

Anthony Blunt and Nicolas Poussin:

A Queer Approach

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**ABSTRACT**

Anthony Blunt and Nicolas Poussin:  
A Queer Approach

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The art historian Anthony Blunt (1907-1983), a homosexual and famously a Soviet spy, was a leading authority on the French painter Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665). In recent years, several scholars have noticed strange affinities between these two figures, affinities that relate to their ideas, to a common interest in secrecy and in covert knowledge, as well as to less definite attitudes that these scholars have had difficulty pinning down. This thesis proposes that these strange affinities may be explained by means of Queer Theory, which has afforded art historical scholarship a language and sets of concepts that allow the more difficult aspects of Blunt's relationship to Poussin to be carefully anatomized. I argue that Blunt may have found in Poussin's complex and ambiguous pictorial worlds both an inspiration for and a reflection of his multiple, contradictory identities and commitments. Meanwhile, I investigate what properties in Poussin's art make possible this relationship, exploring how a kernel of homoerotic sensibility, entering Poussin's *oeuvre* from the Arcadian pastoral tradition grows and diversifies to depict what I call queer bodies and to construct what I call queer spaces. Blunt's art historical account of Poussin, the most influential account of the painter in the twentieth century, turns out to be but one facet of a deep and mutually-constitutive encounter between artist and art historian.

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## INTRODUCTION

A boy seems to float, not in water but in representation. He lies on this side but, with limbs so placed that his entire body seems to be taking on the form of a rectangular cartouche, he is weightless. Placed on this spot he seems at once rooted in the space of depiction – the rock he rests on appears between his slightly parted legs almost like stone from which he is being carved – and he seems to hover on the canvas surface. His perimeter is defined by surprisingly straight lines. The figure mirrors the containing rectangle of the painting's frame, reflecting his enclosure. And, of course, this boy is *all about* reflection. This figure dominates a painting called *Echo and Narcissus* (1627), [Fig.0.1] one of the best known and also one of the least typical depictions of the mythological youth. In this painting, the traditional reflection in the pond is substituted with a reflecting encounter between the viewer's gaze and the boy's disarmingly vulnerable body, laid out but almost shyly so, before that gaze. A longing gaze, informed by homosexual desire, is one unavoidable potential response set up by this image. But, if it occurs to such a viewer that he is Narcissus in this encounter as much as is the boy, then the apparently yielding scene turns out to be a trap. This painting and many that follow it destabilize and subvert the bodies they depict and the spaces that they construct in order to problematize representation. These concerns, which may strike us at first as so very contemporary, are found in the work of a seventeenth century painter known for his difficult and sophisticated intellectual approach. This is the first point of departure.

The French painter Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665) is an art-historical curiosity. Consistently accepted by art historians and other art professionals as one of the most

important practitioners in the history of European painting, he often goes unheard of by the general public,<sup>1</sup> at least outside of France. And where Poussin is not unknown he is very often not liked, even in France.<sup>2</sup> (Absurdly, the painter is simultaneously rejected as obscure and overexposed.) Poussin is centrally placed: he stands at the point historically where the centre of gravity of Western art shifts from Italy (at this time, particularly, from Rome) to Paris. Poussin's style of formal order and visual clarity, meanwhile, became the basis for the classicist approach promulgated by the French Royal Academy to 1789 and, under successor regimes, well into the nineteenth century. Poussin combines the then-recent Italian Renaissance traditions of Titianesque *colore* with Raphaelesque *disegno* and, through the medium of his own example, transmits and transforms them to become a new basis for French classical and eventually neoclassical painting.<sup>3</sup> Yet, all too often, the cool and contemplative rationality of much of Poussin's painting diminishes the attention paid to his erotic or vital subjects, and the themes in his art.

These subjects, this thesis argues, are not beside the point of his intellectual concerns;

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<sup>1</sup>In the mid-1980s a survey of entering art students at Cooper Union in New York revealed that Poussin enjoyed the same level of name-recognition (as a visual artist) as William Blake, only one fifth that of Giacometti or Tintoretto and was far behind leading names such as Michelangelo or Picasso. While there is an obvious selection bias in this kind of survey (art students), it should help rather than harm Poussin's chances of recognition. See Robert Hughes, "Jean-Michel Basquiat: Requiem for a Featherweight" in *Nothing If Not Critical: Selected Essays on Art and Artists* (New York: Knopf, 1990) 308. Reprinted from *New Republic* 199 (21 Nov., 1988): 34-36.

<sup>2</sup>In France there was disappointment with public disengagement and disinterest during the so-called *année Poussin*, the quadricentennial of his birth (1994), a year of commemorative exhibitions, symposia and publications on the artist. Experts who had been planning a major cultural event for France found the public "bored." See Katie Scott, "I: Introduction," in *Commemorating Poussin: Reception and Interpretation of the Artist*, ed. Katie Scott and Genevieve Warwick (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 2. One critic, Philippe Dagen, writing in *Le Monde* wondered whether it was not Poussin's very academic institutionalism that itself rendered the artist, for the general public, «de plus en plus étrange» Philippe Dagen, «Poussin au Grand Palais et à Chantilly. L'Oueil universel,» *Le Monde*, 29 September 1994. Quoted in Scott, *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>'Disegno' refers to the preponderance of line in Central Italian and Florentine Renaissance painting, 'colore' to that of rich colour fields in Venetian. For the influence on Poussin of Raphael, see Konrad Oberhuber «Raphaël et Poussin» in *Poussin et Rome: Actes du colloque à l'Académie de France à Rome et à la Bibliotheca Hertziana 16-18 novembre 1994* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1996) 67-74. For that of Titian, see Denis Mahon "Nicolas Poussin and Venetian Painting: New Connexions – II" in *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 88.515 (1946): 37-43.

they are central to them. Poussin's paintings belong to many genres, including portraiture and religious art. The painter is best known, however, for his mythological paintings, his history paintings (a genre he helped to establish), and his landscapes, in which literary, philosophical and historical scenes are regularly seen in a mixed genre called 'historical landscape' or *paysage historique*. Outstanding within this body of work, and recurrent within it, is an engagement with the poetic idyll of Arcadia and the complex of themes organized in it. Poussin was born in Normandy but moved, via Paris, to Rome.<sup>4</sup> The artist arrived in 1625 and lived there for most of the rest of his working life.<sup>5</sup> Living in Rome, he had both Italian and French patrons and he was closely connected with philosophical circles in Rome and in Paris.<sup>6</sup> Poussin has thus been understood as an artist's artist or even an art historian's artist, one too concerned with rarefied literary themes and philosophical minutiae to be truly popular.

Yet Poussin's thematic and formal, compositional language is in many respects imperfectly decipherable. Individual readings seem at once insufficient and compelling, like a jigsaw puzzle that reveals a clear image even while there remain pieces that do not fit. These difficulties are ones that this thesis will explain using the new critical methodology of Queer Theory. Poussin's works exemplify difference: bacchanalian abandon is portrayed in regimented and carefully ordered compositions, reactions of horror are expressed by generic and mask-like faces, poses are taken from familiar sculpture while Poussin's own works, no less than the figures in them, are often serially

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<sup>4</sup>At Les Andelys, an east Norman origin he shares with his near-contemporary Pierre Corneille (1606-1684), born at Rouen, commonly regarded as the founder of French classicism in drama.

<sup>5</sup>He returned to France for just over two years, from late 1640 to early 1643. Other sources put the artist's return to Rome in late 1642. See Anthony Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin* (Hong Kong: Pallas Athene, 1995) 160.

<sup>6</sup>See Sheila McTighe, *Nicolas Poussin's Landscape Allegories* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 27.

used, recycled or are reiterations of previous versions. Poststructural theory, in general, allows us to understand that Poussin's *oeuvre* may exist in a state of reference and semiological deferral. I shall therefore explore how Poussin's works frustrate their viewers, by revealing only enough to remain mysterious. But I propose that Queer Theory, in particular, can best organize this interpretive endeavour. Poussin's multiplicity is akin to the lack of an ontological foundation under our constructions of gender norms. (Judith Butler defines gender as an "imitation that has no original.")<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, Poussin's work starts off by making use of gender play and implied (and frustrated) sexuality. The point of intersection where the explicit subject of gender encounters the engendering of difference and referral (and reference and deferral) may mark the spot where Queer Theory can be used to advantage to illuminate Poussin's strategy of representation. Such a 'queer Poussin' may at once seem implausible, given that the artist is not known to be homosexual while he is known for his rationalism and tight visual order. But, when such superficial considerations are stripped away, his constant pictorial destabilizations, his early and organizing engagements with gender, and his thematic subversiveness may, rather, make such an account of the painter seem inevitable, in retrospect.

There is, however, a second point of departure. In the last century the study of Poussin was most associated with one English art historian, Anthony Blunt (1907-1983). Blunt was a spy and a traitor as well as an art historian and he was also a lifelong

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<sup>7</sup>Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. H. Abelove et al. (New York and London: Routledge, 1993) 313. Republished in *The Judith Butler Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004) 119-137.

homosexual although he never came out of the closet.<sup>8</sup> Blunt's sexuality, I propose, is central both to his art history and his other activities. And so this thesis also investigates the role Nicolas Poussin and his concerns played in determining the outlook and work of this art historian, who did much to recuperate the artist in the twentieth century.<sup>9</sup> This is slippery terrain and reasonable speculations that begin by making careful use of available evidence can easily go too far and become speculative psychobiography, better suited to historical fiction than to history. I aim not to posit a certain and exhaustive interpretation but rather to explore and theoretically frame a compelling interpretive possibility. There are real limits to what we can legitimately claim about the past, of course, but there are also choices about emphasis and about our points of view that we must make again now, and go on remaking forever. In what follows I shall present a Queer Theory-based interpretation of the purposeful 'multiplicity'<sup>10</sup> used by Blunt to maintain his secret identities and then go on to explore how this multiplicity corresponds to a multiplicity really present in the work of Poussin.

Anthony Blunt is no less a curiosity than is Poussin and, certainly, he is not better liked. Blunt was one of the first English art historians trained in the scientific methods of the émigré scholars fleeing to Britain and America from Germany and Austria after the rise to power of the Nazis.<sup>11</sup> In 1946, Blunt became, as Surveyor of the King's Pictures<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>It could be said, however, that Blunt never came out of the closet because he never needed to. Blunt's sexuality epitomized the 'open secret' of elite homosexuality in his era. This is discussed in Chapter 1.

<sup>9</sup>Blunt's role in twentieth century Poussin studies is controversial. See David Carrier, "Anthony Blunt's Poussin" in *Word & Image* 25.4 (Dec., 2009): 416-426.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. 'duplicity'.

<sup>11</sup>Art historical studies were transformed in the United Kingdom by the arrivals of Rudolph Wittkower, Fritz Saxl, who helped move the Warburg Institute to London in the previous year, Edgar Wind, Ernst Cassirer, and Marxist art historians Friedrich Antal and Arnold Hauser, and, in the United States, by the arrivals of Erwin Panofsky (who first appeared in the U.S. in 1931 on an exchange basis with his appointment at Hamburg but then stayed permanently after the Nazis came to power), Walter Friedländer, who began teaching at the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University in 1935, and Klaus Berger, among others.

(or curator of the Royal art collections), a member of the Royal Household and, in 1947, he became director of the Courtauld Institute of Art at the University of London, an institute with which he had been affiliated as a lecturer for ten years. Blunt was a leading figure in English language art history during the 1950s and 60s and was often considered its most prominent specialist on Poussin. Blunt had many publications on Poussin throughout his career but among the most influential were his 1967 monograph, *Nicolas Poussin*, based on his 1958 Mellon Lectures and work begun much earlier in a 1933-34 fellowship dissertation,<sup>13</sup> and the early article “The Heroic and Ideal Landscape in the Work of Nicolas Poussin,” published in 1944 in the then-new *Journal of the Courtauld and Warburg Institutes*.<sup>14</sup> Blunt also attempted to sort out many of the mysteries in date and attribution that clouded the picture of the artist, leading to the companion volume to his monograph, *Poussin’s Paintings: A Critical Catalogue* (1966), and a sequence of fourteen articles in the *Burlington Magazine*, collectively called “Poussin Studies,” that were published between 1947 and 1964. It was in this latter respect, Poussin’s chronology, that he was frequently offside from other scholars dealing with the painter, most notably Denis Mahon.<sup>15</sup> Blunt became something of a public figure in Britain and in the art world. He achieved real fame only at the cost of infamy when, in November 1979, he was unmasked by the newly elected Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher as having been, since at least 1938, a traitor and a Soviet spy. Although he could not be prosecuted,<sup>16</sup> these revelations dealt both his personal and professional reputations blows from which

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<sup>12</sup>After 1952, Surveyor of the Queen’s Pictures.

<sup>13</sup>See Chapter 1.

<sup>14</sup>Anthony Blunt, “The Heroic and Ideal Landscape in the Work of Nicolas Poussin,” *Journal of the Courtauld and Warburg Institutes* 7 (1944): 154-168.

<sup>15</sup>Blunt’s relationship with Mahon will be discussed in Chapter 1. For a full overview of their differences, see Miranda Carter’s biography of Blunt, *Anthony Blunt: His Lives* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2001) 421-35.

<sup>16</sup>See Chapter 1 and/or Appendix 1.



they never recovered. Then (and since) Blunt's homosexuality has been as important as his treachery in defining his public notoriety. He has also been of interest to writers of serious literature and to popular culture. So far, he has been the subject of a major play,<sup>17</sup> two novels,<sup>18</sup> three television dramas,<sup>19</sup> and ongoing journalistic writing.

Not lost in all this attention (but not well examined either) has been Blunt's sustained and singular art historical interest in Poussin. This thesis investigates these two figures together, using a queer approach, in order to clarify a mystery concerning their relationship, which has interested but, so far, also only frustrated those scholars and other interpreters who have turned their minds to this problem. The problem was first noticed by the critic and philosopher George Steiner who wrote shortly after Blunt's exposure that Blunt's "lifelong passion"<sup>20</sup> for Poussin set him at odds with typical English aesthetic values and might be key to understanding his politics.<sup>21</sup> The art historian Sheila McTighe also has conjectured that there might be a connection between Poussin's politics and those of Blunt. McTighe writes: "Blunt first proposed, then dropped, the thesis that Poussin's late work was closely associated with *libertinage* [...] Blunt's later reluctance to deal with the issue of *libertinage* may have had roots in his personal situation."<sup>22</sup> (*Libertinage* was an atheistic and subversive political philosophy prevalent in France in the mid seventeenth century.) McTighe maintains, as I shall, that this connection disturbed Blunt and may have led him to adjust his account of Poussin to minimize the

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<sup>17</sup>*A Question of Attribution* by Alan Bennett (1988).

