collection of the Earl of Strafford), cited below, p. 317.

⁵ This is the beginning of Friedrich Schiller's famous poem *Resignation* (quoted, for example, in Büchmann, *Geflügelte Worte*, 27th ed., p. 441 f., with many other instances from German literature), where the frustrated hero has renounced Pleasure and Beauty in favor of Hope and Truth and unsuccessfully requests compensation. In English dictionaries of quotations, the passage is often erroneously ascribed to Goethe (by way of confusion with the motto superscribed on his *Italienische Reise*, for which see below, p. 319); cf., e.g., Burt Stevenson, *The Home Book of Quotations*, New York, 1937, p. 94; *A New Dictionary of Quotations*, H. L. Mencken, ed., New York, 1942, p. 53 (here with the equally erroneous assertion that "the phrase begins to appear on paintings in the XVI century"); Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations*, Boston, 1947, p. 1043.

⁶ Jacques Delille, *Les Jardins*, 1782, quoted, e.g., in Büchmann, *loc. cit.*, and Stevenson, *loc. cit.*

⁷ *The Poetical Works of Mrs. Felicia Hemans*, Philadelphia, 1847, p. 398. See also below, p. 318, Note 49.

change, which was of paramount importance for modern literature, not on a man of letters but on a great painter.

Before attempting all this, however, we have to ask ourselves a preliminary question: how is it that that particular, not overly opulent, region of central Greece, Arcady, came to be universally accepted as an ideal realm of perfect bliss and beauty, a dream incarnate of ineffable happiness, surrounded nevertheless with a halo of "sweetly sad" melancholy?

There had been, from the beginning of classical speculation, two contrasting opinions about the natural state of man, each of them, of course, a "Gegen-Konstruktion" to the conditions under which it was formed. One view, termed "soft" primitivism in an illuminating book by Lovejoy and Boas,⁸ conceives of primitive life as a golden age of plenty, innocence and happiness—in other words, as civilized life purged of its vices. The other, "hard" form of primitivism conceives of primitive life as an almost subhuman existence full of terrible hardships and devoid of all comforts—in other words, as civilized life stripped of its virtues.

Arcady, as we encounter it in all modern literature, and as we refer to it in our daily speech, falls under the heading of "soft" or golden-age primitivism. But of Arcady as it existed in actuality, and as it is described to us by the Greek writers, almost the opposite is true.

To be sure, this real Arcady was the domain of Pan, who could be heard playing the syrinx on Mount Maenalus,⁹ and its inhabitants were famous for their musical accomplishments as well as for their ancient lineage, rugged virtue, and rustic hospitality; but they were also famous for their utter ignorance and low standards of living. As the earlier Samuel Butler was to summarize it in his well-known satire against ancestral pride:

The old Arcadians that could trace
Their pedigree from race to race
Before the moon, were once reputed
Of all the Grecians the most stupid,

⁸ A. O. Lovejoy and G. Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity*, Baltimore, I, 1935.

⁹ Pausanias, *Periegesis*, VIII, 36, 8: "Mount Maenalus is particularly sacred to Pan so that people assert that Pan could be heard there playing the syrinx."

Whom nothing in the world could bring
To civil life but fiddleing.¹⁰

And from a purely physical point of view their country lacked most of the charms which we are wont to associate with a land of ideal pastoral bliss. Polybius, Arcady's most famous son, while doing justice to his homeland's simple piety and love of music, describes it otherwise as a poor, bare, rocky, chilly country, devoid of all the amenities of life and scarcely affording food for a few meager goats.¹¹

Small wonder, then, that the Greek poets refrained from staging their pastorals in Arcady. The scene of the most famous of them, the *Idylls* of Theocritus, is laid in Sicily, then so richly endowed with all those flowery meadows, shadowy groves and mild breezes which the "desert ways" (William Lithgow) of the actual Arcady conspicuously lacked. Pan himself has to journey from Arcady to Sicily when Theocritus' dying Daphnis wishes to return his shepherd's flute to the god.¹²

It was in Latin, not in Greek, poetry that the great shift

¹⁰ Samuel Butler, *Satires and Miscellaneous Poetry and Prose*, R. Lamar, ed., Cambridge, 1929, p. 470.

¹¹ Polybius, *Historiae*, IV, 20. For further authors emphasizing the negative aspects of primordial simplicity, see, for example, Juvenal, who characterized a peculiarly boring orator as an "Arcadian youth" (*Saturae*, VII, 160) and Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii*, VIII, 7, who calls the Arcadians "acorn-eating swine." Even their musical achievements were disparaged by Fulgentius, *Expositio Virgilianae continentiae*, 748, 19 (R. Helm, ed., Leipzig, 1898, p. 90), who by *Arcadicae aures* (the reading *Arcadicis auribus* is better documented than, and preferable to, *arcaicis auribus*) meant "ears not susceptible to real beauty." The much discussed question as to whether there had existed in Arcady a genuine pastoral or bucolic poetry preceding Theocritus' *Idylls* now seems to have been decided in the negative. In addition to the literature adduced in E. Panofsky, "Et in Arcadia Ego; On the Conception of Transience in Poussin and Watteau," *Philosophy and History, Essays Presented to Ernst Cassirer*, R. Klibansky and H. J. Paton, eds., Oxford, 1936, p. 223 ff., see now B. Snell, "Arkadien, die Entstehung einer geistigen Landschaft," *Antike und Abendland*, I, 1944, p. 26 ff. An article by M. Petroni, "Das neue Arkadien," *ibidem*, III, 1948, p. 187 ff., does not contribute much to the problem discussed in this essay.

¹² Theocritus, *Idylls*, I, 123 ff.

took place and that Arcady entered upon the stage of world literature. But even here we can still distinguish between two opposite manners of approach, one represented by Ovid, the other by Virgil. Both of them based their conception of Arcady to some extent on Polybius; but they used him in diametrically opposed ways. Ovid describes the Arcadians as primeval savages, still representing that period "prior to the birth of Jupiter and the creation of the moon," to which Samuel Butler alludes:

Ante Jovem genitum terras habuisse feruntur
Arcades, et Luna gens prior illa fuit.
Vita ferae similis, nullos agitata per usus;
Artis adhuc expers et rude vulgus erat.¹³

"The Arcadians are said to have inhabited the earth before the birth of Jupiter; their tribe was older than the moon. Not as yet enhanced by discipline and manners, their life was similar to that of beasts; they were an uncouth lot, still ignorant of art." Very consistently, Ovid makes no mention of their one redeeming feature, their musicality: he made Polybius' Arcady even worse than it was.

