

*Oh, what's the way to Arcady?*

*The spring is rustling in the tree,  
The tree the wind is blowing through,  
It sets the blossoms flickering white.*

*I knew not skies could burn so blue  
Nor any breezes blow so light.  
They blow an old-time way for me,  
Across the world to Arcady.*

*H.C. Bunner, The Way to Arcady*

The lure of Arcadia is strong in the hearts of many. It is a most beloved and enduring theme. A theme that transcends generation and geography; cited in art and literature; its appeal lies within its key themes of poetry, music, love, conquest and demise. These themes are universal and central to us all.

Arcadia, the pastoral paradise celebrated in Theocritus' Idylls and Virgil's Eclogues has been a major source of inspiration for artists and printmakers since the Renaissance. These texts however, were only accessible in Greek and Latin, and so it was the Italian writer Jacopo Sannazaro who extended and popularized the concept of Arcadia to a larger audience through his magnum opus *Arcadia*.

The pastoral paradise of Arcadia, however, is elusive. It is but a dream, a dream of escape from the reality of city life, vice and avarice. A mythical place populated by shepherds, nymphs, fauns, centaurs and satyrs. A locus amoenus; evocative of a Golden Age; overseen by the goat-like deity Pan who being "the God of all Nature" naturally "fought with Love and lost, because Love conquers all".<sup>1</sup> Thus Pan lends Arcadia a melancholy air. Although Pan induces sad thoughts in men, he also provides the cure from melancholia in the form of music.

Through this exhibition of prints from the Poynton collection, we seek to illustrate not only the stories and settings of Arcadia, but more importantly the transformation in the representation and meaning of Arcadia that occurred from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. The exhibition culminates in a unique focus on the classical revival occurring within Australia at the beginning of the twentieth century.

\*Sections 1, 2 and 4 written by other authors have been removed.

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<sup>1</sup>Freedman, 1989, p. 82

## **Setting the Scene ~ *Of Ruins and Rapture***

Ruins represent the primary element in both the myth and actuality of Arcadia. The true Arcadia, situated in the mountainous Peloponnese region of Greece, holds the ancient ruins of the city of Mycenae. The poet Alpheius wrote of Mycenae in the second century “This birthplace of heroes was now scarcely above ground... So, as I passed thee by, did I see thee, unhappy Mycanae, more waste than any goat-fold. The goat herds pointed thee out and ....said, ‘Here stood the city rich in gold, the city that the Cyclops built.’” For Alpheius, the ruins of Mycenae stand not only as a document of a civilisation lost, but moreover they embody a sense of the narrative of both Gods and mortals. They evoke an emotive nostalgia for an archaic meaning forever lost. Thus Alpheius sets the tradition for the poetics of ruins.

The tradition of ruin elegy culminates in the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. Written in 1467, it has been described as the first full-length literary ruin rhapsody.<sup>2</sup> The importance of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* to the pastoral tradition is paramount. In its descriptions and illustrations of grandiose ruins where columns are heaped unimaginably one on top of the other, overgrown with plants and vines and set amid picturesque gardens, the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* provides the blueprint for the pictorial depiction of ruins within the pastoral mode. More importantly, however, it asserts the prime association of ruins and the pastoral from which point on they cannot be separated.

Although the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* sets the precedents for the depiction of ruins within the pastoral setting, the aesthetics and motifs of which appear in the prints of Claude Lorrain(e), Giambattista Piranesi and Richard Earlom in varying degrees, it was the theatre which popularised and provided the conventions for the use of these aesthetics and motifs. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, operas and plays were stereotyped in their settings for specific scenes and always presented at least one wild landscape with ruins.<sup>3</sup> The influence of theatre upon painting was considered mutual with developments in one re-appearing in the other.