<sup>18</sup>*The Untouchable* by John Banville and *A Friendship of Convenience* by Rufus Gunn (both 1997).

<sup>19</sup>The BBC's *Blunt: The Fourth Man* (1985), starring Anthony Hopkins and Ian Richardson (as Blunt), the 1991 television dramatization of *A Question of Attribution*, directed by John Schlesinger and starring James Fox and Prunella Scales, and the BBC's 2003 miniseries *Cambridge Spies*.

<sup>20</sup>George Steiner, "The Cleric of Treason," the *New Yorker* (8 Dec., 1980): 158-95. The essay was later republished in *George Steiner: A Reader* (London: Penguin Books, 1984) 178-204.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 166-67.

<sup>22</sup>McTighe, 16. See Chapter 1.

risk. In the periodical *Art Bulletin*, in September 1998, the Poussin scholar David Carrier wrote a review of several then-recent books and catalogues on Poussin and he identified the figure of Blunt as a delicate problem needing to be explored in contemporary Poussin studies. He writes that Blunt's Poussin is a "secretive man who, seeming to paint pictures with sacred and profane subjects anyone could understand - really worked for a tiny group of privileged persons, friends who set themselves apart from the vulgar masses. In this respect, is he not family akin to Blunt himself?"<sup>23</sup> He continues:

It still is hard to know what to make of the obvious affinities between Blunt's political career and his interpretative approach to Poussin. Do we judge Blunt's account inherently flawed on the ground that his Poussin is all too transparently a self-projection? Alternatively, might we conclude that Blunt's life prepared him to understand Poussin?<sup>24</sup>

This project at least partly takes up the challenge posed in Carrier's review.

Carrier goes on to state: "Until there is a serious intellectual biography of Blunt – there are various journalistic accounts about his spying – it will be impossible to sort out the relation between his life and writing."<sup>25</sup> This thesis will not be an intellectual biography, however: a presentation and interpretation of all of Blunt's art historical interests and writings is beyond this project's scope. What I shall undertake here is a methodological and historiographical answer to the questions asked by Carrier in the foregoing quotation: should we understand Blunt's Poussin as a self-projection and did Blunt's life give him a unique advantage to understand Poussin? In effect, I propose that we answer 'yes' to each of these questions. We should understand Blunt's Poussin as something of a self-projection and we should also conclude that Blunt's life did give him a unique advantage to understand Poussin. These are not opposed possibilities.

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<sup>23</sup>David Carrier, book review in *Art Bulletin* 80. 3 (Sept., 1998), 571.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 570-71.

Carrier's word "affinity" is carefully chosen. Literally, the word denotes kinship by marriage or association in a community or family-like group.<sup>26</sup> It implies a family (or a quasi-family) relationship entered into by choice. Each particular affinity, therefore, can only be clearly explained if its particular circumstances can be accounted for precisely. While it may be obvious that Blunt and Poussin share affinities, it is less obvious what these affinities might be. Such correspondences, or similarities, or even rhymings as there may be are, to say the least, difficult to specify. To explain the affinity, this thesis pursues a number of interpretive aims: it will explore and interpret Anthony Blunt's engagement with Poussin by investigating as a key issue Blunt's sexuality, it will locate the Arcadian thematic<sup>27</sup> found in Poussin's art as an organizing element, and it will relate these findings to a queer rereading of Poussin's *oeuvre*, one which begins with questions of sexuality but develops into a much broader interpretation of Poussin's visual and thematic multiplicity. The key claim I make is that the emergence of Queer Theory now allows these affinities to be explained.

Of course, Anthony Blunt could not adopt a manifestly queer attitude in his scholarship and writings, partly because Queer Theory did not yet exist to allow its articulation in scholarly terms and partly because, even if it had existed during his lifetime, to do so would have brought on instant personal and professional ruin. Indeed, I suspect that Blunt would have been baffled by Queer Theory and would likely have dismissed it, however politely. This does not mean that Anthony Blunt (or Nicolas

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<sup>26</sup>The word derives from Latin, *affinis* (bordering upon, joined in marriage). Source: *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, sv. "Affinity". Source Online. Accessed 22 Jun. 2011. < <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/affinity>>

<sup>27</sup>'Thematic,' used in English as a noun, is a loan word from French, where *thématique* is a feminine noun (as well as an adjective) meaning an ensemble or system made up of several interconnected themes: See *Lexilogos/ Centre national de ressources textuelle et lexicale*, sv. "thématique". Source online. Accessed 4 Apr. 2011. < <http://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/thematique>>.

Poussin, for that matter) cannot be explained through Queer Theory. Queer Theory informs my scholarship allowing me to consider in a systematic way issues that Blunt did not and could not. ‘Queer’ is a particularly appropriate category with which to examine Anthony Blunt. Blunt’s sexuality and spying, taken together, and the impenitent attitude that seemed to underlie both aspects of his life cast Blunt as a homosexual outlaw. Blunt was exposed as a perverse non-conformist, not just as a traitor and not just as a homosexual. In being both, he was something monstrously indeterminate. He was queer. This project then brings Blunt’s queerness together with the queerness I find in Poussin and proposes that they are connected, a task that involves queering art history, not just locating ‘queers’ in it. I do not assert that Nicolas Poussin was queer (I do not know whether he was or not, although I shall observe that he could have been).<sup>28</sup> In Poussin’s case, it is the work, not the artist, that I assert is queer. While I maintain that queer interpretations of both these figures are viable separately, what makes a queer approach really compelling in each case is how it accounts for the affinities noticed by Carrier, McTighe and Steiner.

The acceptance of homosexuality as a speakable issue in art reception, meanwhile, together with the entry into scholarly debate of queer approaches allows me to recuperate fragmentary evidence through these new critical categories. But still, in pursuing this argument, we must accept that historical conditions make the retention of comprehensive direct evidence unlikely. Both Blunt (for most of his life) and Poussin lived when queer meanings could only be implicit, never explicit. What evidence remains, therefore, is cryptic, partial or capable of being divergently interpreted. This project, therefore, embraces speculation to an extent, but not at the cost of rigour. Some

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<sup>28</sup>See Chapter 3.

conclusions of this investigation will have to remain bracketed as speculative, but that speculation can at least be theoretically framed. After all, scholarly contributions have only ever been contributions to an ongoing dialogue, and the customary demand for conclusiveness has served to block off important avenues of research, especially where marginal subjects are concerned. In proposing a different scholarly mode here I join with others in queer art history who call attention to a disciplinary bias, which has the effect of keeping queer histories out of many historical narratives for want of impossible positive evidence.<sup>29</sup>

The remainder of this introduction will do two things. It will provide an overview of the subjects to be developed further in the chapters that follow. First, however, it will introduce the theoretical issues and methodological approaches I shall be using throughout the thesis. What follows next, then, is something of a primer, familiarizing readers with key principles and concepts found in Queer Theory.

### Theoretical and Methodological Approach

An assumption underlying this project of interpretation is that as social and cultural circumstances change around the objects of art historical study, we art historians must adjust the lenses through which we examine those objects, so that they may remain fully visible and relevant. This line of argument can help explain Poussin for us today, but only in a context that is historiographically self-conscious. My approach embraces methodological transparency to challenge further what was once held to be the atemporal

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<sup>29</sup>See, for instance, James Smalls, “The Queer Case of Girodet: Making Trouble for Art History” *Art Journal* 55.4 (1996): 20-27. See also the discussion of Smalls’s claims in Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “Is Endymion Gay? Historical Interpretation and Sexual Identities,” in *Girodet: 1767-1824* (Paris: Gallimard, Musée du Louvre Éditions, 2006) 81-95. See also below and the section “Queer Historiography” in Chapter 1.

transparency of visual artistic meaning. My methodology is chosen so as to explain what I think is the irony – that Blunt’s own queerness necessitated his presentation of a Poussin purged of some queerness that is really there. I believe that a methodological approach based on Queer Theory can do this.

The politics surrounding Blunt’s exposure as a traitor and a spy, which involved much media commentary publicly certifying that Blunt was a homosexual, picked up on something common in the discourse on homosexuality in 1979, something that the gay-rights movement had been at pains to dispel: the perception that homosexuality is inherently subversive. For at least ten years previous, some gay rights organizations and gay activists had worked to foster an appreciation that homosexuality and homosexuals were and could be accepted as normal. This aim, always balanced against defending broad sexual freedom, has defined mainstream gay and lesbian activism and organizations in the Western world, including the United Kingdom. It has also characterized much gay and lesbian oriented scholarship, which had sought to uncover the histories of homosexual communities, cultures, individuals, or else to force the acknowledgement *as* homosexual (or homoerotic) of relevant themes, figures or motifs in works of culture. To lesser and greater extents, the guiding purpose of this work of recovery has been to normalize and to naturalize ordinary homosexuality. Arising in seeming opposition to this program, Queer Theory is a critical project that seeks to recapture the subversive potential not just of homosexuality but of alternative sexuality, generally. Where political attempts to promote gay rights have meant normalizing gay conduct, Queer Theory promotes its marginality. If there is an overture to the wider society, it is merely to implicate it as well, to universalize such marginality. Queer

Theory locates *all* identities as misfits unable to fully adhere to an artificial order of meanings, gender identities and prescribed desires.

Queer Theory is a distinct tradition from what has been known as Gay and Lesbian Studies. It has been defined by the art historian Whitney Davis (perhaps a little too neatly) as “the effect of deconstruction on gay and lesbian studies.”<sup>30</sup> Gay and Lesbian Studies accepts the ideological parameters of liberalism. Queer Theory, by contrast, is an anti-liberal critical discourse seeking to use the occlusion of positive gay and lesbian histories to contest – in the case of historical disciplines – the historiographical norms responsible for those occlusions. So far, it has tended merely to critique the political aspirations of Gay and Lesbian Studies.<sup>31</sup> For Gay and Lesbian Studies the silence surrounding homosexuality in history is a problem to be overcome by locating homosexuals in history (and this can be done, of course, to a considerable extent). For Queer Theory, the objective is to investigate the silences themselves in order to expose those agencies that engender them. The present study blends some aims of Gay and Lesbian Studies with some queer theoretical methods. I prefer the term ‘queer’ both because it is more general *and* more precise. While homosexuality is central to this study, it is only one aspect of the challenge to normative constructions of identity that I critique and that I argue has led earlier accounts of the Blunt-Poussin relationship to miss the mark. This project, however, is limited in scope. I aim only to explain the instance of Blunt and Poussin, although some general lessons are drawn for the work of what I call

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<sup>30</sup>Whitney Davis, “‘Homosexuality,’ Gay and Lesbian Studies, and Queer Theory in Art History,” in *The Subjects of Art History: Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Mark Cheetham, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 124.

<sup>31</sup>See, for example, Michael Warner, “Beyond Gay Marriage” in *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics and the Ethics of Queer Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) 81-147. Warner contends, in effect, that the liberal project of “normalizing” gays and lesbians threatens to cost them everything in their culture, which is, despite everything, a subversive culture. He maintains it is a slow surrender to the privatization of “our imagination and belonging” (127).

‘speculative historiography’ in the Conclusion. This thesis uses Queer Theory to locate a specific queer problematic in history.

‘Queer’ is a category that deliberately stays indistinct. A queer is a person, queer is a quality, and to queer becomes a verb, an operation, and a performative activity (if only an interpretive one at times). Also, as a reclaimed term of abuse – though older and less abrasive than ‘faggot’ – queer is conscious of and celebrates its indeterminacy and double, triple and multiple meanings. Even as a verb, to queer means both ‘to make queer’ and to spoil or ruin, as in the now dated expression “I didn’t mean to queer it for you.” As will be shown, in the theoretical domain Queer Theory can be allied to such critical approaches as deconstruction and ideology critique, yet it prefers to remain an unreliable ally. Queer Theory is a biased critical practice, partisan and unruly. It is a translation of popular, if once fringe, cultural practices into the academy.<sup>32</sup> It has been developed primarily through its applications in various circumstances. I maintain – and the proliferation of queer discourse within scholarship attests that – Queer Theory operates in a dynamic and productive relationship with other critical approaches. In using Queer Theory I am aware of its emergent position within academic critical methodologies. While it is an approach that borrows much from more established discourses, it also contributes much in revealing new ways to conceptualize established problematics.

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<sup>32</sup>Even the critical term has an uncouth origin: “Queer theory originally came into being as a joke. Teresa de Lauretis coined the phrase “queer theory” to serve as the title of a conference that she held in February of 1990 at the University of California, Santa Cruz [...] She had heard the word ‘queer’ being tossed about in a gay-affirmative sense by activists, street kids, and members of the art world in New York during the late 1980s. She had the courage, and the conviction, to pair that scurrilous term with the academic holy word, ‘theory’. Her usage was scandalously offensive. Sympathetic faculty at UCSC asked, in wounded tones, ‘Why do they have to call it that?’ But the conjunction was more than merely mischievous: it was deliberately disruptive.” David Halperin, “The Normalization of Queer Theory,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 45 (2003): 339-40.



Queer Theory may be said to have three mothers (Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Teresa de Lauretis and Judith Butler), one grandfather (Michel Foucault), and a sort of great uncle in Jacques Derrida – a suitably alternative genealogy. This ‘family’ is also somewhat dysfunctional. Neither Sedgwick nor Butler uses the term queer in their foundational texts and de Lauretis, who coined the term, abandoned it early and in disgust.<sup>33</sup> The family name tends to be deployed more when discussing Queer Theory in the abstract, and less when doing it.<sup>34</sup> ‘Queer Theory’, meanwhile, has been something of a synecdoche, used to describe all academic work dealing with queer issues, regardless of the critical approach or theoretical orientation. In effect, this has led to a body of work under the rubric of Queer Theory that may be queer but that is hardly theory. At the same time, it is a recurring complaint that Queer Theory includes work that is certainly theory, but hardly queer.<sup>35</sup> Queer Theory’s core body of literature, then, is small but influential. It would include, in the main, work by Sedgwick, Butler, Diana Fuss, Lisa Duggan and Lauren Berlant, all approaching it out of Feminism, as well as David Halperin, Michael Warner, José Esteban Muñoz among others, approaching it from the direction of Gay and Lesbian Studies. The work of Michel Foucault is a common basis for its philosophical orientation.<sup>36</sup> Queer Theory’s critical practices, meanwhile, are often close to those of deconstruction. It tends to critique other discourses. In sum, it is a sprawling nexus of divergent lines of inquiry but even where theory is never mentioned explicitly, the approaches it fashions usually still provide an argumentative armature. In this thesis, I shall be drawing connections between what is taken to be ‘mainstream’ Queer Theory

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 339.