Virgil, on the other hand, idealized it: not only did he emphasize the virtues that the real Arcady had (including the all-pervading sound of song and flutes not mentioned by Ovid); he also added charms which the real Arcady had never possessed: luxuriant vegetation, eternal spring, and inexhaustible leisure for love. In short, he transplanted the bucolics of Theocritus to what he decided to call Arcadia, so that Arethusa, the fountain nymph of Syracuse, must come to his assistance in Arcady,¹⁴ whereas Theocritus' Pan, as mentioned before, had been implored to travel in the opposite direction.

In so doing, Virgil accomplished infinitely more than a mere synthesis of "hard" and "soft" primitivism, of the wild Arcadian pine trees with the Sicilian groves and meadows, of Arcadian virtue and piety with Sicilian sweetness and sensuousness: he transformed two realities into one Utopia, a realm sufficiently remote from Roman everyday life to defy realistic interpretation (the very names of the characters as well as of

¹³ Ovid, *Fasti*, II, 289 ff.

¹⁴ Virgil, *Eclogues*, X, 4-6.

the plants and animals suggest an unreal, far-off atmosphere when the Greek words occur in the context of Latin verse), yet sufficiently saturated with visual concreteness to make a direct appeal to the inner experience of every reader.

It was, then, in the imagination of Virgil, and of Virgil alone, that the concept of Arcady, as we know it, was born—that a bleak and chilly district of Greece came to be transfigured into an imaginary realm of perfect bliss. But no sooner had this new, Utopian Arcady come into being than a discrepancy was felt between the supernatural perfection of an imaginary environment and the natural limitations of human life as it is. True enough, the two fundamental tragedies of human existence, frustrated love and death, are by no means absent from Theocritus' *Idylls*. On the contrary, they are strongly accentuated and depicted with haunting intensity. No reader of Theocritus will ever forget the desperate, monotonous invocations of the abandoned Simaetha, who, in the dead of night, spins her magic wheel in order to regain her lover;¹⁵ or the end of Daphnis, destroyed by Aphrodite because he has dared challenge the power of love.¹⁶ But with Theocritus these human tragedies are real—just as real as the Sicilian scenery—and they are things of the present. We actually witness the despair of the beautiful sorceress; we actually hear the dying words of Daphnis even though they form part of a "pastoral song." In Theocritus' real Sicily, the joys and sorrows of the human heart complement each other as naturally and inevitably as do rain and shine, day and night, in the life of nature.

In Virgil's ideal Arcady human suffering and superhumanly perfect surroundings create a dissonance. This dissonance, once felt, had to be resolved, and it was resolved in that vespertinal mixture of sadness and tranquillity which is perhaps Virgil's most personal contribution to poetry. With only slight exaggeration one might say that he "discovered" the evening. When Theocritus' shepherds conclude their melodious converse at nightfall, they like to part with a little joke about the behavior of nannies and billy goats.¹⁷ At the end of Virgil's

¹⁵ Theocritus, *Idylls*, II.

¹⁶ Theocritus, *Idylls*, I.

¹⁷ Theocritus, *Idylls*, I, 151 f.; V, 147 ff.

Eclogues we feel evening silently settle over the world: "Ite domum saturae, venit Hesperus, ite, capellae";¹⁸ or: "Majorisque cadunt altis de montibus umbrae."¹⁹

Virgil does not exclude frustrated love and death; but he deprives them, as it were, of their factuality. He projects tragedy either into the future or, preferably, into the past, and he thereby transforms mythical truth into elegiac sentiment. It is this discovery of the elegiac, opening up the dimension of the past and thus inaugurating that long line of poetry that was to culminate in Thomas Gray, which makes Virgil's bucolics, in spite of their close dependence on Greek models, a work of original and immortal genius. The Daphnis motif, for instance, was used by Virgil in two of his *Eclogues*, the Tenth and the Fifth. But in both cases, tragedy no longer faces us as stark reality but is seen through the soft, colored haze of sentiment either anticipatory or retrospective.

In the Tenth *Eclogue*, the dying Daphnis is boldly—and, it would seem, not without humor—transformed into a real person, Virgil's friend and fellow poet, Gallus. And while Theocritus' Daphnis is really dying because he has refused to love, Virgil's Gallus announces to a group of sympathizing shepherds and sylvan divinities that he is going to die because his mistress, Lycoris, has left him for a rival: she dwells in the dreary North but she is happy in the arms of her handsome soldier, Antony; he, Gallus, is surrounded by all the beauties of Utopia but wastes away with grief, comforted

¹⁸ Virgil, *Eclogues*, X, 77: "Come home, you've had your fill; the evening star is here; come home, my goats." Cf. also *Eclogues*, VI, 84 ff.:

Ille canit (pulsae referunt ad sidera valles),
Cogere donec ovis stabulis numerumque referre
Iussit et invito processit Vesper Olympo.

"[Silenus] sings, the echoing valleys wafting the sound to the stars, until Hesperus has ordered the flocks to be stabled and counted and, against Olympus' wishes, has pursued his course." The *invito Olympo* ("Olympus" here used for "the Olympians" as we use "the Kremlin" for the Russian government) has to be construed as an ablative absolute: the gods regret that the relentless progress of the evening star puts an end to the song of Silenus.

¹⁹ Virgil, *Eclogues*, I, 83: "And longer fall the shadows from the mountains high."

only by the thought that his sufferings and ultimate demise will be the subject of an Arcadian dirge.

In the Fifth *Eclogue*, Daphnis has retained his identity; but—and this is the novelty—his tragedy is presented to us only through the elegiac reminiscences of his survivors, who are preparing a memorial ceremony and are about to raise a tombstone for him:

A lasting monument to Daphnis raise
With this inscription to record his praise:
"Daphnis, the fields' delight, the shepherds' love,
Renown'd on earth and deifi'd above;
Whose flocks excelled the fairest on the plains,
But less than he himself surpassed the swains."²⁰

π Here, then, is the first appearance of the "Tomb in Arcadia," that almost indispensable feature of Arcady in later poetry and art. But after Virgil's passing, this tomb, and with it Virgil's Arcady as a whole, was to sink into oblivion for many centuries. During the Middle Ages, when bliss was sought in the beyond and not in any region of the earth, however perfect, pastoral poetry assumed a realistic, moralizing and distinctly non-Utopian character.²¹ The *dramatis personae* were "Robin" and "Marion" instead of "Daphnis" and "Chloe," and the scene of Boccaccio's *Ameto*, where more than thirteen hundred years after Virgil at least the name of Arcadia reappears, is laid near Cortona in Tuscany. Arcadia is represented only by an emissary, so to speak, and this emissary—a shepherd named Alcesto di Arcadia—limits himself to defending, after the fashion of the conventional "debates" (*concertationes* or *conflictus*), the Polybian and Ovidian ideal of rough and healthy frugality against the charms of wealth and comfort extolled by his rival, Achaten di Achademia from Sicily.²²

In the Renaissance, however, Virgil's—not Ovid's and Polyb-

²⁰ Virgil, *Eclogues*, V, 42 ff., here quoted from Dryden's translation.