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<sup>2</sup> Macaulay, 1953, p. 15

<sup>3</sup> Zucker, 1961, p. 122

Decaying temples, in Claude, however, are not considered a direct invocation of the theatre.<sup>4</sup> Rather they take their inspiration from the present day architectural ruins of Rome and the Roman Campagna. This is not to say that Claude is detached from the theatrical mode. On the contrary, his compositions present a strong association with the stage. An association that many maintain is “consciously exploited.”<sup>5</sup>

In both prints: *Time, Apollo and the Seasons* (cat. 5) and *Mercury and Argus* (cat. 6), Claude sets his characters within the foreground and the drama enacted is read horizontally across the picture plane as if upon a stage. Although Claude’s landscape is generally constructed in a series of receding planes he is very skilled at creating atmospheric perspective through the use of an irregular mesh of shading.<sup>6</sup> The scenery does not surround the characters but rather acts as a scenic backdrop. The ruins in both do not dominate the composition, but rather they are partially obscured by foliage, almost merging with the trees to create a single masse. Claude utilises the ruin in landscape as a vehicle to create a romanticising mood but he does so within the strictures of the narrative at play.

Giambattista Piranesi was an architect and archaeologist and as a result his technical approach to printmaking is more linear and displays a tighter more decisive quality of draughtsmanship than the loose sketchiness of Claude. Active in Rome from 1740, he was a great advocate of the superiority of Roman architecture over Grecian. His studies had included perspective, the benefit of which can be immediately appreciated in his prints *The Temple of Sybil at Tivoli* (cat. 6) and *The Arch of Janus Quadrifions* (cat. 7) where characters are not only depicted before his momentous ruins but also convincingly within and beyond.

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<sup>4</sup> Lagerlof, 1990, p. 10

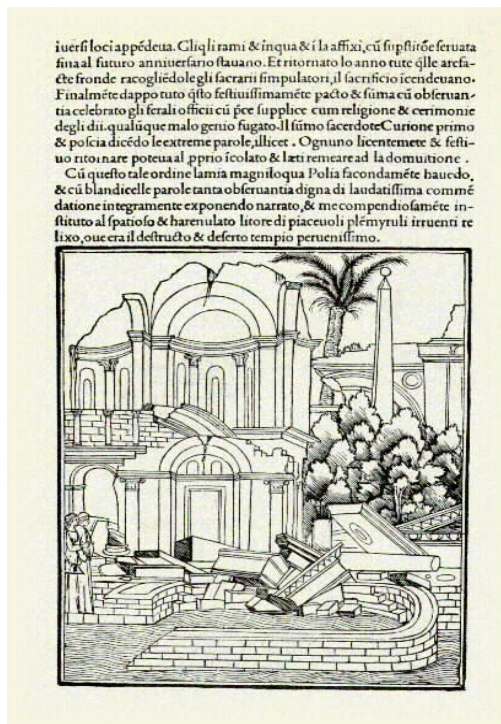
<sup>5</sup> Lagerlof, 1990, p. 36

<sup>6</sup> Seymour Haden in *About Etching* has suggested that Claude may have used a pumice stone in places to roughen the plate and remove lines of light. In essence a rough attempt at reproducing the effects of mezzotint.

Interestingly, Piranesi also studied stage design and indeed he promotes a sense of the narrative through the dramatic connected gestures of his protagonists. The drama enacted, however, is dwarfed by the architecture. Piranesi uses the ruin to provide a dramatic sense of space and proportion creating *magnificenza*; a notion that once held immense importance in Latin culture.<sup>7</sup>

Both the works of Claude and Piranesi can be seen as transition pieces which move from the predominance of the narrative to that of the romantic.

We see the same progression in the work of Richard Earlom whose most celebrated work was a set of prints after Claude's drawings from his *Liber Vertatis*. Therefore we may identify many of the same visual motifs in Earlom's work as in Claude's. Earlom, however, subsumes the narrative even further by relegating the figurative groups to the background. By removing the dramatic narrative from the forefront, he creates an atmospheric serenity even more conducive to the romantic pastoral mode than that of Claude or Piranesi.



**Fig. 1** Illustration from the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, 1467

<sup>7</sup> Makarius, 2004, p. 97