<sup>34</sup>This is a common occurrence with theoretical methodologies, of course: how frequently does one encounter the term ‘poststructuralism’ in the works of Michel Foucault?

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 341-43.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 342.

and other critical traditions which have recently been or are now being associated with Queer Theory. Important among these will be the thought of Gilles Deleuze<sup>37</sup> and a particular strain of semiotics, where I shall draw from Julia Kristeva and (writing on Poussin directly) Louis Marin.<sup>38</sup> These approaches will be introduced in the particular parts of this study where they are immediately used. My own, overall argumentative armature is taken from elements of ‘canonical’ Queer Theory, though, particularly the work of Butler and of Sedgwick, and so their complex relationship to Queer Theory ought to be clarified upfront.

Although there is no treatise of Queer Theory, the two most important texts certainly would be Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet*, both of 1990. Both were published before the academic term ‘queer’ was coined (by de Lauretis), also in 1990.<sup>39</sup> This complicated origin has led to Queer Theory’s very coherence as a project being doubted. David M. Halperin, a scholar associated both with Queer Theory and with its critics, published what can best be called a lament for the discourse’s troubled history and its stormy present, while remaining hopeful for its future. Halperin’s explanation is long but very helpful and worth quoting at length. Explaining that Teresa de Lauretis

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<sup>37</sup>I shall be drawing from Deleuze’s work on difference, conducted on his own, and his work undertaken in collaboration with Felix Guattari on the idea of becoming. These discussions arise in Chapter 3 and carry over into Chapter 4. The key texts are *Difference and Repetition* (1968) and the collaborative volume *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). Meanwhile, the correspondences between Deleuzian thought and Queer Theory have been explored recently, for instance in the book *Deleuze and Queer Theory*, ed. Chrysanthi Nigianni and Merl Storr (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2009).

<sup>38</sup>These discussions will take place in Chapters 3 and 4, respectively. I shall be engaging with Kristeva’s conceptualization of intertextuality, from *Revolution and Poetic Language* (1974) and, later, with Marin’s work on Poussin, particularly using the books *To Destroy Painting* (1987) and *Sublime Poussin* (1999).

<sup>39</sup>Halperin, 339.

coined the term, as a provocative joke,<sup>40</sup> to describe a kind of theory she would have liked to see, he writes:

She hoped both to make theory queer (that is, to challenge the heterosexist underpinnings and assumptions of what conventionally passed for “theory” in academic circles) and to queer theory (to call attention to everything that is perverse about the project of theorizing sexual desire and sexual pleasure). Queer theory was thus a placeholder for a hypothetical knowledge-practice not yet in existence, but whose consummation was devoutly to be wished.<sup>41</sup>

But, in a process he regards as suspicious, Halperin recounts how the discourse seemed to appear immediately and miraculously, like a theoretical parthenogenesis. He goes on:

The moment that the scandalous formula “queer theory” was uttered, however, it became the name of an already established school of theory, as if it constituted a set of specific doctrines, a singular, substantive perspective on the world, a particular theorization of human experience, equivalent in that respect to psychoanalytic or Marxist theory. The only problem was that no one knew what the theory was. And for the very good reason that no such theory existed. Those working in the field did their best, politely and tactfully, to point this out: Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, for example, published a cautionary editorial in PMLA entitled “What Does Queer Theory Teach Us About X?” But it was too late. Queer theory appeared on the shelves of bookstores and in advertisements for academic jobs [...] Queer theory thereby achieved what lesbian and gay studies, despite its many scholarly and critical accomplishments, had been unable to bring about: namely, the entry of queer scholarship into the academy, the creation of jobs in queer studies, and the acquisition of academic respectability for queer work.<sup>42</sup>

The peculiar circumstance of Queer Theory’s birth, therefore, account for the oddity that its two most important texts predate it.

Queer theory, therefore, had to be invented after the fact, to supply the demand it had evoked. (The two texts that, in retrospect, were taken to have founded queer theory, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet* and Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, were written well before anyone had ever heard of it.) All this would be merely amusing, if the hegemony of queer theory hadn’t had the undesirable and misleading

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<sup>40</sup>See above.

<sup>41</sup>Halperin, 340.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

effect of portraying all previous work in lesbian and gay studies as under-theorized, as laboring under the delusion of identity politics, and if it hadn't radically narrowed the scope of queer studies by privileging its theoretical register, restricting its range, and scaling down its interdisciplinary ambition.<sup>43</sup>

While Halperin's assessment of the discourse's current value can be scathing, it must be borne in mind that his central complaint in this account is its relationship to academic institutions, as compared to the bleaker histories of its predecessors. At worst, it is a strange and tangled intellectual domain, full of potential pitfalls and with a highly distinctive history. One must not demand from Queer Theory any interpretive practices that are too neat, or too regular. It is a meeting place of different approaches and different concerns, mutually intelligible but hardly congruent. It is a kind of methodological bazaar where treasures may be found but it cannot be too easily policed, and certainly not conclusively inventoried. In short, Queer Theory is difficult. It cannot exist in any valuable form except in reference to its object of study. Despite this, the theoretical outlook of those two major texts that predate it will appear in different places in this thesis and they provide some common conceptual reference points.

In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* Judith Butler sought to expose the category of gender as entirely constructed and her work helped turn a large part of feminist discourse into a deconstruction of gender. In the book, Butler argues that identity is made only in signification (she calls this 'performativity') and that it never survives outside of its performances.<sup>44</sup> (Later, in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, she would elaborate upon this and clarify the importance of repetition in

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 341.

<sup>44</sup>Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990) 145.

this process.)<sup>45</sup> But, having done all that, Butler then turns the discussion on its head, arguing that subversion and undercutting of identity is only possible within this regime. Butler's position is that her approach does not deconstruct the politics of feminism but rather only its illusion of a foundational gender, arguing, as she later famously put it, that "gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original."<sup>46</sup> Feminism as a political *practice* could continue. Butler's new orientation for feminism would soon cease to be called 'feminism.' It is now called queer. In the 1993 essay "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," Butler elaborates in less theoretical terms what this means for Gay and Lesbian Studies. She calls all identity categories "stumbling blocks" and argues that the construction of a homosexual identity actually requires the constant renewal of the closet. She writes: "being 'out' must produce the closet again and again in order to maintain itself as 'out.' In this sense, *outness* can only produce a new opacity; and the closet produces the promise of a disclosure that can [...] never come."<sup>47</sup> The central contribution made in *Gender Trouble* and in the texts that follow it is Butler's reframing of identity as a dynamic and unstable process characterized by internal difference and lacking any fixed state.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* argues that any political liberation, such as that following the Stonewall riots in the United States, does not change the fundamental dynamics of homosexual identities or of how they interact with the

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<sup>45</sup>She writes: "It is not simply a matter of construing performativity as a repetition of acts, as if 'acts' remain intact and self-identical as they are repeated in time, and where 'time' is understood as external to the 'acts' themselves. On the contrary, an act is itself a repetition, a sedimentation, and a congealment of the past which is precisely foreclosed in its act-like status [...] I make use of the Lacanian notion that every act is to be construed as a repetition, the repetition of what cannot be recollected, of the irrecoverable, and is thus the haunting spectre of the subject's deconstitution." Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993) 644n7.

<sup>46</sup>Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 309.

wider culture.<sup>48</sup> Where Butler deals primarily with the assertion of identity, through performativity, Sedgwick is primarily concerned with its reception (or consumption), in various ways. The closet establishes an occasion for knowledge, and here she is building on the ideas of Michel Foucault. This knowledge is not final but limited: it automatically and always creates some new dimension of secrecy. Secrecy *per se* and the act of revealing become central and even eroticized in all constructions of homosexual identities. She argues that the closet is not abolished by self-disclosure.<sup>49</sup> Rather, it is highlighted; and the maintenance of the closet together with the newly-received knowledge produces a greater inclusiveness, perhaps, but the foregrounding of secrecy is still organizing. She writes: “[Since Stonewall] gay uncovering seems if anything heightened in surprise and delectability, rather than staled, by the increasingly intense atmosphere of public articulations of and about the love that is famous for daring not to speak its name.”<sup>50</sup>

It is discernible, then, that Butler and Sedgwick are concerned with comparable questions and that they deal with them in a comparable way. The normative is a process but, according to these authors, the normal is a mirage. Queer Theory certainly aims to understand those marginal identities that are its habitual subject within an overall critique of the total structure of identity. Queer Theory tends to imply, therefore, that it may be possible to queer anything. Halperin describes its potential breadth this way:

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<sup>48</sup>See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990).

<sup>49</sup>Sedgwick argues that the closet, or “coming out of the closet” has become such a handy encapsulation of modern practices of knowledge and disclosure not because it was “evacuated of its historical gay specificity” but exactly because “a whole cluster of the most crucial sites for the contestation of meaning in twentieth century western culture are [...] quite indelibly marked with the historical specificity of homosocial/homosexual definition [...] from around the turn of the century.” (Sedgwick, 72) For understanding the twentieth century, at least, Sedgwick’s brand of Queer Theory posits homosexuality as a major foundational idea organizing everybody’s identities and practices.

<sup>50</sup>Sedgwick, 67.

Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence. 'Queer' then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative.<sup>51</sup>

The question then arises whether the category 'queer' can and should still be reserved to some prescribed field of applicability.<sup>52</sup> So far, Queer Theory has tended to be used as if it could be. Queer may be a "zone of possibilities,"<sup>53</sup> as one scholar has put it, but even so-called queers are used to having their possibilities be policed. A queer zone is a discomfort zone and Queer Theory was born in anxiety over the loss of special identities.

In a much-cited caveat, in 1995, Halperin expressed this anxiety, writing:

Lesbians and gay men can now look forward to a new round of condescension and dismissal at the hands of the trendy and glamorously unspecified sexual outlaws who call themselves 'queer' and who claim the radical chic attached to a sexually transgressive identity without, of course, having to do anything icky with their bodies in order to earn it.<sup>54</sup>

In this passage the anxiety is betrayed by sarcasm. 'Icky' is clearly sarcastic. 'Radical chic' is a term dripping with sarcasm.<sup>55</sup> We might well wonder, though, whether the greatest threat facing lesbians and gay men really is straight people pretending to be 'sexual outlaws'. Still, it is a hotly contested matter among scholars addressing Queer Theory whether expansions of its field of study far beyond manifestly homosexual or related subjects is legitimate. Here I may record my own position that, as Queer Theory

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<sup>51</sup>David Halperin, *Saint = Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) 62.

<sup>52</sup>That is, does Queer Theory challenge the normative or merely the heteronormative, or can the concepts even be separated? 'Heteronormative' was coined by Michael Warner in the volume he edited, *Fear of a Queer Planet*. See Michael Warner, "Introduction," *Fear of a Queer Planet* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1993) xxiii.

<sup>53</sup>Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1996) 2.

<sup>54</sup>Halperin, *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>55</sup>First coined by Tom Wolfe, it is reproduced here with its bite intact but its original meaning apparently forgotten. See Tom Wolfe, *Radical Chic & Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1970). The phrase was coined to mock socialites and celebrities who associated themselves with radical political figures and those figures who sold out (or rented out) their causes to frolic with 'high society' figures. The possibility of a legitimate radical chic, as Wolfe meant it, does not exist.

develops and matures, it will be concerned less with who may use it and with respect to what objects of application and more with how effectively it may be deployed, wherever it is deployed, to generate new knowledge.

Queer approaches have been particularly limited, so far, within the discipline of art history, as compared with literary studies, for example. Whitney Davis is perhaps the most prominent figure in gay-oriented art history. He has edited the volume *Gay and Lesbian Studies in Art History* (1994)<sup>56</sup> and is the author of “‘Homosexuality,’ Gay and Lesbian Studies, and Queer Theory in Art History,” a historiographical study published in 1998.<sup>57</sup> He is also a sensitive but critical voice in surveying the discipline. Davis writes that scholarly works in the period up to the 1980s were “united by their common concern to establish gay and lesbian inquiry within the discipline in the discipline’s own accepted and most prestigious terms and formats.”<sup>58</sup> The field was still very small and so these early forays tended to concentrate on the most glaring omissions in the history of art and to “analyze ‘homosexual’ artists, major homoerotic motifs or themes in the visual arts, and gay and lesbian cultural networks and institutions.”<sup>59</sup> It was already such a job to place these analyses within a still quite resistant discipline’s main organs of dialogue, that few scholars pursued more marginal or daring cases. The application of Queer Theory

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<sup>56</sup>*Gay and Lesbian Studies in Art History*, ed. Whitney Davis (Binghamton, New York: Haworth Press/Harrington Park Press, 1994), published simultaneously as *The Journal of Homosexuality* 27, nos. 1/2 (1994) (special double issue).

<sup>57</sup>(See above) *The Subjects of Art History*, 115-142. According to Davis, ‘Homosexuality’ was a nineteenth and early twentieth century belief in the present, real and instantiated homoerotic potential within cultural creations, it tended to acknowledge homosexuality – albeit it in code – by diverse kinds of cultural practitioners, and it was founded on the belief in an innate homoerotic potential. In sum, it tended to universalize homoerotic interest, while seeing it realized only to varying extents. After Stonewall, the emergent Gay and Lesbian Studies articulated a separate homosexual identity and subjectivity. Its aim within art history, like feminist art history’s earlier recovery of women artists, had been to recover homosexual artists, or to recover them as homosexual. It also sought to recover manifestly homoerotic content.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*



proper in art history has come later still. Only in the last decade and a half has Queer Theory made such inroads.<sup>60</sup> In the 1994 compilation he edited, *Gay and Lesbian Studies in Art History*, Davis does mention Queer Theory in his introduction. There, however, his theme is largely how to reconcile it with a discipline that was then only beginning to deal with queer-related art in a serious way. He does see Queer Theory's appearance in art history as an opportunity to curb the worst practices both of the approach's supporters and its detractors. Davis writes:

“[Q]ueer studies” or “queer theory” [...] have been chiefly associated with the efforts of literary historians and critics trained in deconstructionist, psychoanalytic and other movements in recent critical theory and with contemporary media studies; art historians [...] have participated much less vigorously in this endeavour. But despite an unfortunate demonizing of documentary or “positivist” labours in some quarters of “queer theory,” and an equally unfortunate hostility to “theory” in some quarters of lesbian and gay historical studies, there is absolutely no reason why historical and hermeneutic awareness cannot go hand-in-hand – and it is perhaps art historians, who tend to straddle the social-historical and literary-critical approaches who are best placed to carry out an effective synthesis.<sup>61</sup>

I am inclined to agree with Davis about the potential of this encounter. But, for all that, in the seventeen years since 1994 queer approaches have made little headway in the study of historical, rather than contemporary, art. This is beginning to change. The question as to whether and how Queer Theory may appropriately be used to look at art of past epochs is taken up at length at the beginning of the second part of this thesis.<sup>62</sup> It is worthwhile to note, however, that my work here both builds upon and expands from some (few) past attempts.