²¹ For a brief summary of the development, see L. Levraut, *Le Genre pastoral*, Paris, 1914.

²² Boccaccio, *Ameto*, V (Florence edition of 1529, p. 23 ff.).

ius'—Arcady emerged from the past like an enchanting vision. Only, for the modern mind, this Arcady was not so much a Utopia of bliss and beauty distant in space as a Utopia of bliss and beauty distant in time. Like the whole classical sphere, of which it had become an integral part, Arcady became an object of that nostalgia which distinguishes the real Renaissance from all those pseudo- or proto-Renaissances that had taken place during the Middle Ages:²³ it developed into a haven, not only from a faulty reality but also, and even more so, from a questionable present. At the height of the Quattrocento an attempt was made to bridge the gap between the present and the past by means of an allegorical fiction. Lorenzo the Magnificent and Politian metaphorically identified the Medici villa at Fiesole with Arcady and their own circle with the Arcadian shepherds; and it is this alluring fiction which underlies Signorelli's famous picture—now, unhappily, destroyed—which used to be admired as the *Realm of Pan*.²⁴

Soon, however, the visionary kingdom of Arcady was re-established as a sovereign domain. In Boccaccio's *Ameto* it had figured only as a distant home of rustic simplicity, and the Medicean poets had used it only as a classical disguise for their own country life. In Jacopo Sannazaro's *Arcadia*²⁵ of 1502 Arcady itself is the scene of the action and is glorified for its own sake; it is revived as an emotional experience *sui*

²³ Cf. E. Panofsky, "Renaissance and Resuscitations," *Kenyon Review*, VI, 1944, p. 201 ff.

²⁴ For an analysis of Signorelli's painting, see F. Saxl, *Antike Götter in der Spätrenaissance*, *Studien der Bibliothek Warburg*, VIII, Leipzig and Berlin, 1927, p. 22 ff.

²⁵ For Jacopo Sannazaro's *Arcadia*, see M. Scherillo's illuminating introduction to his edition of 1888. Sannazaro's poem—first published at Venice in 1502—is based on both Italian and classical sources (Petrarch and Boccaccio on the one hand, Virgil, Polybius, Catullus, Longus, Nemesius, etc., on the other), thereby resuscitating the Virgilian conception of Arcadia within the limits of a modern, more subjective *Weltanschauung*. Sannazaro's is the first postclassical pastoral actually staged in Arcadia, and it is a significant fact that the few allusions to the contemporary scene, the court of Naples, were added, or at least made explicit, only in the second edition of 1504.

generis and *sui juris* instead of serving as a classical pseudonym for the poet's and his patrons' own surroundings. Sannazaro's Arcady is, like Virgil's, a Utopian realm. But in addition it is a realm irretrievably lost, seen through a veil of reminiscent melancholy: "La musa vera del Sannazaro è la malinconia," as an Italian scholar puts it.²⁶ Reflecting the feeling of a period that, for the first time, had realized that Pan was dead, Sannazaro wallows in those funeral hymns and ceremonies, yearning love songs and melancholy memories which occur in Virgil only occasionally; and his very predilection for triple rhymes, technically known as *drucciolo* (a few lines of this kind will be quoted later), endows his verses with a sweet, lingering plaintiveness. It was through him that the elegiac feeling—present but, as it were, peripheral in Virgil's *Eclogues*—became the central quality of the Arcadian sphere. One more step and this nostalgic but as yet impersonal longing for the unbroken peace and innocence of an ideal past was sharpened into a bitter, personal accusation against the real present. The famous "O bell'età de l'oro" in Torquato Tasso's *Aminta* (1573) is not so much a eulogy of Arcady as an invective against the constrained and conscience-ridden spirit of Tasso's own period, the age of the Counter-Reformation. Flowing hair and nude bodies are bound and concealed, deportment and carriage have lost touch with nature; the very spring of pleasure is polluted, the very gift of Love perverted into theft.²⁷ Here is the outburst of an actor stepping before the footlights and in the presence of all contrasting the misery of his real existence with the splendor of his role.

III Almost exactly half a century later, Giovanni Francesco Guercino—not Bartolommeo Schidone, as stated in all "Dictionaries of Familiar Quotations"—produced the first pictorial rendering of the Death in Arcady theme (Fig. 90); and it is in this picture, painted at Rome between 1621 and 1623 and now preserved in the Galleria Corsini, that we first

²⁶ A. Sainati, *La lirica latina del Rinascimento*, Pisa, 1919, I, p. 184, quoted by Saxl, *ibidem*.

²⁷ Tasso, *Aminta*, I, 2 (E. Grillo, ed., London and Toronto, 1924, p. 90 ff.).

encounter the phrase *Et in Arcadia ego*.²⁸ There are reasons to believe that the subject was of special interest to Giulio Rospigliosi (later Pope Clement IX), whose family palace, which housed Guido Reni's *Aurora*, must have been frequently visited by Guercino when he composed his own, more modern *Aurora* in the Casino Ludovisi; and Giulio Rospigliosi—a humanist, a lover of the arts, and a poet of no mean merits—may even be the inventor of the famous phrase, which is not classical and does not seem to occur in literature before it made its appearance in Guercino's picture.²⁹ What, then, is the literal sense of this phrase?

²⁸ Guercino's picture is referred to as Schidone's in, for example, Büchmann, *loc. cit.*; Bartlett, *loc. cit.* (where, in addition, the inscription on Poussin's Louvre painting is misquoted as *Et ego in Arcadia vixi*); and Hoyt's *New Cyclopaedia of Poetical Quotations* (which has the text right but translates it as: "I, too, was in Arcadia"). For the correct attribution of the painting, see H. Voss, "Kritische Bemerkungen zu Seicentisten in den römischen Gallerien," *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft*, XXXIV, 1911, p. 119 ff. (p. 121).