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<sup>60</sup>In *Gay and Lesbian Studies in Art History* Whitney Davis, includes essays that treat issues of manifestly gay subject matter or images that have become gay icons, by figures such as himself, Michael Camille or David Joselit. Only one essay takes an avowedly queer approach, “Queering Boundaries: Semen and Visual Representations from the Middle Ages and in the Era of the AIDS Crisis.” (The essay is by John Paul Riccio, perhaps tellingly one of only three contributors not yet to have earned a doctorate.) See Davis, ed., *Gay and Lesbian Studies in Art History*.

<sup>61</sup>Whitney Davis, “Introduction” in *Gay and Lesbian Studies in Art History*.

<sup>62</sup>See the section “Queer Early Modern?” in Chapter 3.

As this study will be bringing a queer approach to Nicolas Poussin – surely not an obvious example of an artist waiting to be ‘queered’ – some account of past work in this area and how it may be undertaken is desirable. One key example is provided now. The term ‘queer’ has been used to describe the work of one art historian in particular who did not (at first) use that term himself, but whose interests seem aligned with those of Queer Theory to a considerable extent. The work of Michael Camille aims at locating homosexual desire in historic European art, particularly that of the Middle Ages, but he relates it to multiplicity, the undermining of dominant, normative meanings, and the persistent effect of marginality.<sup>63</sup> This is closely aligned with the project of Queer Theory. In *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art*,<sup>64</sup> which was published in 1992, Camille looks at the importance of marginality within various medieval environments connected with visual art, including the monastery (manuscript marginalia), the cathedral (gargoyles and historiated capitals), the court (books of hours), and the city (the ‘carnavalesque’ dimension of urban life). Camille investigates a mutually constitutive relationship between centre and periphery that he recognizes as offering a timely engagement with postmodern theory, although he is careful not to project postmodernism onto the Middle Ages. In his later work, the connection with homoerotic seeing would become far more forcefully developed, as in “‘For Our Devotion and Pleasure’: The Sexual Objects of Jean Duc de Berry”, for instance, which comes from a 2001 collection of essays entitled *Other Objects of Desire: Collectors and Collecting Queerly*, which he edited. Camille still does not use the term ‘queer’ in the body of his

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<sup>63</sup>Camille was published in Davis’s 1994 volume, albeit writing about a much later work, Hippolyte Flandrin’s *Figure d’Etude* (1836), [Fig. 0.2] a noted gay icon; but even earlier his work encountered key queer themes, even where it did not directly deal with sexuality.

<sup>64</sup>Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

own contribution. His approach, however, aims not only to locate a polymorphous (but preponderantly homoerotic) desire, that of Duke Jean, encoded in his famous book of hours, but he even uses a sometimes lusty intuition in order to illuminate that desire. Of two youths in the *January Page* of that book. [Fig. 0.3] Camille writes: “Pol de Limbourg’s pretty boys on this page show how the newly fashionable short haircuts for male courtiers also created a newly charged erotic zone of the medieval body – the swan-like nape of the neck.”<sup>65</sup> (Camille now appears to have lost any fear of projection).

Camille writes a vision of the Middle Ages that is filled with articulations and contestations of difference, often of eroticized differences. His work, on the whole, serves to provide an image of the Middle Ages that can be understood on its own terms but, thereby, understood as much closer to the concerns of Queer Theory than might otherwise have been expected. In order to explain Camille’s relationship to queer concerns, Whitney Davis has recently observed that “Michael Camille didn’t queer the Middle Ages, the Middle Ages queered Michael Camille.”<sup>66</sup> This remark makes the important point that queerness is revealed in objects of queer study, not imposed on them. It also implies that queerness is more basic than and not beholden to recent conceptualizations of sex and gender differences. Despite this bold expansion of scope, beyond the stricter confines of Gay and Lesbian Studies, Queer Theory or, as with Camille, queer approaches have still tended to be used only in cases where gender issues are in play or where a protagonist is, in some way, queer. Even James Smalls, in a ground-breaking extension of Queer Theory to visual art, seems to need the possibility

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<sup>65</sup>Michael Camille, “‘For Our Devotion and Pleasure’: The Sexual Objects of Jean Duc de Berry” in *Other Objects of Desire: Collectors and Collecting Queerly*, ed. Michael Camille and Adrian Rifkin (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001) 15.

<sup>66</sup>Whitney Davis, *Annual Meeting of the College Art Association (CAA)*, Chicago, Illinois, 13 Feb., 2010. See also Chapter 3.

that his artist, Anne-Louis Girodet de Roucy-Trioson, may have been homosexual. (He points out that destroyed correspondence makes it impossible to ever rule out that he was.) Smalls argues only for the need of a queer-oriented audience for Girodet's works to have them be intelligible in queer terms; yet the logical umbilicus remains attached, as though such a reception is untenable or unviable without a homosexual artist.<sup>67</sup>

I believe this range of application can and should be expanded even further. This position is embedded in this project and it is one also implied in the founding texts of Queer Theory, I believe. Queer Theory need not restrict itself to a concern with queers. Indeed, developing as it does out of Feminism and not Gay and Lesbian Studies, Queer Theory already was extended beyond its original theoretical scope. That is, even the concern with queer issues is itself an extension into new terrain by a variant of poststructuralist Feminism. And so, to be centered outside itself or its own 'natural' concerns was already the earliest property of Queer Theory. Part of this project addresses a manifestly queer (and homosexual) topic in Anthony Blunt. The other part blazes a very new trail, undertaking to deploy Queer Theory to analyze the visual and thematic properties of artworks by an artist not ordinarily associated with homosexuality at all. To put my contentions in Davis's terms, I shall be arguing that it is Poussin who has queered Blunt, in some sense. This contention is based upon a broad understanding of the potential scope of Queer Theory and will not depend upon discovering that Poussin was himself homosexually-inclined, even though I shall suggest that possibility. I believe, therefore, that this same project is well positioned to try the question of what the limits of Queer Theory's application should be and that it thereby may serve to expand them.

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<sup>67</sup>See Smalls, *ibid.*

### Thesis Overview

This thesis is divided into two parts. The first concerns Anthony Blunt and his engagements with Poussin and the second presents a new queer reading of Poussin. Each part consists of two chapters. The argument is pursued throughout the thesis and there are linkages among these chapters but the discussions of Blunt's life and work and its relationship to Poussin, on the one hand, and of Poussin's art, on the other, are largely separated into the two respective parts "Blunt's Poussin" and "A Queer Poussin."

Part One begins with the first chapter, "Secret Identity and the Art Historian," which outlines Anthony Blunt's contribution to Poussin scholarship and explores the attempts made by scholars to explain the mysterious relationship between the artist and the art historian that seems to underlie it. I outline how I believe this relationship may properly be explained using a queer approach and, from there, I go on to critique those conventions and habits of thought that have led homosexual and homoerotic issues to be sidelined until relatively recently – and sometimes still – in art historical scholarship. Using the key case of James Smalls's essay on Girodet as an example, I show how heteronormativity can cause queer meanings to be suppressed, without any intentional distortion, merely because of the unrecognized biases and in-built conventions of art history.<sup>68</sup> Chapter 1 also explores how queerness may have influenced Blunt's thought and writings, even if Blunt did not directly conceive of such queerness himself. I conclude with an account of how the circumstances of Blunt's exposure in 1979 allows us to see, almost in cross-section, the structure of the manifold queer identity that Blunt had meticulously been building since at least the late 1930s.

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<sup>68</sup>I respond, in particular, to certain criticisms of Smalls's reading by Abigail Solomon-Godeau. See Chapter 1. See also Solomon-Godeau, *ibid.*

In the second chapter, “Arcadia and the Splitting of Anthony Blunt,” I examine in greater depth the mechanics of Blunt’s evolving thinking, work, and identity construction. Blunt’s transition from his early Marxist art criticism to his later, apparently disinterested, art history is explored in detail. The hypothesis presented is that an early fascination with the artistic world of Poussin, and in particular the Arcadian thematic, becomes a basis for Blunt to reimagine and to transform both art and politics. I outline the role of homoeroticism over the history of the Arcadian thematic. While Arcadian visions are central to Poussin’s work and have been widely recognized as such, Blunt may be said to underemphasize them, which may indicate, in turn, another importance for him. I conclude with an interpretation of Arcadia’s meaning for Blunt and why he might find it a necessary subject to partly suppress. The interpretive possibility I explore in this chapter is whether Blunt may have resolved a crisis that emerged between his views on art and his views on politics by becoming, at around the same time, a professional art historian and a Soviet spy. This partly covert and multiple identity, I maintain, could be as queer as was his sexuality.

In Part Two of this thesis I leave Blunt behind, to a large extent, and go on to analyze and interpret Poussin’s artworks using Queer Theory and related methodologies, an orientation in this body of work that I am calling a ‘queer Poussin’. I examine two dimensions in which Poussin adapts and then develops this homoerotic potential, to increasingly queer ends, looking first at queer bodies and then later at ways of depicting space. Having previously explored how the Arcadian tradition has established homoerotic overtones, in Chapter 3 (“Queer Bodies”), I investigate how Poussin adopts this tradition, depicting bodies in a way that is arguably queer, both in his artworks’ formal and

representative aspects. My investigation begins with a consideration of the value of – and problems with – using a very new critical category to look at art of the early modern period. I go on to look at how Poussin achieves a queer destabilization of the individual body (with a more sustained interpretation of the *Echo and Narcissus* mentioned above) and then, later, how he expands upon this approach when depicting groups of interconnected figures (as I examine in detail his *Bacchanal before a Herm of Pan* of 1631-32). The argument I advance is that there is a general development in Poussin’s pursuit of a queer pictorial order but that this development is not smooth. My discussion is, for this reason, organized thematically. I discuss queer bodies, the visual and textual sources with which they engage, and the complex meanings they thereby encode. Along the way, I relate my queer interpretation to other relevant theoretical models, particularly to Julia Kristeva’s concept of intertextuality and, in relation to the *Bacchanal*, to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s discussion of becoming-animal in *A Thousand Plateaus*.

The final chapter in Part Two, “Making Queer Space,” explores how Poussin’s queer approach evolves to become a way of destabilizing space in his depictions and, eventually, of destabilizing depiction itself. By looking at a number of Poussin’s major historical and mythological subjects, I relate the queer reading, established in the previous, chapter to a number of other scholars’ interpretations and to other theoretical approaches related to Queer Theory, such as Lacanian psychoanalysis, Michel Foucault’s concept of ‘heterotopias’, and semiological readings of Poussin by Louis Marin. This discussion spans twenty years of Poussin’s working life but only focuses on five major works, including *The Rape of the Sabines*, (1634), *The Plague at Ashdod* (1631) and *Landscape with Pyramus and Thisbe* (1651). Poussin deals with very difficult problems

in representation, problematizing representation itself. His usual solution is to construct pictorial spaces that destabilize, resist or undermine themselves. In general, the figure-ground relationship is undermined. I focus on one further painting, *Holy Family in Egypt* (1655-57), which seems to simultaneously depict both Rome and Egypt in one collapsed setting. Other paintings seem to both advance and recede spatially, such as the last of the five works I look at closely, Poussin's 1640 painting, the *Arcadian Shepherds*. The painter therefore presents a pictorial multiplicity entirely congruent with the multiplicity that Queer Theory finds in all gender identities, and, ultimately, in all represented identity.

The general argument is then recapitulated, its findings articulated and their implications discussed in the Conclusion, "Speculative Historiography," which fits the findings of the two parts back together and assesses how effective this queer approach to the project's joint research problem has been. I also compare the insights of my scholarly investigation with fictional views of Blunt and the Blunt-Poussin relationship. Considering all this, I put this thesis's findings in the context of a larger debate about historical scholarship and how it should be conducted, ending with a brief consideration of how adventurous and how careful art history and historiography ought to be.



**PART ONE: BLUNT'S POUSSIN**

**CHAPTER 1:**  
**SECRET IDENTITY AND THE ART HISTORIAN**

Recently art history has suffered the indignity of being described as “harmless.”<sup>1</sup> The adjective was applied – tongue no doubt in cheek – on the website of the Courtauld Institute of Art to describe how surprising it seemed that an art historian, its long-time director Anthony Blunt, should have turned out to be a Soviet agent. The Institute’s statement reads in part:

Given his background, his accent, and Olympian demeanour, it was inconceivable that such a man could have been a subversive. Above all, the zeal with and dedication with which he threw himself into the promotion of a harmless academic subject like art history, created the impression of a man wholly absorbed in a world where contemporary politics were not a primary concern.<sup>2</sup>

The text goes on to restate a common view that Blunt used his art history, real though it was, as a cover for his clandestine lives. In this chapter, I argue for the centrality of queerness in understanding both Blunt’s political activities and his art historical work. I argue, furthermore, that through an articulation of queerness these two aspects of his life can be intimately connected. The picture emerging from this story is of an art history that certainly has not been ‘harmless’, in Blunt’s case, and possibly never is. I propose that Blunt’s art history is biased by his queerness in that it is inflected by his concern for secrecy and his determination to maintain discrete, incompatible identities. I situate my claims within a debate about Blunt’s art history that flared up in the wake of the revelations of his espionage and treachery and I also situate my claims within a debate

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<sup>1</sup>Courtauld Institute of Art, “About us: A Short History of the Courtauld,” *The Courtauld Institute of Art Website*. (Text Online. Accessed 21 Oct., 2009. <<http://www.courtauld.ac.uk/about/history.shtml>>

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

about whether art history as a discipline is necessarily always affected by bias of some kind. Therefore, this chapter and, to a lesser extent, the next undertake a historiography of Anthony Blunt.