²⁹ For Giulio Rospigliosi, see L. von Pastor, *The History of the Popes*, E. Graf, tr. XXXI, London, 1940, p. 319 ff.; for his poetical works, G. Cavenazzi, *Papa Clemente IX Poeta*, Modena, 1900. He was born in 1600 at Pistoia but educated at the Jesuits' College at Rome, subsequently studied at the University of Pisa, and taught philosophy there from 1623 to 1625 (which, of course, did not prevent him from visiting Rome at intervals). Soon after, he seems to have settled in Rome (in 1629 he composed poems on a Barberini-Colonna wedding) and obtained high offices at the Curia in 1632. After nine years as papal nuncio in Spain (1644–53), he became governor of Rome (1655), was created cardinal in 1657, elected pope in 1667, and died in 1669. That this cultured and unselfish prince of the Church—who patronized the first "Exhibition of Old Masters," organized by his brother, in the last year of his papacy (Pastor, p. 331)—was in some way involved with the *Et in Arcadia* subject is suggested by a passage in G. P. Bellori, *Le vite de' pittori, scultori, et architetti moderni*, Rome, 1672, p. 447 f. After having described Poussin's "*Ballo della vita humana*," now in the Wallace Collection at London, Bellori informs us that the subject of this *morale poesia* had been "suggested by Pope Clement IX, when still a prelate," and goes on to say that the painter did full justice to the *sublimità dell'Autore che aggiunse le due seguenti invenzioni*, to wit, "*La verità scoperta del Tempo*" (probably not identical with the painting now in the Louvre but with another version, transmitted through the engravings listed in A. Andresen, *Nicolaus Poussin; Verzeichnis der nach seinen Gemälden gefertig-*

As was mentioned at the beginning, we are now inclined to translate it as "I, too, was born, or lived, in Arcady." That is to say, we assume that the *et* means "too" and refers to *ego*, and we further assume that the unexpressed verb stands in the past tense; we thus attribute the whole phrase to a defunct inhabitant of Arcady. All these assumptions are incompatible with the rules of Latin grammar. The phrase *Et in Arcadia ego* is one of those elliptical sentences like *Summum jus summa iniuria*, *E pluribus unum*, *Nequid nimis* or *Sic semper tyrannis*, in which the verb has to be supplied by the reader. This unexpressed verb must therefore be unequivocally suggested by the words given, and this means that it can never be a preterite. It is possible to suggest a subjunctive as in *Nequid nimis* ("Let there never be done too much") or *Sic semper tyrannis* ("May this be the fate of all tyrants"); it is also possible, though fairly unusual, to suggest a future as in Neptune's famous *Quos ego* ("These I shall deal with"); but it is not possible to suggest a past tense. Even more important: the adverbial *et* invariably refers to the noun or pronoun directly following it (as in *Et tu, Brute*), and this means that it belongs, in our case, not to *ego* but to *Arcadia*;

ten Kupferstiche, Leipzig, 1863, Nos. 407 and 408, the latter dedicated to Clement IX) and "*La Felicità soggetta a la Morte*," that is to say, the *Et in Arcadia ego* composition. Barring a typographical error (omission of a *si* before *che agghunse*), the "exalted" *Autore* can only be Giulio Rospigliosi (for Poussin is referred to, at the beginning of the same sentence, as *Niccolo*): according to Bellori it was he, Rospigliosi, who "added the two following inventions," that is to say, in addition to the *Ballo della vita humana*, the *Verità scoperta del Tempo* and the *Arcadia* subject.

The difficulty is that—as we know while Bellori probably did not—this subject had already been treated by Guercino between 1621 and 1623 while he was engaged upon his *Aurora* fresco in the Casino Ludovisi. Bellori's brief account may have simplified a situation which might be tentatively reconstructed as follows: Bellori knew from Poussin that Giulio Rospigliosi had ordered the Louvre version of the *Et in Arcadia ego* and had informed Poussin that he, Rospigliosi, was the actual inventor of the subject. Bellori took this to mean that Rospigliosi had "invented" the subject when ordering the Louvre picture; but what Rospigliosi had really claimed was that he had suggested it to Guercino (doubtless a frequent visitor to Guido Reni's *Aurora*) and, subsequently, asked Poussin to repeat it in an improved redaction.

it is amusing to observe that some modern writers accustomed to the now familiar interpretation but blessed with an inbred feeling for good Latin—for instance, Balzac,³⁰ the German Romanticist C. J. Weber,³¹ and the excellent Miss Dorothy Sayers³²—instinctively misquote the *Et in Arcadia ego* into *Et ego in Arcadia*. The correct translation of the phrase in its orthodox form is, therefore, not "I, too, was born, or lived, in Arcady," but: "Even in Arcady there am I," from which we must conclude that the speaker is not a deceased Arcadian shepherd or shepherdess but Death in person. In short, King George III's interpretation is, grammatically, absolutely right. And with reference to Guercino's painting, it is also absolutely right from a visual point of view.

In this painting two Arcadian shepherds are checked in their wanderings by the sudden sight, not of a funerary monument but of a huge human skull that lies on a moldering piece of masonry and receives the attentions of a fly and a mouse, popular symbols of decay and all-devouring time.³³ Incised

³⁰ Balzac, *Madame Firmiani*: "J'ai aussi aimé, *et ego in Arcadia*."

³¹ C. J. Weber, *Demokritos oder hinterlassene Papiere eines lachenden Philosophen*, n. d., XII, 20, p. 253 ff.: "Gräber und Urnen in englischen Gärten verbreiten die nämliche sanfte Wehmut wie ein Gottesacker oder ein 'Et ego in Arcadia,' in einer Landschaft von Poussin," and the same erroneous reading, now fairly well explained, occurs in the earlier editions of Büchmann's *Geflügelte Worte* (in the 16th edition, for instance, on p. 582).

³² Dorothy Sayers, "The Bone of Contention," *Lord Peter Views the Body* (Harcourt Brace and Co., N. Y.), p. 139. This feeling for Latin grammar seems to be widespread among British mystery-story writers. In Nicholas Blake's *Thou Shell of Death*, XII (Continental Albatross Edition, 1937), p. 219, an elderly nobleman says: "*Et ego*, Superintendent, in *Arcadia vixi*—what?"

³³ The significance of the mouse as a symbol of all-devouring time is already pointed out in Horapollo's *Hieroglyphica* I, 50 (now easily accessible in G. Boas, *The Hieroglyphics of Horapollo* [Bollingen Series, XXIII], New York, 1950, p. 80) and remained well known throughout the centuries (cf. the mediaeval allegory of human life known as "The Tree of Barlaam"; according to Condivi, *Vita di Michelangelo*, cap. xlv, even Michelangelo is said to have planned the inclusion of a mouse in the iconography of the Medici Chapel). Viewed through the medium of "Romantic irony" the motive of the Guercino picture looks as follows: "Ein gar herrliches 'Memento mori' ist . . . ein hübscher gebleichter Menschenhädel auf der Toilette. So ein leerer Hirnkasten . . . müsste

on the masonry are the words *Et in Arcadia ego*, and it is unquestionably by the skull that they are supposed to be pronounced; an old description of the picture mistakenly but understandably even places them on a scroll issuing from the skull's mouth.³⁴ The skull, now, was and is the accepted symbol of Death personified, as is borne out by the very fact that the English language refers to it, not as a "dead man's head," but as a "death's-head." The speaking death's-head was thus a common feature in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century art and literature³⁵ and is even alluded to by Falstaff (*Henry IV*,

Wunder tun, wenn die Macht der Gewohnheit nicht noch stärker wäre. . . . Man würde zuletzt das Dasein des Totenschädels ganz vergessen, wenn nicht schon zu Zeiten *eine Maus* ihn wieder lebendig gemacht . . . hätte" (C. J. Weber, *loc. cit.*).

³⁴ Leslie and Taylor, *loc. cit.*, with reference to Reynolds' portrait of Mrs. Bouverie and Mrs. Crewe: "The thought is borrowed from Guercino where the gay frolickers stumble over a death's-head with a scroll proceeding from his mouth inscribed *Et in Arcadia ego*." The "scroll" allegedly proceeding from the mouth of the skull is obviously due to a misinterpretation of the mouse's tail. Only, as I don't know the Reynolds sketch (unfortunately the "Roman Sketchbook," formerly belonging to R. Gwatkin, cf. Leslie and Taylor, *op. cit.*, I, p. 51, could not be located), I cannot tell whether Reynolds misinterpreted the picture or Tom Taylor misinterpreted the sketch. In any case this very misinterpretation shows that even at a comparatively recent period an unbiased observer of the Guercino composition naturally assumed that the words *Et in Arcadia ego* were voiced by the skull.

³⁵ As to the significance of skulls and skeletons in connection with the general conception of life and destiny, cf. R. Zahn, 81. *Berliner Winckelmanns-Programm*, 1923; T. Creizenach, "Gaudeamus igitur," *Verhandlungen der 28. Versammlung Deutscher Philologen und Schulmänner*, Leipzig, 1872; C. H. Becker, "Ubi sunt qui ante nos in mundo fuerunt?" *Aufsätze zur Kultur- und Sprachgeschichte, vornehmlich des Islam*, Ernst Kuhn zum 70. Geburtstag gewidmet, 1916, pp. 87 ff. It appears that the original significance of those morbid symbols, occurring on goblets and table decorations before they appeared on sepulchral monuments, was a purely hedonistic one, viz., an invitation to enjoy the pleasures of life as long as it lasts, and only subsequently was turned into a moralistic sermon of resignation and penitence. This development took place in ancient Egypt as well as in the civilizations deriving from classical antiquity, both occidental and oriental. In them, the inversion of the original idea was chiefly due to patristic writing. In point of fact, the *Vita brevis* idea is characterized by an intrinsic ambiva-

second part, ii, 4) when he answers Doll Tearsheet's well-intentioned warnings as to his conduct: "Peace, good Doll, do not speak like a death's-head; do not bid me remember mine end."

This "remember mine end" is precisely the message of Guercino's painting. It conveys a warning rather than sweet, sad memories. There is little or nothing elegiac about it, and when we try to trace the iconographic antecedents of the composition, we find them in such moralistic representations as the renderings of the Legend of the Three Quick and the Three Dead (known to all from the Camposanto at Pisa), where three young knights, setting out for a hunt, come upon three corpses that rise from their coffins and warn the elegant young men against their thoughtless enjoyment of life (Fig. 89). As these mediaeval dandies are stopped by the coffins, so are Guercino's Arcadians stopped by the skull; the old description just mentioned even speaks of them as "gay frolickers *stumbling over* a death's-head."³⁶ In both cases Death catches youth by the throat, so to speak, and "bids it remember the end." In short, Guercino's picture turns out to be a mediaeval *memento mori* in humanistic disguise—a favorite

lence implying both the Horatian *Carpe diem* and the Christian *surge, surge, vigila, semper esto paratus* (refrain of a song of 1267). From the later phase of the Middle Ages the "speaking" skulls and skeletons became so common a symbol of the *memento mori* idea (in the Camaldulensian sense of this formula) that these motifs invaded almost every sphere of everyday life. Innumerable instances are not only to be found in sepulchral art (mostly with such inscriptions as *Vixi ut vivis, morieris ut sum mortuus* or *Tales vos eritis, fueram quandoque quod estis*), but also in portraits, on clocks, on medals, and, most especially, on finger rings (many instances adduced in the London Shakespeare edition of 1785 with reference to the notorious dialogue between Falstaff and Doll Tearsheet). On the other hand, the menace of a "speaking skull" could also be interpreted as a hopeful prospect for the afterlife, as is the case in a short stanza by the German seventeenth-century poet D. C. von Lohenstein, in which the *Redender Todtenkopff des Herrn Matthäus Machners* says: *Ja/ wenn der Höchste wird vom Kirch-Hof erndten ein/ So werd ich Todten-Kopff ein Englisch Antlitz seyn* (quoted in W. Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, 1928, p. 215).

³⁶ See the passage quoted in Note 34.

concept of Christian moral theology shifted to the ideal milieu of classical and classicizing pastorals.

We happen to know that Sir Joshua Reynolds not only knew but even sketched Guercino's painting (ascribing it, incidentally, to its true author instead of to Bartolommeo Schidone).³⁷ It is a fair assumption that he remembered this very painting when he included the *Et in Arcadia ego* motif in his portrait of Mrs. Crewe and Mrs. Bouverie; and this firsthand connection with the very source of the phrase may account for the fact that its grammatically correct interpretation (as "Even in Arcadia, I, Death, hold sway"), while long forgotten on the Continent, remained familiar to the circle of Reynolds and, later on, became part of what may be termed a specifically English or "insular" tradition—a tradition which tended to retain the idea of a *memento mori*. We have seen that Reynolds himself adhered to the correct interpretation of the Latin phrase and that George III understood it at once. In addition, we have an *Et in Arcadia ego* composition by Giovanni Battista Cipriani (Fig. 93), born in Florence but active in England from the end of his apprenticeship up to his death in 1785,³⁸ which shows the coat-of-arms of Death, the skull and bones, surmounted by the inscription "*Ancora in Arcadia morte*," which means: "Even in Arcady there is Death," precisely as King George had translated it. Even the ironic iconoclasm of our own century still draws, in England, from this original, sinister conception of the *Et in Arcadia* theme. Augustus John, who likes to designate portraits of Negro girls with such Arcadian names as "Daphne," "Phyllis," or even "Aminta," has affixed the title *Atque in Arcadia ego* (the unorthodox *atque* expressing the "even" still more em-

³⁷ See Leslie and Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 260: "I find a sketch of Guercino's picture in Reynolds' Roman notebook." It was obviously from this sketch, probably bearing the usual explanatory note, that Tom Taylor learned about the Corsini picture and its author, and so surprising was this knowledge that a later biographer of Reynolds, ignorant as he was of the Guercino painting, ventured to state that Reynolds had been inspired by Poussin (W. Armstrong, *Joshua Reynolds*, übersetzt von E. von Kraatz, n.d., p. 89).