Historiography may mean the history and criticism of history, philosophies and theories of history, or historical methodology as a discipline in its own right. (In another sense, it may also mean any particular body of historical commentaries.) That possible historiographies cover so much broad and contentious territory means that the term's definition necessarily depends on what one's historiographical attitudes are. As I use the term here, historiography is partly the study of art historical work (Anthony Blunt's art historical work on Poussin) but mostly an interpretation of that work within the larger context of what I regard as Blunt's multifaceted engagement with Poussin. This chapter presents my project's methodological approach – it is a speculative queer history – in order to disclose (and not seek to disguise) its *own* bias. One of the ways art history, like any other history, can be harmful is when it has pretensions to an impossible objectivity. This is bad, of course, when, like propaganda, it succeeds in deceiving others. It is worse when it deceives itself. But scholarly bias, I contend, can be manifested just as much in what one has ruled out implicitly from the beginning, what is never considered let alone investigated. This happened for a long time to queer histories, which were buried more by assumptions than by design. Art history can never be made 'harmless', I do not think, but if the biases of its methodology are acknowledged, its harm may be correspondingly reduced.

In this part of the thesis I therefore explore and anatomize the terrain I call 'Blunt's Poussin'. This is the totality of Blunt's effects upon our understanding of the

artist; I shall also explore how Poussin's art and its concerns may have influenced Blunt's self-understanding and may even have helped determine his dangerous identity politics. This exploration will include, to be sure, a consideration of Blunt's art historical writings, but I explore them primarily to see what insight they offer as to the larger picture of the art historian's interaction with the artist's work. Blunt was an art critic before he was an art historian and, while he was an art historian, he was, as a Soviet spy, a traitor. Until the very end of his life, moreover, Blunt was a discreet but well-known homosexual and very well connected in English society, being a long-time member of the Royal household, a fixture of the English academic establishment, a prominent public figure on cultural matters, and, clandestinely, attached to Britain's security and intelligence community. (That there was a Soviet connection as well was a secret known only to a very few until 1979.) The general claim I advance in these first two chapters is that Blunt's academic presentation of Poussin, though serious and real, also served a second purpose, to cover over those aspects of Poussin that most reflect the hidden aspects of Blunt's life and the complex connections among them. In effect, I accept that common view, mentioned above, that Blunt's art history was cover; but rather than assume that the art historical career itself was the cover, I examine instead how what Blunt says about Poussin – and what he does not say about him – is the important aspect of this cover.

This chapter examines the dynamics of Blunt's complex set of identities, emphasizing its relation to the art historical work and to Blunt's public career. The next chapter explores Blunt's earlier career as a critic and relates the Arcadian thematic to Blunt's early life and homosexuality. Together, these two chapters propose that Blunt's Poussin is a manifold and multi-layered engagement with the artist and his concerns. It is

my central claim in this first chapter that the dynamics of identity articulated by Queer Theory do satisfactorily explain the anomalies in Blunt's work and multiple careers and should, therefore, become a basis for understanding both the meaning of his art historical contributions to the study of Poussin and how those contributions have affected and been affected by other aspects of his life. This chapter proceeds by looking, first, at Blunt's art historical contributions to Poussin studies. Second, I ground my contention that Blunt's work may have served a supplementary purpose in the theoretical and methodological terms of Queer Theory and historiographical interpretation, arguing that we must consider such questions, even when they lack positive evidence and even if this means that we have to leave such possibilities bracketed as unproven. Third and finally, I present a general interpretation of Anthony Blunt's elaborate identity construction and recount how it disintegrated, in his 1979 exposure, in such a way as to make its structure discernible.

#### Anthony Blunt and Nicolas Poussin

Typically, art historians work on a number of different artists or subjects and, typically, among these some are special areas of expertise or interest. Anthony Blunt's focus on Nicolas Poussin, however, is atypically intense. As an art historian, Blunt is responsible for various books on Poussin, Renaissance and Baroque French art generally, Italian art and art theory in the Renaissance and Baroque periods, William Blake, and Pablo Picasso.<sup>3</sup> He is the author, moreover, of numerous articles on diverse subjects, but especially on Poussin. Beginning with the publication of *Artistic Theory in Italy 1450-1600* (1940), Blunt's first professional book as an art historian, he displays a certain

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<sup>3</sup>Blunt even managed to have one book and five short articles published after his exposure.

breadth of study. But his interest lay in the Italian theory in the first place because it influenced Poussin. (In fact, this book was an outgrowth of the first part of his unpublished fellowship dissertation which went on to establish exactly that point.)<sup>4</sup> Further, Blunt's interest in French architecture that was roughly contemporary with Poussin's work and, especially, one architect, François Mansart (1598-1666) who was Poussin's almost-exact contemporary, can be understood in part as proxies for Blunt's abiding interest in Poussin. Even his seemingly unrelated interests, especially in Borromini, upon whom he published a monograph in 1979, and in William Blake, upon whom he published first an article in the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* ("Blake's Pictorial Imagination," 1943) and, later, a monograph (*The Art of William Blake*, 1959),<sup>5</sup> suggest in their relative isolation the intensity of Blunt's *poussiniste* focus. More than that, the subjects of his writings also suggest, as with Poussin, correspondences between the artists the art historian studies and circumstances in his own life.<sup>6</sup> These writings are not proxies for Poussin but they are, in some respects, parallel cases.<sup>7</sup> Poussin emerges as uncommonly important for Blunt, looking at his publication

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<sup>4</sup>The dissertation's text, which Blunt had prepared for this Cambridge University fellowship, is not among Blunt's papers and would appear to be lost, although an extremely positive review of it by the (then) Courtauld director, William George Constable, is among those papers.

<sup>5</sup>Otherwise, where Blunt does return repeatedly to a topic, as with Picasso, for instance, these tend to be the holdovers of his early modernist enthusiasms and the later publications tend to include Blunt only as a senior figure working with a younger art historian of his patronage (as with *Picasso: The Formative Years*, 1962, co-written with Phoebe Pool). The case of Picasso may be regarded as truly exceptionally since it concerned Blunt's most notorious – and ultimately absurd – judgment as an art critic, one, moreover, that in the early 1960s tended to concentrate attention in an unwelcome way on his early avowed Marxism. It was useful for Blunt to show that he had changed his mind utterly on the subject of Picasso. See the section "Being Blunt" below and see also Chapter 2.

<sup>6</sup>See David Carrier, "Anthony Blunt's Poussin" in *Word & Image* 25.4 (Dec., 2009): 421. See also Miranda Carter, *Anthony Blunt: His Lives* (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2001) 411-13.

<sup>7</sup>In his 1979 book on Borromini, Blunt writes: "from an early stage Borromini became for me the irresistibly great master, the one architect whose works were so subtle that one could go on examining them and dissecting them, constantly discovering new beauties, new refinements, new ingenuities, and always in the end coming to the conclusion that what seemed at first sight to be freaks of fantasy were in fact variations based on an almost ruthlessly logical method." Anthony Blunt, *Borromini* (London: Allen Lane, 1979) 9. Blunt goes on to note that until the end of the nineteenth century and even up until the time of his

record, but the connection even seems to transcend the strictly art historical. Right at the outset of *Nicolas Poussin*, his 1967 book on the painter and surely his *magnum opus*, Blunt declares “Poussin has always remained my first love.”<sup>8</sup> And this sense of personal investment led many of Blunt’s students to describe the rapport as being an “identification.”<sup>9</sup> Explaining the relationship of Blunt to Poussin is the central problem of any historiographical treatment of Blunt’s art historical career but, well beyond that, it may be necessary to understand Blunt on any other level.

Anthony Blunt’s scholarship on Poussin served to restore but also to further develop a traditional understanding of the artist. It reasserted a traditional view advanced by Poussin’s earliest biographers, such as André Félibien (1619-1695) and Giovanni Pietro Bellori (1613-1696), that Poussin was foremost a painter of ideas.<sup>10</sup> These writers present an intellectual Poussin, interested in philosophy. Blunt, in proposing that Poussin is to be associated with certain neo-stoical schools in Rome at the time,<sup>11</sup> is restoring this Poussin, the *pictor philosophicus*, as opposed to the formalist Poussin Blunt asserts was championed by Roger Fry.<sup>12</sup> But, in restoring this Poussin, Blunt still changes him. Art

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early enthusiasm for the architect Borromini was “vilified as the great anarchist of architecture, the man who overthrew all the laws of the Ancients and replaced them with disorder, and who corrupted the taste of many architects in Italy and Central Europe for generations.” (Ibid.,13) A pattern in Blunt’s interest in artists would seem to be their status as an underdog in some way. At the outset of his 1959 book *The Art of William Blake*, for instance, he wrote: “The fact that Blake had little facility as a painter and that not only many of his early works but also some of his later ones are clumsy has led critics to maintain that painting was for him a minor activity, and that his works in this medium are altogether inferior to those in poetry or prose. This view is, I believe, false.” Anthony Blunt, *The Art of William Blake* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959) 1.

<sup>8</sup>Anthony Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin* [Reprint] (Hong Kong: Pallas Athene, 1995), xvii.

<sup>9</sup>See Carter, 417.

<sup>10</sup>See André Félibien in Claire Pace, ed., *Félibien’s Life of Poussin* [*Entretiens sur les vies et sur les ouvrages des plus excellents peintres anciens et modernes: huitième entretien*] (London: Zwemmer, 1981). See also Giovanni Pietro Bellori, *Vie de Nicolas Poussin* (Geneva: Pierre Cailler, ed., 1947).

<sup>11</sup>See Blunt, “IV: Poussin and Stoicism” in *Nicolas Poussin*, 157-176.

<sup>12</sup>See David Carrier, *Poussin’s Paintings: A Study in Art-Historical Methodology* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993) 47-52. Carrier here provides an excellent account of what can be troublesome in Blunt’s scholarship: it seems clear he uses Fry as a ‘straw man’ for his own arguments,

history had come into existence as a discipline since the first generation of Poussin biographers and Blunt, together with many other art historians, creates a detailed picture of Poussin's various intellectual concerns. In particular, he brings new art-historical ideas about iconography and genres to propose that Poussin is operating in an allegorical mode in many instances where that had not been advanced before, as in his early sensuous paintings.<sup>13</sup> The difficulty arises in that Blunt's Poussin is not as well-grounded as it would appear – in the details of his dating of pictures, for instance.<sup>14</sup> And Blunt's Poussin is a narrative that stresses, above all, a certain order in the painter's development.

Poussin dominated Blunt's intellectual life and returned, over and over again, in his work as an art historian and so the art historian is mainly and correctly associated with this painter. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the names of Anthony Blunt and Nicolas Poussin were intertwined. There are five principal components to Blunt's work on Poussin. The first component is his publication of articles on Poussin over the period 1938 to 1983. Two articles are important stand-alone works. "Poussin's *Et in Arcadia Ego*" (1938) draws from Erwin Panofsky's important 1936 article "Et in Arcadia Ego: Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition"<sup>15</sup> and was published in the *Art Bulletin*. (It influenced a revision of Erwin Panofsky's own essay.)<sup>16</sup> The seminal article "The Heroic and Ideal Landscape in the work of Nicolas Poussin" was published in the *Journal of the Courtauld and Warburg Institutes* in 1944. The other, major contribution is a fourteen part series of

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suggesting that his own project is more ambitious than it really was. Fry's views appeared in *Transformations* (New York: Brentano's, 1926).

<sup>13</sup>Michael Kitson, foreword to *Nicolas Poussin*, x.

<sup>14</sup>See Denis Mahon, "Poussin's Early Development: An Alternative Hypothesis" *The Burlington Magazine* 102.688 (July, 1960): 288-301+.

<sup>15</sup>Erwin Panofsky, "Et in Arcadia Ego: On the Concept of Transience in Poussin and Watteau" in *Philosophy and History: Essays Presented to Ernst Cassirer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936). Reprinted: ed., Raymond Klibansky and HJ Patton (New York: Harper and Row, 1963) 223-254.

<sup>16</sup>Later published as Erwin Panofsky, "Et in Arcadia Ego: Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition" in *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1955) 295-320 .



articles, published in *Burlington Magazine* between 1947 and 1964, called “Poussin Studies.” In all, Blunt published thirty-seven articles on Poussin and these treat every imaginable aspect of the painter’s work, his patronage, his scholarship, and his reception. Blunt even published a late article on Poussin’s will.<sup>17</sup> But the early and formative essays deal primarily with Poussin’s Arcadian landscapes and with the legacy of these mythological landscapes in Poussin’s later, more philosophical landscape works. The second component is Blunt’s contribution to *The Pelican History of Art* series, *Art and Architecture in France 1500-1700* (1953). Blunt’s study is in no way dominated by Poussin, but Poussin emerges as the central and organizing figure in a broad but very learned scholarly survey. Indeed Blunt mentions that it is by, as he puts it, “a curious freak” that the figure at the heart of this period of French art should be found in Rome, not in France.<sup>18</sup> The importance that Poussin has, understated though it may be, turns this book into a study of displacement. The third component of Blunt’s work on Poussin relates to his influence (by that time) within Poussin studies: it is his curatorship of the 1960 Poussin retrospective exhibition in Paris. Here, as later, Blunt’s interest in providing an elegant and unproblematic account of Poussin’s development as an artist comes to the fore. (And it is here that his rivalry with Denis Mahon, a Poussin connoisseur who would persistently and, ultimately persuasively, challenge Blunt’s account, also comes to the fore.)<sup>19</sup> The fourth and fifth components of Blunt’s engagement with Poussin are related to this dating project and, even more closely, to each other. They are Blunt’s 1966

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<sup>17</sup>Anthony Blunt, “A Newly Discovered Will of Nicolas Poussin,” *The Burlington Magazine* 124.956 (1982): 703-704.

<sup>18</sup>Anthony Blunt, *Art and Architecture in France 1500-1700*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Harmondsworth, UK: Pelican Books, 1982) 272.

<sup>19</sup>Ann Sutherland Harris writes: “Mahon’s views about the chronology of Poussin’s work [...] provoked by [Blunt’s] Poussin exhibition of 1960 have been generally accepted.” Ann Sutherland Harris, Review in *Art Bulletin* 72 (1990): 144n.

catalogue of Poussin's work, *The Paintings of Nicolas Poussin: A Critical Catalogue*, and his 1967 monograph (based on his Mellon Lectures of 1958),<sup>20</sup> its companion volume, *Nicolas Poussin*. All this published material drew from research work and unpublished writing stretching back to Blunt's fellowship dissertation<sup>21</sup> and from his constant lecturing.