³⁸ Cipriani produced, among other things, the illustrations of the famous Ariosto edition brought out by the Baskerville Press at Birmingham in 1773.

phatically than does the orthodox *et*) to a morbid, morning-after scene where Death has assumed the guise of a ghastly guitar player;³⁹ and in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* the narrator, while a sophisticated undergraduate at Oxford, adorns his rooms at college with a "human skull lately purchased from the School of Medicine which, resting on a bowl of roses, formed at the moment the chief decoration of my table. It bore the motto *Et in Arcadia ego* inscribed on its forehead."

However, Cipriani, while faithful to the "insular" tradition in the translation of the Latin phrase, drew from another source for his pictorial composition. A thoroughgoing eclectic, he expanded the landscape and added sheep, dogs, and fragments of classical buildings; he increased the personnel by seven figures of a, generally speaking, Raphaelesque character (five of them women); and he replaced Guercino's artless masonry and actual death's-head by an elaborately classicizing tomb, with the skull and bones carved upon it in relief.

In doing all this, this rather indifferent artist shows himself familiar with the innovations of that one man whose pictures mark the turning point in the history of the *Et in Arcadia ego* theme: the great French painter Nicolas Poussin.

iv Poussin had come to Rome in 1624 or 1625, one or two years after Guercino had left it. And a few years later (presumably about 1630) he produced the earlier of his two *Et in Arcadia ego* compositions, now in the Devonshire Collection at Chatsworth (Fig. 91). Being a Classicist (though in a very special sense), and probably conversant with Virgil, Poussin revised Guercino's composition by adding the Arcadian river god Alpheus and by transforming the decaying masonry into a classical sarcophagus inscribed with the *Et in Arcadia ego*; moreover, he emphasized the amorous implications of the Arcadian milieu by the addition of a shepherdess to Guercino's two shepherds. But in spite of these improve-

³⁹ J. Rothenstein, *Augustus John*, Oxford, n.d., Fig. 71. The Negro portraits referred to are illustrated there in Figs. 66, 67, 69. According to a letter from Sir John Rothenstein, the titles given to Augustus John's works in his book were furnished orally by the artist.

ments, Poussin's picture does not conceal its derivation from Guercino's. In the first place, it retains to some extent the element of drama and surprise: the shepherds approach as a group from the left and are unexpectedly stopped by the tomb. In the second place, there is still the actual skull, placed upon the sarcophagus above the word *Arcadia*, though it has become quite small and inconspicuous and fails to attract the attention of the shepherds who—a telling symptom of Poussin's intellectualistic inclinations—seem to be more intensely fascinated by the inscription than they are shocked by the death's-head. In the third place, the picture still conveys, though far less obtrusively than Guercino's, a moral or admonitory message. It formed, originally, the counterpart of a *Midas Washing His Face in the River Pactolus* (now in the Metropolitan Museum at New York), the iconographically essential figure of the river god Pactolus accounting for the inclusion of its counterpart, the less necessary river god Alpheus, in the *Arcadia* picture.⁴⁰

In conjunction, the two compositions thus teach a twofold lesson, one warning against a mad desire for riches at the expense of the more real values of life, the other against a thoughtless enjoyment of pleasures soon to be ended. The phrase *Et in Arcadia ego* can still be understood to be voiced by Death personified, and can still be translated as "Even in Arcady I, Death, hold sway," without being out of harmony with what is visible in the painting itself.

After another five or six years, however, Poussin produced a second and final version of the *Et in Arcadia ego* theme, the famous picture in the Louvre (Fig. 92). And in this painting—no longer a *memento mori* in classical garb paired with a *cave avaritiam* in classical garb, but standing by itself—we can observe a radical break with the mediaeval, moralizing tradition. The element of drama and surprise has disappeared. Instead of two or three Arcadians approaching from the left in a group, we have four, symmetrically arranged on either side

⁴⁰ The connection between Poussin's earlier *Et in Arcadia* composition, viz., the painting owned by the Duke of Devonshire, and the New York *Midas* picture was recognized and completely analyzed by A. Blunt, "Poussin's *Et in Arcadia ego*," *Art Bulletin*, XX, 1938, p. 96 ff. Blunt dates the Duke of Devonshire version about 1630, with which I am now inclined to agree.

of a sepulchral monument. Instead of being checked in their progress by an unexpected and terrifying phenomenon, they are absorbed in calm discussion and pensive contemplation. One of the shepherds kneels on the ground as though rereading the inscription for himself. The second seems to discuss it with a lovely girl who thinks about it in a quiet, thoughtful attitude. The third seems trajected into a sympathetic, brooding melancholy. The form of the tomb is simplified into a plain rectangular block, no longer foreshortened but placed parallel to the picture plane, and the death's-head is eliminated altogether.

Here, then, we have a basic change in interpretation. The Arcadians are not so much warned of an implacable future as they are immersed in mellow meditation on a beautiful past. They seem to think less of themselves than of the human being buried in the tomb—a human being that once enjoyed the pleasures which they now enjoy, and whose monument "bids them remember their end" only in so far as it evokes the memory of one who had been what they are. In short, Poussin's Louvre picture no longer shows a dramatic encounter with Death but a contemplative absorption in the idea of mortality. We are confronted with a change from thinly veiled moralism to undisguised elegiac sentiment.

This general change in content—brought about by all those individual changes in form and motifs that have been mentioned, and too basic to be accounted for by Poussin's normal habit of stabilizing and in some measure tranquillizing the second version of an earlier picture dealing with the same subject⁴¹—can be explained by a variety of reasons. It is consistent with the more relaxed and less fearful spirit of a period that had triumphantly emerged from the spasms of the Counter-Reformation. It is in harmony with the principles of Classicist art theory, which rejected "les objets bizarres," especially such gruesome objects as a death's-head.⁴² And it was facilitated, if not caused, by Poussin's familiarity with Arca-

⁴¹ The importance of this habit is, in my opinion, somewhat overestimated in J. Klein, "An Analysis of Poussin's 'Et in Arcadia ego,'" *Art Bulletin*, XIX, 1937, p. 314 ff.