These last two components, ostensibly the culmination of Blunt's work on Poussin, are also the most problematic in understanding his position in Poussin studies. So complete has been the rejection of Blunt's dating system that, in 1995, when the Hong Kong publisher Pallas Athene republished Blunt's monograph (with a new foreword by Blunt's former student and colleague Michael Kitson) it omitted to republish the accompanying catalogue. (Blunt's catalogue is, nevertheless, extremely useful for its painting-by-painting summary of the scholarship on Poussin's work. When Blunt's chronology was disputed, he included the rival claims.) However, as the dating serves Blunt's account of Poussin's development as a painter and, as Blunt's development as a painter is the overwhelming theme of his monograph, this problem cannot be brushed aside so neatly. Kitson, in his foreword, seeks to downplay this problem, writing "attribution, dating and the establishment of the artist's *oeuvre* are the *unimportant* aspects of the book."<sup>22</sup> He continues that "the quality which gives the book lasting value is its investigation of the ideas expressed in Poussin's work."<sup>23</sup> This remark is as smooth as it is (I presume) unintentionally misleading. He does not mean and cannot mean that

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<sup>20</sup>Blunt lectured on Poussin in 1958 at Columbia University. These were published as Anthony Blunt, *The A.W.Mellon Lectures on Fine Art* (New York: Bollingen, 1958).

<sup>21</sup>This dissertation was entitled "The History and Theories of Painting in Italy and France from 1400 to 1700," and had been prepared in 1933-34. It became the basis for *Artistic Theory in Italy 1450-1600* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1940) and his ongoing work on Poussin.

<sup>22</sup>Michael Kitson, foreword to Anthony Blunt's *Nicolas Poussin* (Hong Kong: Pallas Athene, 1995) ix.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

Blunt's discussion of Poussin's ideas – the whole thrust of which is to locate Poussin's works in their immediate place and time – can be separated from their dates such that the dating system can sink while the larger intellectual interpretation continues afloat on a life-raft of plausibility. On the contrary, Kitson means that in making the discussion of Poussin's ideas the point of his scholarship Blunt was recasting Poussin studies, even if his own account of those ideas must be qualified and corrected to correspond to a better account of the dating of his pictures. It is hard to account for Blunt's ongoing eminence, given the flaws in his work, unless we see him as a trailblazer of some kind. The situation has been well summarized by the philosopher turned art historian David Carrier, who writes:

The starting point for the modern scholarship [on Poussin] is Anthony Blunt's 1958 Mellon lectures [...] Blunt's general claim [is] that Poussin displays a somewhat eclectic, complex system of ideas linked with Stoicism. Blunt's claims about connoisseurship have not stood the test of time as well, but although the opposed analysis of Sir Denis Mahon has triumphed, that has not changed the general way that Poussin's art has been understood [...] Mahon's work has been treated as dealing with attributions and dates, not with the meaning of Poussin's pictures.<sup>24</sup>

Blunt's interest throughout his career had been to provide for Poussin the appearance of a well-ordered development and a coherent relationship to his intellectual *milieu*. His motivations are explored in the 1996 book *Nicolas Poussin: Friendship and the Love of Painting* by Elizabeth Cropper and Charles Dempsey.<sup>25</sup> These two art

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<sup>24</sup>Carrier, *Poussin's Paintings*, 47-48.

<sup>25</sup>Dempsey also knew Blunt personally and they were correspondents, especially in Blunt's capacity as editor of the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, when, in 1965, as a young art historian, Dempsey contributed to a series of articles published in that journal debating the correct interpretation of Poussin's *Triumph of Neptune and Amphitrite* (the debate concerned whether it was a 'Marine Venus' instead, as Dempsey believes.) See Anthony Blunt to Charles Dempsey, 16 Oct. 1964. Anthony Blunt to Charles Dempsey, 20 Oct. 1964. Anthony Blunt to Charles Dempsey, 22 Dec. 1965. Privately, Blunt could be waspishly critical about Dempsey's written style. To Joe Trapp (co-editor for the Warburg Institute), Blunt writes: "I am returning herewith Dempsey's two articles. I am rather in favour of publishing both, if we have room. I am pretty bored with the *Marine Venus* myself, but I think he does produce quite a lot of

historians set out to bridge a gap in Poussin studies between a focus on stylistics and connoisseurship, on the one hand, and interpretation based on textual evidence and the concepts found in works of art, on the other, that goes back at least as far as disputes in which Anthony Blunt was a participant. Their book links Poussin's ideas and his stylistics through a study of his networks of friends and his world of letters. They aim to bring in the theoretically sophisticated methodologies that had arisen in art historical and literary criticism since Blunt's time, using these new approaches to resolve certain old disputes. They rightly see Blunt as an important figure for their argument and open the book with a consideration of his motivations and concerns about the divide between connoisseurship and interpretation. Cropper and Dempsey write:

[Blunt] had at first planned [...] "to produce a straightforward monograph on Poussin as a painter." However, he found that it was necessary first to understand "the intellectual climate in which [Poussin] worked and the ideas ... in which he believed and which affected his method of work as well as his paintings."<sup>26</sup>

Sorting out the many fragments of intellectual traditions and philosophical influences that inform Poussin is a gargantuan task but Cropper and Dempsey seem too quick to take Blunt at his word that this fundamental task, providing a coherent and digestible theory of Poussin's intellectual commitments, was motivated entirely by necessity. (Rather, it may be the necessity of dealing with the challenge posed by Mahon that inspired Blunt's

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new evidence. It could, I believe, be shortened in a few parts [...] I have made one or two alterations of style, because in some cases his sentences are not very happy. I hate 'Amor' instead of either Cupid or Putto, particularly in its false plurals 'Amors'. On the other hand 'Amores' might seem pedantic. [...]Dempsey's] second article is better written than the other, and my comments of detail really concern fact rather than style." Anthony Blunt to Joe Trapp, 15 Dec., 1965. All letters Anthony Frederick Blunt Papers, The Courtauld Institute (CI AFB 200). Dempsey's first article is certainly Charles Dempsey, "Poussin's Marine Venus at Philadelphia: A Re-Identification Accepted," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 28 (1965): 338-343. The second is presumably Charles Dempsey, "The Textual Sources of Poussin's Marine Venus at Philadelphia," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 29 (1966): 438-442.

<sup>26</sup>Elizabeth Cropper and Charles Dempsey, *Nicolas Poussin: Friendship and the Love of Painting* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 5. For Blunt quotations (contained therein) see Anthony Blunt, preface, *Nicolas Poussin*, xvii, and Blunt, *Art and Architecture in France*, 195.

acknowledgement of the importance of connoisseurship and the plastic aspects of Poussin's painting in his introduction.) Cropper and Dempsey see in Blunt's writings an unresolved ambivalence, related possibly to Blunt's doubts about the quality of Poussin's work. And this ambivalence is at once a commonplace within art history and something made unusually acute within Poussin studies because of the role played by Blunt. They continue:

The interpretation of works of art [...] means working simultaneously on at least two primary levels, on the one hand that of history and its conventions and traditions (which determine expectations), and on the other that of the individual expression of unique works [...]. It is the central problem Blunt felt himself compelled to confront in his monograph, and about which he clearly felt defensive.<sup>27</sup>

Cropper and Dempsey see Blunt's 1967 *Nicolas Poussin* as an incomplete engagement by Blunt with the French painter, in that he apparently felt impelled to ground Poussin in intellectual history so as to justify his importance (whereas he would have preferred to assume the painter's historical importance so that he could advocate for the painter's pictorial merits). The authors go on:

He hoped someday to be able to write a book in which all this historical matter could be taken for granted, so that "Poussin's supreme merits as a painter can be made the principal theme." He never wrote that book, and perhaps could not have. The quality of Poussin's art, and on a deeper level his own response to it, was not something he could easily resolve within himself.<sup>28</sup>

While I see this interpretation of Blunt as plausible, I wonder whether Blunt's lack of resolution (as Cropper and Dempsey regard it) may not relate instead to an intuition (or even an understanding) on Blunt's part that Poussin, given the art historian's clear investment in him, might represent danger of some other kind. Namely, if Poussin should

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<sup>27</sup>Cropper and Dempsey, *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.* For Blunt quotations (contained therein) see Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, xvii.

come to be seen as subversive in any way (such as how Sheila McTighe argues he was connected with the atheist circle of *libertinage*)<sup>29</sup> and not just be seen as governed by order, reason and self-restraint, it could reflect badly on Blunt or, at least, compromise the benefit to Blunt's image of being associated with so apparently high-minded a painter. Blunt would have had cause to fear a wrong or – rather worse – a *dangerously right* understanding of Poussin as unorthodox or subversive. If this possibility is accepted, then some of the subtlety and cunning seen in Blunt's management of his private and political lives could be found in his scholarly life as well. Did Blunt, then, take steps to minimize any risky aspects of Poussin?

Of course, we cannot know for sure – we cannot know of any unrecorded and unconfessed deliberateness, anyway – but in the last section of this chapter I do propose a few cases where such a pattern of Blunt dispelling doubts about himself, at least, appears to be present. One part of the question that can be established, at least, is that Blunt saw diverse aspects of Poussin but worked, despite this, to present them as less important than a general outlook and development on the artist's part that was not only respectable but highly austere and unworldly. Blunt's foremost goal in presenting Poussin generally during his career but, especially, in his central 1967 book, had been to rescue Poussin as a painter of ideas. Blunt devotes a chapter to what he regards as the most important set of ideas among these, Poussin's stoicism.<sup>30</sup> He accounts for the influence of stoicism, first, by establishing that it is a common understanding of the artist and, second, by maintaining that its importance has still been underestimated. He writes that the years after Poussin's return to Rome “were among the most important and the most fruitful of

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<sup>29</sup>See Introduction and see below.

<sup>30</sup>See Blunt “IV: Poussin and Stoicism,” in *Nicolas Poussin*, 157-176.

his whole career [,]” in which he produced paintings that “were regarded as his supreme achievement by his own contemporaries and for two centuries after his death.”<sup>31</sup> Blunt adds that it has been well recognized that “Poussin’s works of the 1640’s [that is, works from this same period] reveal very clearly the influence of Stoic ideas and that his letters contain phrases which are Stoic in flavour.”<sup>32</sup> Despite this, he writes, “the influence of this philosophy goes deeper and has more far-reaching effects than is generally stated.”<sup>33</sup>

Blunt goes on to furnish several examples, including one work, *The Testament of Eudamias*,<sup>34</sup> which illustrates an obscure classical tale in which a man wills his daughter and mother to his friends when he dies without being able leave the proper funds to provide for them. This tale extols the virtue of extreme loyalty in friendship and the performance of one’s duties, as both friends handsomely provide for the dead man’s relatives regardless of the considerable cost and public ridicule they incur by it. While this story does illustrate a stoical idea of duty, it also celebrates a powerful devotion to friends which was a hallmark both of Poussin’s outlook (as Cropper and Dempsey explore) and Blunt’s own powerful devotion to his friends. (Despite being caught as a spy, Blunt refused to betray any of them).<sup>35</sup> Blunt is careful not to draw out this point about friendship, however, and he concludes this discussion, merely observing that “[t]he moral of the story is sufficiently clear.”<sup>36</sup> (It is not and clearly calls for some kind of exegesis.) Later, Blunt maintains that stoicism represented for Poussin an organizing vision of the universe and his own role in it, writing “it is even possible to deduce, if the

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 160.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 166.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>See below.

<sup>36</sup>Blunt, *ibid.*, 166.

letters are read in conjunction with allegories implied in the paintings, that the artist was also influenced by Stoic ideas on the organization and beauty of the cosmos and the position of man in it.”<sup>37</sup> But following this passage is a series of caveats and exceptions that attest to Poussin’s involvement with intrigues, his “Bohemian” youth, and that he could quarrel passionately about material possessions.<sup>38</sup> Blunt explains away this discrepancy: “One must not forget that he was by blood a Norman peasant.”<sup>39</sup> Being himself, by blood, a relative of Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon (in 1967, the Queen Mother),<sup>40</sup> Blunt could arguably escape any taint from identification on that score. Still, despite listing several incidents that call into question the integrity of Poussin’s stoicism, Blunt concludes that it is foundational in understanding the artist’s middle and late work and, thus, the entire course of his development, which is the core of Blunt’s own work on the painter.<sup>41</sup> Despite the odd messy detail here or there, Blunt gives us a Poussin who is, as he puts it, “grave, deliberate, and serious” while “living apart from the world and contemplating it with detachment and even a certain scorn.”<sup>42</sup> I suggest it is no accident that those who liked Blunt greatly and those who despised him – and there were a good many of both – could find these words an apt description at least of the public persona of the art historian as well as the artist he studied.

The subject of Anthony Blunt, Nicolas Poussin and their interconnectedness is a compelling one to pursue at this time. Since 1990, there has been an upswing of scholarly interest in Poussin. Meanwhile, the subject of Blunt has become timely. With the release

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 167.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 172-174.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 174.

<sup>40</sup>Carter, 4.

<sup>41</sup>Blunt observes: “Stoicism was a mainspring – probably the mainspring – in Poussin’s thought during the later part of his life.” Blunt, *ibid.*, 177.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 172.



of his so-called “Memoir” (an abortive attempt at autobiography written in the years between his exposure and death but embargoed until July 2009) there was a brief flurry of new interest in Blunt in the summer and fall of 2009. All this follows the publication in 2001 of the first proper biographical study of Blunt by Miranda Carter. It represents an ongoing popular interest in Blunt as a figure of intrigue, that is, as a spy; but there has even been some particular, scholarly interest in how Blunt’s complicated life may have affected or been affected by his art historical work, an issue which has recently returned as well. Despite various attempts, however, no convincing account of that relationship has yet been given.