⁴² See, for example, H. Jouin, *Conférences de l'Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture*, Paris, 1883, p. 94.

dian literature, already evident in the Chatsworth picture, where the substitution of a classical sarcophagus for Guercino's shapeless piece of masonry may well have been suggested by the tomb of Daphnis in Virgil's Fifth *Eclogue*. But the reverent and melancholy mood of the Louvre picture, and even a detail such as the simple, rectangular shape of the tomb, would seem to reveal a fresh contact with Sannazaro. His description of the "Tomb in Arcadia"—characteristically no longer enclosing the reluctant shepherd Daphnis but a no less reluctant shepherdess named Phyllis—actually foreshadows the situation visualized in Poussin's later composition:

..... farò fra questi rustici
 La sepoltura tua famosa e celebre.
 Et da' monti Toscani et da' Ligustici
 Verran pastori ad venerar questo angulo
 Sol per cagion che alcuna volta fustici.
 Et leggeran nel bel sasso quadrangulo
 Il titol che ad tutt'hore il cor m'infrigida,
 Per cui tanto dolor nel petto strangulo:
 "Quella che ad Meliseo si altera et rigida
 Si mostrò sempre, hor mansueta et humile
 Si sta sepolta in questa pietra frigida."⁴³

"I will make thy tomb famous and renowned among these rustic folk. Shepherds shall come from the hills of Tuscany and Liguria to worship this corner of the world solely because thou hast dwelt here once. And they shall read on the beautiful square monument the inscription that chills my heart at all hours, that makes me strangle so much sorrow in my breast: 'She who always showed herself so haughty and rigid to Meliseo now lies entombed, meek and humble, in this cold stone.'"

These verses not only anticipate the simple, rectangular shape of the tomb in Poussin's Louvre picture which strikes us as a direct illustration of Sannazaro's *bel sasso quadrangulo*; they also conform in an amazing degree to the picture's strange, ambiguous mood—to that hushed brooding over the silent message of a former fellow being: "I, too, lived in Arcady where you now live; I, too, enjoyed the pleasures which you now enjoy; I, too, was hardhearted where I should

⁴³ Sannazaro, *Arcadia* (Scherillo, ed.), p. 306, lines 257-67. Further tombs occur in Sannazaro's poem on p. 70, line 49 ff., and p. 145, line 246 ff. (a literal translation of Virgil, *Eclogues*, X, 31 ff.).

have been compassionate. And now I am dead and buried." In thus paraphrasing, according to Sannazaro, the meaning of the *Et in Arcadia ego* as it appears in Poussin's Louvre painting, I have done what nearly all the Continental interpreters did: I have distorted the original meaning of the inscription in order to adapt it to the new appearance and content of the picture. For there is no doubt that this inscription, translated correctly, no longer harmonizes with what we see with our eyes.

When read according to the rules of Latin grammar ("Even in Arcady, there am I"), the phrase had been consistent and easily intelligible as long as the words could be attributed to a death's-head and as long as the shepherds were suddenly and frighteningly interrupted in their walk. This is manifestly true of Guercino's painting, where the death's-head is the most prominent feature of the composition and where its psychological impact is not as yet weakened by the competition of a beautiful sarcophagus or tomb. But it is also true, if in a considerably lesser degree, of Poussin's earlier picture, where the skull, though smaller and already subordinated to the newly introduced sarcophagus, is still in evidence, and where the idea of sudden interruption is retained.

When facing the Louvre painting, however, the beholder finds it difficult to accept the inscription in its literal, grammatically correct, significance. In the absence of a death's-head, the *ego* in the phrase *Et in Arcadia ego* must now be taken to refer to the tomb itself. And though a "speaking tomb" was not unheard of in the funerary poetry of the time, this conceit was so unusual that Michelangelo, who used it in three of his fifty epitaphs on a handsome boy, thought it necessary to enlighten the reader by an explanatory remark to the effect that here it is, exceptionally, "the tomb which addresses him who reads these verses."⁴⁴ It is infinitely more natural to ascribe the words, not to the tomb but to the person

⁴⁴ See the discussion between W. Weisbach, "Et in Arcadia ego," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, ser. 6, XVIII, 1937, p. 287 ff., and this writer, "'Et in Arcadia ego' et le tombeau parlant," *ibidem*, ser. 6, XIX, 1938, p. 305 f. For Michelangelo's three epitaphs in which the tomb itself addresses the beholder ("La sepoltura parla a chi legge questi versi"), see K. Frey, *Die Dichtungen des Michelagnolo Buonaroti*, Berlin, 1897, No. LXXVII, 34, 38, 40.

buried therein. Such is the case with ninety-nine per cent of all epitaphs, including the inscriptions of the tomb of Daphnis in Virgil and the tomb of Phyllis in Sannazaro; and Poussin's Louvre picture suggests this familiar interpretation—which, as it were, projects the message of the Latin phrase from the present into the past—all the more forcibly as the behavior of the figures no longer expresses surprise and dismay but quiet, reminiscent meditation.

Thus Poussin himself, while making no verbal change in the inscription, invites, almost compels, the beholder to mistranslate it by relating the *ego* to a dead person instead of to the tomb, by connecting the *et* with *ego* instead of with *Arcadia*, and by supplying the missing verb in the form of a *vixi* or *fui* instead of a *sum*. The development of his pictorial vision had outgrown the significance of the literary formula, and we may say that those who, under the impact of the Louvre picture, decided to render the phrase *Et in Arcadia ego* as "I, too, lived in Arcady," rather than as "Even in Arcady, there am I," did violence to Latin grammar but justice to the new meaning of Poussin's composition.

This *felix culpa* can, in fact, be shown to have been committed in Poussin's own circle. His friend and first biographer, Giovanni Pietro Bellori, had given, in 1672, a perfectly correct and exact interpretation of the inscription when he wrote: "*Et in Arcadia ego*, cioè, che il sepolcro si trova ancora in Arcadia, e la Morte a luogo in mezzo le felicità"⁴⁵ ("*Et in Arcadia ego*, which means that the *grave is to be found* [present tense] *even in Arcady* and that death occurs in the very midst of delight"). But only a few years later (1685) Poussin's second biographer, André Félibien, also acquainted with him, took the first and decisive step on the road to bad Latinity and good artistic analysis: "Par cette inscription," he says, "on a voulu marquer que *celui qui est dans cette sépulture a vécu* en Arcadie et que la mort se rencontre parmi les plus grandes félicités"⁴⁶ ("This inscription emphasizes the fact that the *person buried in this tomb has lived* [past tense]

⁴⁵ G. P. Bellori, *loc. cit.*

⁴⁶ A. Félibien, *Entretiens sur les vies et les ouvrages des peintres*, Paris, 1666–1685 (in the edition of 1705, IV, p. 71); cf. also the inscription of Bernard Picart's engraving after Poussin's Louvre picture as quoted by Andresen, *op. cit.*, No. 417.

in Arcady"). Here, then, we have the occupant of the tomb substituted for the tomb itself, and the whole phrase projected into the past: what had been a menace has become a remembrance. From then on the development proceeded to its logical conclusion. Félibien had not bothered about the *et*; he had simply left it out, and this abbreviated version, quaintly retranslated into Latin, survives in the inscription of a picture by Richard Wilson, painted at Rome in 1755: "Ego fui in Arcadia." Some thirty years after Félibien (1719), the Abbé du Bos rendered the *et* by an adverbial "cependant": "Je vivais cependant en Arcadie,"⁴⁷ which is in English: "And yet I lived in Arcady." The final touch, it seems, was put by the great Diderot, who, in 1758, firmly attached the *et* to the *ego* and rendered it by *aussi*: "Je vivais aussi dans la délicieuse Arcadie,"⁴⁸ "I, too, lived in delightful Arcady." His translation

⁴⁷ Abbé du Bos, *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* (first published in 1719), I, section VI; in the Dresden edition of 1760, p. 48 ff.