On 23 July 2009 the embargo on Blunt’s aborted autobiography was lifted. This document was the skeleton of what had been intended, at first, to be a full book but which Blunt scaled down to a short memoir towards the end of his life.<sup>43</sup> It was bequeathed to the United Kingdom and deposited at the British Library in the year following Blunt’s death (that is, in 1984) by his long-time lover (and executor) John Gaskin. Gaskin did so to avoid paying death duties on a document valued at probate as worth £120 000. He was able to have it embargoed for a period of twenty-five years,<sup>44</sup> ostensibly to protect the reputations of surviving persons. The publicity surrounding the recent release of Blunt’s Memoir has tended to express disappointment that the memoir offered no obvious revelations of espionage and focused too much on art history. A representative example of this is the following, from a brief article by James Appell in the *Oxonian Review*:

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<sup>43</sup>Blunt’s brother Wilfrid states that the draft is 30 000 words. I did not count them but that sounds likely. The draft exists in two forms: a manuscript with some typed passages with corrections by hand and some entirely hand-written pages, and a revised typescript of 71 single-spaced pages. See Wilfrid Blunt, “My Brother Anthony: A Postscript” in *Slow on the Feather: Further Autobiography 1938-1959* (Salisbury: Michael Russell, 1986) 246. See also Anthony Blunt, “Memoir” MS (1983), MSS Reading Room, British Library, King’s Cross, London, UK.

<sup>44</sup>Not thirty years, as Wilfrid Blunt erroneously records. See Wilfrid Blunt, 246n.

[T]he general consensus among historians is that if Blunt intended his memoirs to serve as adequate explanation for his treason, he singularly failed. At best, his papers are an apology stunted by the Official Secrets Act which curtailed his freedom to speak frankly. At worst the memoirs are a mealy-mouthed insult to the reader's own intelligence. Blunt devotes pages and pages to his views on art history and self-serving reflections on the honours he received as an art historian.<sup>45</sup>

The article does go on to make the sensitive distinction between Blunt's professed reasons for becoming a spy and his different professed reasons for remaining a spy – first antifascism and, later, personal loyalty to his friends – but, in refusing to make the intellectual leap of empathizing with Blunt, Appell's avowed desire to understand him is doomed to failure. His reflexive dismissal of Blunt's life-long interest in art as but 'pages and pages' devoted to this interest makes the elementary mistake of not looking for an explanation of Blunt in the central devotion of his intellectual life.

One attempt to expose such a connection was an article by Martin Bailey in the *Art Newspaper*, "Blunt: Art History Made me into a Marxist."<sup>46</sup> The article, however, misunderstands Blunt's remarks on Marxism and art history and even engages in selective quotation to imply a causal connection that Blunt never makes. The headline is misleading and the quotation from the memoir offered does not specifically make that point. Blunt wrote: "At first I was only interested in the application of Marxism to the study of history, in particular, to my own field of art history."<sup>47</sup> In the context of Blunt's account it is clear that he means this statement to diminish the importance of Marxism as a motivating factor in his life until after the mid 1930s.<sup>48</sup> Far from declaring art history to

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<sup>45</sup>James Appell, "Blunt Instrument" *The Oxonian Review* 10.4 23 (Nov. 2009). Text Online. Accessed 25 May 2010. <<http://www.oxonianreview.org/wp/blunt-instrument/>>

<sup>46</sup>Martin Bailey, "Blunt: Art History made me into a Marxist," *The Art Newspaper* 205 (Sept., 2009): 4.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid. see also Anthony Blunt, "Memoir" 17. Unless otherwise stated, all MS pagination refers to the original manuscript (not the later 71-page typescript).

<sup>48</sup>Ibid. In the revised text Blunt inserts a passage to emphasize how he was transported to Marxism: "It is difficult after more than 45 years to relive the atmosphere of Cambridge at this time, and quite impossible, I

be a catalyst that made him a radical, Blunt means to portray himself as a political naïf who was pushed by political events into embracing Marxism, for the most part, with only second-hand expositions from his friends, especially Guy Burgess.<sup>49</sup> Ultimately, he states, politics revolutionized his thinking about art, not vice-versa.<sup>50</sup> Bailey and, especially, whoever wrote his headline effectively reverse the point Blunt was trying to make. While Bailey's article misrepresents the message of Blunt's memoir, in doing so it may still be telling the truth. (That is, it may be Blunt who misrepresents his own actions, though not, perhaps, his memory of them.) In the first place, Blunt was not an art historian at all at this point but a modern languages don who wrote art criticism on the side. That said, if we substitute 'art' for 'art history' and forget the ventriloquism, the observation could be sound: art may have made Blunt into a Marxist.

One other observer has recently taken the key step of looking at Blunt's central interest with art, that is, Nicolas Poussin. Coming at the question from the other direction, that is, from art historical Poussin studies, this observer recognizes a connection that authors who approach the figure of Blunt through his (arguably) more diverting espionage career cannot. I mentioned this observer at the outset of the thesis: David Carrier. In *Art Bulletin* (in September 1998) he wrote a review of several publications on

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believe, for anyone who did not experience it to imagine what it was like [...] Cambridge was seething with communist enthusiasm." Anthony Blunt, "Memoir" [revised draft] 19.

<sup>49</sup>Guy Burgess (1911-1963) was, at least until Kim Philby's 1963 defection, the best known of the 'Cambridge Spies'. He was notorious, originally for being charming and, later, for being a drunk and, sometimes, spectacularly indiscreet. He fled to Moscow in 1951 together with Donald MacLean. Both were diplomats and their defections started the slow landslide that led, first, to Philby's defection (in 1963) and, second, to Blunt's secret confession of 1964. All four had been close friends at Cambridge and after.

<sup>50</sup>Blunt writes: "There was very little available about [Marxism and art] in writing at the time and I absorbed ideas about it mainly through listening to the explanations of Guy [...] as [he] applied the general themes of Marxism to the particular problems that interested me. This gradually led to a complete revision – one could even say a reversal – of my orientation. Instead of believing that art was an activity completely divorced from real life and that works of art existed in a kind of vacuum I came to realize that they were made by human beings and that their creation was affected by the other activities of the human beings and the conditions in which they lived." Blunt, "Memoir" [MS], 17-18.

Poussin, including books by Cropper and Dempsey, and Sheila McTighe, in which he asked: “is it possible to define the ways in which our understanding of Poussin’s paintings is influenced by the tradition of commentary?” He observed that “these are [...] especially delicate problems with Poussin because of the role played by his most distinguished champion, Anthony Blunt.”<sup>51</sup> Carrier was himself the author of *Poussin’s Paintings: a Study in Art-Historical Methodology* (1993), an important if somewhat maverick text within the upsurge of publishing on Poussin in the 1990s. The ‘role’ Carrier points out is itself difficult to pin down. Blunt was certainly the dominant figure in art history on the subject of Poussin in the 1950s and 1960s but, since then, his influence has held up even while many of his views have come to be significantly qualified where they have not been rejected entirely. Blunt’s authority is no longer accepted but he remains oddly compelling. From here Carrier goes on to draw attention to those “affinities” between Blunt and Poussin that frame the research problem posed at the beginning of this thesis.<sup>52</sup>

This is a problem to which Carrier has returned. In 2004 he gave a talk at the Courtauld Institute, an academic institution still haunted to some extent by Blunt, and this talk became the basis for his most recent contribution, the article “Anthony Blunt’s Poussin” published in the December 2009 edition of *Word and Image*.<sup>53</sup> In this article Carrier is somewhat more specific about the similarities Blunt and Poussin share. He writes: “Blunt’s Poussin was a privileged person who in public hides his true self, like Blunt himself. Just as Blunt, a member of the English Establishment, secretly was a communist, so Poussin, the painter of many sacred scenes, was not an orthodox

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<sup>51</sup>David Carrier, book review in *Art Bulletin* 80. 3 (Sept., 1998), 570-71.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 571.

<sup>53</sup>Carrier, “Anthony Blunt’s Poussin,” 416-426.

Catholic.”<sup>54</sup> Carrier also makes the case for Blunt’s lingering effect even while his word is not taken over what became the near consensus of his peers, especially that of his main rival Poussiniste in English language scholarship, the collector and scholar Sir Denis Mahon.<sup>55</sup> He notes Christopher Wright’s observation that “for some reason there is a tendency to quote Blunt more often even when adopting Mahon’s point of view.”<sup>56</sup> Blunt remains the presiding figure of Anglo-American Poussin studies – the “doyen” as Wright calls him – even if many of his views, like the man himself, are now discredited.<sup>57</sup>

Carrier’s larger theme is the contest between formalism and connoisseurship, on the one hand (which are typically conservative), and a social, political or otherwise contextual art history, on the other, which insists that art objects must be understood within a larger framework. The latter is Blunt’s point of view, according to Carrier. And its broad acceptance in art history today accounts both for the continuing fascination Blunt holds and his effect of having enhanced Poussin’s status to the level it enjoys today. To illustrate his contention, Carrier uses a rhetorical example. He writes:

Consider another seventeenth-century French artist, also a slow beginner who making his way to Rome had a very long career. Famous in his own time, making many paintings with mythological subjects, he stood some distance from the concerns of the High Baroque. Much favoured by English connoisseurs, this man’s art has always been admired – his paintings are found in many major museums. I speak of Claude Lorrain. One way to understand the effect of Blunt’s writings is to compare the recent literature on Poussin and Claude. Unlike Poussin, Claude has not inspired high profile political interpretation. If we subtract out, as it were, the effect of Blunt’s writings, then Poussin would have something like Claude’s status.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 418.

<sup>55</sup>Christopher Wright, *Poussin Paintings: A Catalogue Raisonné* (London: Hippocrene Books, 1985) 7.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid. Quoted in Carrier, “Anthony Blunt’s Poussin,” 426.

<sup>57</sup>Wright, *ibid.*

<sup>58</sup>Carrier, *ibid.*, 418.

This is a good thought experiment but it neglects the old *peintre-philosophe* tradition (or, as Carrier calls it, the cliché) of Poussin's biographers and thereby, I think, leaves too much scope for the construction of different art histories.<sup>59</sup> I cannot accept that, absent Blunt, the project of connecting Poussin to this esoteric world of ideas would not have happened in the twentieth century. Indeed, Carrier himself makes too many claims to the contrary in this article alone.<sup>60</sup> Blunt certainly put his stamp on the intellectual account of Poussin but he did not invent him<sup>61</sup> or even reinvent him.

Carrier's text reveals an organizing determination to avoid any account of Blunt's Poussin that relies on personal or psychological factors. He writes: "I am unhappy with [the] tendency, so natural in a biographer, to explain Blunt's career in terms of personal psychology,"<sup>62</sup> complaining later, "[t]his same mistaken tendency to personalize scholarly debate appears in [accounts] of Blunt's interpretations."<sup>63</sup> Carrier's argument carefully avoids these, as if that were itself the point of understanding Blunt's work. Carrier addresses two attempts at explaining Blunt which, he feels, rely too heavily on psychological or personal factors. The celebrated critic George Steiner (born 1929) diagnosed the Blunt enigma as owing to a split in his personality in a long biographical article, "The Cleric of Treason," first published in the *New Yorker* in 1980 (the year after

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 416. Joachim von Sandrart (1606 – 1688), Giovanni Pietro Bellori (1613-1696), André Félibien (1619-1695), and Giuseppe Passeri (1654-1714) were all early biographers of Poussin. Bellori and Félibien, particularly, established his reputation as an erudite and intellectual painter.

<sup>60</sup>Among the most important would be that Blunt's own work begins by following Walter Friedländer's, that Ernst Gombrich's essay on Poussin's *Orion* stands completely independent of and owes nothing to Blunt's scholarship, and that Erwin Panofsky's essay of 1936 was also a major spur for Blunt.

<sup>61</sup>Curiously, this claim is made as well in one of the best fictional treatments of Blunt. See John Banville, *The Untouchable* (London: Picador, 1997) 343. Victor Maskell, the Blunt characters, claims he 'invented' Poussin.

<sup>62</sup>Carrier, *ibid.*

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 419.

Blunt's exposure).<sup>64</sup> Steiner's long essay will be discussed further below but its central observation, seized upon by Carrier, is that Blunt had a dual existence and a divided loyalty that sprang from some inward cleavage. (He will even eventually use the word "schizophrenia" to describe it.)<sup>65</sup> Steiner's larger point, which is not Carrier's particular concern, is that this split is itself embedded in aspects of modern intellectual life and institutions. Steiner writes: "Professor Blunt's treason and duplicity do pose fundamental questions about the nature of intellectual-academic obsession, about the coexistence within a single sensibility of utmost truth and falsehood, and about certain germs of the inhuman planted [...] at the very roots of excellence in our society."<sup>66</sup>

Until Miranda Carter's 2001 biography, which engages with Steiner and which Steiner, in turn, reviewed,<sup>67</sup> it was the most comprehensive serious attempt to understand Blunt. Miranda Carter (born 1965) is an English biographer, educated at Oxford, and *Anthony Blunt: His Lives* (2001), which won several awards, was her first book. Carter follows Steiner's view, that Blunt was split. Indeed the structure of her biography is to work to disentangle in eighteen separate chapters, the different strands of his identity, such as 'Art Historian,' 'Spy,' etc. She still sees at root a fundamental duality, however. She writes: "Steiner's proposed dichotomy is suggestive, but [...] the true division in Blunt was between the spy and the teacher. On the one hand, secrecy, concealment,

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<sup>64</sup>See George Steiner, "The Cleric of Treason," the *New Yorker* (8 December, 1980): 158-195. The essay was later republished in *George Steiner: A Reader* (London: Penguin Books, 1984) 191.

<sup>65</sup>Carrier, *ibid.*, 183. Steiner, 176. [Note: here and below I follow the *New Yorker* pagination.]

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>67</sup>See George Steiner, "Ice Cold in Arcadia. Privacy, Hauteur, and Deception: Anthony Blunt's Strange Career." *Times Literary Supplement*, November 2<sup>nd</sup> 2001. Source Online. Accessed 5 December 2009. <[http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/the\\_tls/Subscriber\\_Archive/Biography\\_Memoirs\\_Archive/article6756688.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/the_tls/Subscriber_Archive/Biography_Memoirs_Archive/article6756688.ece)>

obfuscation; on the other clarification, illumination, explanation.”<sup>68</sup> Carrier calls this putative personality split a “way of thinking.”<sup>69</sup>

I agree with Carrier that such explanations are inadequate, although I find he tends to distort both Carter and Steiner in order to strengthen *their* affinity.<sup>70</sup> But it does not follow that, just because these particular personal (or psychological) accounts are wrong, no other such account may be right. Since Blunt was a homosexual who came to adulthood during a time when personal honesty entailed a very high risk of physical imprisonment, we must understand that duplicity was a condition forced upon him *a priori*. It does not need to be explained, or explained away, but it must be understood as basic within Blunt’s situation and fundamental for how he would see the world, from a young age. We need not go as far as to undertake a dubious psychobiography, therefore, to understand the conditions of secrecy, duality (or multiplicity) inherent in Blunt’s situation. Those conditions are sufficiently external, in the culture of the time, that without posthumous mind reading we can suppose certain things safely. For Blunt, authenticity would be premised upon duplicity and inauthenticity upon forthrightness, not the other way around.<sup>71</sup> A misplaced concern for disciplinary rigour has led Carrier to avoid this issue, forcing him to dispel from consideration in advance what I believe turns out to be the key to unlocking these paradoxes and, thereafter (and in another sense of the

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<sup>68</sup>Carter, 366.