⁴⁸ Diderot, "De la poésie dramatique," *Oeuvres complètes*, J. Assézat, ed., Paris, 1875–1877, VII, p. 353. Diderot's description of the painting itself is significantly inaccurate: "Il y a un paysage de Poussin où l'on voit de jeunes bergères qui dansent au son du chalumeau [!]; et à l'écart, un tombeau avec cette inscription 'Je vivais aussi dans la délicieuse Arcadie.' Le prestige de style dont il s'agit, tient quelquefois à un mot qui détourne ma vue du sujet principal, et qui me montre de côté, comme dans le paysage du Poussin, l'espace, le temps, la vie, la mort ou quelque autre idée grande et mélancolique jetée toute au travers des images de la gaieté" (cf. also another reference to the Poussin picture in Diderot's "Salon de 1767," *Oeuvres*, XI, p. 161; later on the misplaced *aussi* became as much a matter of course in French literature as the misplaced *Auch* in Germany, as illustrated by Delille's *Et moi aussi, je fus pasteur dans l'Arcadie*). The picture described by Diderot seemed to bear out his well-known theory of the *contrastés dramatiques*, because he imagined that it showed the shepherds dancing to the sound of a flute. This error is due either to a confusion with other pictures by Poussin, such, for example, as the *Bacchanal* in the London National Gallery or the *Feast of Pan* in the Cook Collection at Richmond, or to the impression of some later picture dealing with the same subject. Angelica Kauffmann, for instance, in 1766 exhibited a picture described as follows: "a shepherd and shepherdess of Arcadia moralizing at the side of a sepulchre, while others are dancing at a distance" (cf. Lady Victoria Manners and Dr. W. C. Williamson, *Angelica Kauffmann*, London, 1924, p. 239; also Leslie and Taylor, *op. cit.*, I, p. 260).

must thus be considered as the literary source of all the later variations now in use, down to Jacques Delille, Johann Georg Jacobi, Goethe, Schiller, and Mrs. Felicia Hemans."⁴⁹

Thus, while—as we have seen—the original meaning of *Et in Arcadia ego* precariously survived in the British Isles, the general development outside England resulted in the nearly universal acceptance of what may be called the elegiac interpretation ushered in by Poussin's Louvre picture. And in Poussin's own homeland, France, the humanistic tradition had so much decayed in the nineteenth century that Gustave Flaubert, the great contemporary of the early Impressionists, no longer understood the famous phrase at all. In his beautiful description of the Bois de la Garenne—"parc très beau malgré ces beautés factices"—he mentions, together with a Temple of Vesta, a Temple of Friendship, and a great number of artificial ruins: "sur une pierre taillée en forme de tombe, *In Arcadia ego*, non-sens dont je n'ai pu découvrir l'intention,"⁵⁰ "on a stone cut in the shape of a tomb one reads *In Arcadia ego*, a piece of nonsense the meaning of which I have been unable to discover."

We can easily see that the new conception of the Tomb in Arcady initiated by Poussin's Louvre picture, and sanctioned by the mistranslation of its inscription, could lead to reflections of almost opposite nature, depressing and melancholy

⁴⁹ For Jacques Delille, Goethe and Schiller, see above, Notes 5, 6. As to Mrs. Felicia Hemans (cf. Note 7), the motto superscribed on her poem appears to confuse Poussin's Louvre picture with one or more of its later variations: "A celebrated picture of Poussin represents a band of shepherd youths and maidens suddenly checked in their wanderings and affected with various emotions by the sight of a tomb which bears the inscription 'Et in Arcadia ego.'" In the poem itself Mrs. Hemans follows in the footsteps of Sannazaro and Diderot in assuming that the occupant of the tomb is a young girl:

Was some gentle kindred maid
In that grave with dirges laid?
Some fair creature, with the tone
Of whose voice a joy is gone?

⁵⁰ Gustave Flaubert, "Par les champs et par les grèves." *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris, 1910, p. 70; the passage was kindly brought to my attention by Georg Swarzenski.

on the one hand, comforting and assuaging on the other; and, more often than not, to a truly "Romantic" fusion of both. In Richard Wilson's painting, just mentioned, the shepherds and the funerary monument—here a slightly mutilated *stele*—are reduced to a *staffage* accentuating the muted serenity of the Roman Campagna at sundown. In Johann Georg Jacobi's *Winterreise* of 1769—containing what seems to be the earliest "Tomb in Arcady" in German literature—we read: "Whenever, in a beautiful landscape, I encounter a tomb with the inscription *Auch ich war in Arkadien*, I point it out to my friends; we stop a moment, press each other's hands, and proceed."⁵¹ And in a strangely attractive engraving by a German Romanticist named Carl Wilhelm Kolbe (Fig. 94), who had a trick of constructing wondrous jungles and forests by magnifying grass, herbs or cabbage leaves to the size of bushes and trees, the tomb and its inscription (here, correctly, *Et in Arcadia ego* although the legend of the engraving consists of the erroneous "*Auch ich war in Arkadien*") serve only to emphasize the gentle absorption of two lovers in one another. In Goethe's use of the phrase *Et in Arcadia ego*, finally, the idea of death has been entirely eliminated.⁵² He uses it, in an abbreviated version ("*Auch ich in Arkadien*") as a motto for his famous account of his blissful journey to Italy, so that it merely means: "I, too, was in the land of joy and beauty."

Fragonard, on the other hand, retained the idea of death; but he reversed the original moral. He depicted two cupids, probably spirits of departed lovers, clasped in an embrace within a broken sarcophagus while other, smaller cupids flut-

⁵¹ See Büchmann, *loc. cit.*

⁵² Cf. also Goethe's *Faust*, iii, 3:

Gelockt, auf sel'gem Grund zu wohnen,
Du flüchtetest ins heiterste Geschick!
Zur Laube wandeln sich die Thronen,
Arcadisch frei sei unser Glück!

In later German literature this purely hedonistic interpretation of Arcadian happiness was to degenerate into the trivial conception of "having a good time." In the German translation of Offenbach's *Orphée aux Enfers* the hero therefore sings "Als ich noch Prinz war von Arkadien" instead of "Quand j'étais prince de Béotie."

ter about and a friendly genius illumines the scene with the light of a nuptial torch (Fig. 95). Here the development has run full cycle. To Guercino's "Even in Arcady, there is death" Fragonard's drawing replies: "Even in death, there may be Arcady."