<sup>69</sup>Carrier, *ibid.*, 417.

<sup>70</sup>Carrier observes, for instance, that Carter and Steiner share a sense of outrage, although in Carter it is “subdued.” This is certainly true of Steiner but Carter’s aim is quite different, largely to critique the late Cold War truisms of the Thatcher era, of which she tended to see Steiner’s 1980 article – although she clearly respects it – being an example. Carrier, *ibid.* 417-418. See Carter, xvii.

<sup>71</sup>It is believed that a concern for personal as well as political ‘liberation’ and a pitch to escape social alienation through a shared secret life was advanced by Arnold Deutsch – recruiter of the ‘Cambridge Spies’ – when approaching Blunt, Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean, who were all homosexual or bisexual. (Kim Philby was neither.) Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (London: Penguin Books, 2009) 173-174.



word), the key to deciphering the different codes which obscure Blunt's motivations and disguise the meaning of his various activities. The central element which Carrier has banished from consideration in banishing the personal together with the psychological is Blunt's homosexuality. I am indebted to Carrier for isolating and framing some of the problems pertaining to the research project this thesis undertakes. I cannot help, however, but find his contributions, to date, unsatisfactory. Carrier apprehends a matter he is not able quite to pin down.

To pin down how Blunt's situation affects his scholarship, it is helpful to turn again to Steiner's biographical essay, from which it is necessary (and worthwhile) to quote at length. Although I disagree with some of his conclusions, the critic identifies several key questions. Most especially, he succeeds in understanding how Poussin afforded Blunt a model for his peculiar sensibility, which could not be easily reconciled with the tone of English society and culture. Poussin becomes a focus for Blunt's serene style of alienation. Steiner writes:

It is with obvious approbation that Blunt cites Poussin's own testimony: "My nature compels me to seek and love things that are well ordered, fleeing confusion, which is contrary and inimical to me as is day to deepest night." This great tradition of austere nobility is essential to the French genius from Racine to Mallarmé, from the brothers Le Nain to [Georges] Braque. Very few Englishmen have felt at home in its formality. Blunt, who passed long periods of his youth in France, found in French tradition the primary climate of his feelings. He came to recognize in Poussin a late Stoic, a Senecan moralist passionate in his very rationality but fastidiously detached from public affairs. Montaigne's, observes Blunt, is the voice – and a voice quintessentially French – of this passionate dispassion. Though these qualities are preeminent in Nicolas Poussin, they can be found in other masters and media: in the French architect Philibert de l'Orme (c.1510-70) to whom Blunt devoted a monograph in 1958.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>Steiner, "Cleric of Treason" 166.

The sense of ‘affinity’ that Steiner describes here goes beyond Blunt finding Poussin peculiarly to his tastes. Given the extreme of appreciation and shared outlook that Blunt’s students spoke of when they described the relationship as one of identification,<sup>73</sup> it is reasonable to think of Poussin satisfying a need in Blunt, even if that cannot be conclusively demonstrated. Meanwhile, Steiner identifies another important strand: Blunt’s duplicity or (as I maintain) his multiplicity. In Steiner, this strand manifests itself in his sense that Blunt’s scholarly work and espionage are – or should be – in unresolvable contradiction, that his duplicity is a shocking betrayal, not just of the United Kingdom, but of scholarship itself:

Espionage and treason are, one is given to understand, as ancient as whoredom. And, obviously, they have often engaged human beings of some intelligence and audacity, and, in certain cases, of elevated social standing. Yet the enlistment in this nauseating trade of a man of great intellectual eminence, one whose manifest contributions to the life of the mind are of high grace and perception, and who, as a scholar and a teacher, made veracity, scrupulous integrity the touchstone of his work – this is indeed rare.<sup>74</sup>

The sense presented here, both of the unadulterated questing after truth in which scholars are presumed to engage and of the nobility (in the very oldest sense of the term) of the scholarly profession – that spying and cheating and lying should have been *beneath* Blunt, that is, *socially* – may well seem quaint today. But Steiner’s complaint correctly identifies the sense of unreality that pertained to Blunt’s betrayal and still animates most accounts of it. (Also, the sense of contamination he implies is tellingly expressed using an analogy dripping with contempt and sexual anxiety, in his invocation of ‘whoredom’.) Finally, Steiner identifies one further strand that is important. He writes:

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<sup>73</sup>See above.

<sup>74</sup>Steiner, 176.

Neither sociology nor cultural history, neither political theory nor psychology has even begun to handle authoritatively the vast theme of the part played by homosexuality in Western culture since the nineteenth century. [...] There is hardly a branch of literature, of music, of the plastic arts, of philosophy, of drama, film, fashion, and the furnishings of daily urban life in which homosexuality has not been crucially involved, often dominantly. [...] This is a vast and as yet only imperfectly understood development, of which the role of homosexuality in politics and in the world of espionage and betrayal is only a specialized, though dramatic feature.<sup>75</sup>

Steiner goes on to qualify and add precision to the sensibility, which I see as queer, that he means to pick out. He adds:

In the case of Blunt and the apostolic<sup>76</sup> youth of Cambridge and Bloomsbury, moreover, homosexuality may be too restrictive a concept. Until very recently, the more privileged orders of English society were educated in celibate schools and in the celibate colleges of Oxford and Cambridge [...] This education was underwritten by the explicit ideal of masculine friendship, of a masculine intimacy and mutual trust more lasting and radiant than the plebeian values of the outside world. [Memoirs such as] Cyril Connolly's "Enemies of Promise," [and] Philip Toynbee's exquisite "Friends Apart" give a classic picture of this adolescent Arcadia, with its overtones of white flannel summer afternoons and heroic deaths in manly wars to come. [...] It is, therefore, not the homoeroticism that matters most but the vision of a small constellation of men, their souls attuned by shared schooling and by the shared enchanted setting of Cambridge cloisters and gardens. The strength of elective affinity in such a coterie is twofold: there are the bonds of internal affection, and there is the rejection, more or less conscious, more or less aggressive, of the vulgar usages and philistine values of "the others," of the banal multitude.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 180.

<sup>76</sup>Steiner is hinting at Blunt's membership, when at Cambridge, in the Cambridge Apostles, a secret society of intellectuals strongly associated with the Bloomsbury group and with homosexual romances. See Carter, 61-64. In Anthony Blunt's F.B.I. file, the Cambridge Apostles is colourfully described: "[redacted] the well known secret 'Conversazione Society' (The Apostles), which he described as an ancient discussion society which was 'non-conformist' but not political and somewhat similar in character to a secret fraternity in the United States. This organization held meetings weekly at which papers were presented and various political and cultural topics were discussed. [Redacted] said although the society was not political he later learned there were Communist Party (CP) members of the Organization such as Guy de Moncy Burgess and Professor Anthony Blunt but pointed out the membership also included many distinguished persons such as [redacted] and [redacted]." Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation. File: "Anthony Blunt." Freedom of Information/Privacy Acts Release: 11 Oct., 2003. (37 of 120 pages.) Text Online. Accessed 23 Jul., 2008. <<http://foia.fbi.gov/blunt/blunt1.pdf>>

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 180.

Homosexuality and homoeroticism are central to the cultural phenomenon Steiner uses to get closer to explaining Blunt. But it is a very select part of it, an aspect of modern homosexuality that is secretive, separatist and that holds itself to what it perceives to be a higher moral code – or, rather, a code of personal loyalty higher than ordinary morality.<sup>78</sup> It was, in Blunt’s English *milieu*, associated with upper middle class and aristocratic education but it had much in common with an underground, international homosexuality not so bound by class elsewhere. Steiner is right, however, to relate this sensibility to an Arcadian ideal. It is most interesting that Steiner also uses Carrier’s word ‘affinity’ – here with the echo of Goethe’s *Elective Affinities* – with its associations of an adopted family relationship, but based on chemical attraction. This idea of chosen family has defined emergent homosexual identity in the twentieth century, as well. Its queerness comes from how resistant normative society has until recently been to regarding homosexual relationships as having the legitimacy of family. And so, for Blunt and his circle, romantic friendship became an ideal that had to exceed the loyalty to family (and certainly to country) in order to succeed in asserting itself.

Steiner’s essay brings together these different issues in a very thorough, and, I think, perceptive way. He was not been able to bring these strands together in any satisfying conclusion, however, and, in the end, seems to give up trying.<sup>79</sup> Like Carter

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<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 182.

<sup>79</sup>Steiner’s conclusion, though interesting, is bizarre. He notes that a late poem of Ezra Pound’s makes reference to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, Anthony’s distant cousin, and complains that “[a]s it stands, the word ‘Blunt’ burns a derisive hole in the bright fabric of the poem.” Complaining this has now ruined the poem for him he curses “Damn the man.” (Ibid. 195.) This episode is odd because Pound, in prison when he wrote that poem, was condemned as a pro-fascist traitor but Steiner is prepared to excuse his treacheries without much reflection. It is interesting because, unless he were truly emotionally engaged in Blunt’s case and in a way that was unresolved at the time of writing, there is no good reason the simple surname ‘Blunt’ should be so disagreeable. Personally, I am inclined to suspect it is the betrayal of the scholarly ideal that so disturbs Steiner and that all the rest is of little account. For more on the relationship between Pound and Blunt, see Chapter 2.

does later, Steiner is prepared to conclude that Blunt represents a riddle that cannot be properly answered.<sup>80</sup> Both authors, however, are hindered because their approach is not, fundamentally, art historical. The key, as I see it, lies in part in Blunt's work as an art historian and, as I shall go on to argue in Part Two, in Poussin's art itself. Steiner and Carter make the understandable mistake of assuming that Blunt's art historical work is straight-forward or transparent. It need not be and, indeed, I consider that it cannot be: art historical analyses are always affected by personal biases and always exist in tension with questions of 'truth'.

Another commentator upon Blunt's case, in my view, gets closer to the mark, although his assessment is scathing and, from the point of view of bias, has problems of its own. As mentioned above, Denis Mahon emerged as Blunt's chief adversary in English language Poussin studies. Mahon (1910-2011) was an art historian in the mould of a connoisseur and was himself a copious collector of Italian Baroque art, having purchased his first work (a Francesco Guercino) in 1934.<sup>81</sup> He financed his collecting mainly through his partial inheritance of a large banking fortune, Guinness Mahon Holdings, itself related to the Guinness brewing concern.<sup>82</sup> Mahon is famous for the venom in his disputes and for his persistence in conducting them. His professional conflict with Blunt was about substance and about approach. It was also badly exacerbated by a profound conflict of personal styles and attitudes. Mahon was a

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<sup>80</sup>Carter writes: "The factor which most persistently kept Blunt a mystery, however, was his own fundamental mysteriousness, the fact that even to his friends he was an enigma." (Carter, xvi.) Though found in the Prologue, this statement is as close as she comes to a general conclusion about her subject.

<sup>81</sup>Bryan Appleyard, "The Artful Codger: Sir Denis Mahon," *The Sunday Times* 23 Feb. (2003) n.p. Source Online. Accessed 19 Feb. 2010. <[http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life\\_and\\_style/article877446.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/article877446.ece)> The painting is *Jacob Blessing the Sons of Joseph* (c.1620), Collection of Sir Denis Mahon.

<sup>82</sup>"Obituary: Sir Denis Mahon," *The Telegraph*, 28 Apr. (2011): n.p. Source Online. Accessed 27 May 2011. <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/culture-obituaries/art-obituaries/8481701/Sir-Denis-Mahon.html>>

traditional connoisseur of the English type and was, for the most part, contemptuous of the scientific art history in which Blunt had been trained. Blunt, for his part, was, as Miranda Carter put it, “exasperated by Mahon’s insistence that he could date paintings not just to particular years, but to actual months.”<sup>83</sup> Mahon framed his arguments meticulously,<sup>84</sup> using only visual evidence. A profile of Mahon, published in the *Times* in 2003 characterized their dispute as follows:

[A]rt historians, especially the Germans, had been obsessed with broad theories into which they fitted paintings and painters. But Mahon hated theory; he is a typical English empiricist – he looks, above all, at the facts of the painting. The point about art history based on theory is that you can do it without having an ‘eye’. Mahon says Anthony Blunt, one of the leading figures in post-war British art history and a Soviet spy, had no eye.<sup>85</sup> He plainly loathed Blunt and links his treachery in politics with dishonesty in art history. In 1960 there was a big Louvre exhibition of paintings by Poussin. Blunt was regarded as the world authority on Poussin and had written the catalogue. Mahon was convinced he’d got the chronology of the paintings badly wrong and he went for Blunt’s throat. Of course, he won.<sup>86</sup>

Over time, the dispute became nasty and personal. Mahon conducted his art historical disputes in a manner Blunt regarded as ungentlemanlike and went so far, on one occasion, as to employ solicitors to interview Blunt at the Courtauld Institute.<sup>87</sup>

Ultimately, Mahon succeeded in showing that Blunt had implied he had seen a disputed Poussin in life – Mahon happened to own the painting – whereas, in fact, he had only seen a photographic reproduction.

Denis Mahon was interviewed by Barrie Penrose and Simon Freeman, authors of one of the more sensational journalistic books – though by no means the most sensational

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<sup>83</sup>Carter, 424.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>85</sup>This is an idea about Blunt that has endured. It features, for instance, in Alan Bennett’s 1991 play about Blunt, *A Question of Attribution*.

<sup>86</sup>Appleyard, *ibid.*

<sup>87</sup>Carter, *ibid.*, 429-430.

book<sup>88</sup> – on the Blunt case. They quote Mahon observing that “[o]nce you get away with lying on one subject, it spills over into the rest of your life and that is what happened with Blunt, he became a practised liar.”<sup>89</sup> Here there is a striking contrast between the arguments made by Steiner and that put forward by Mahon. One might have expected Mahon to conclude simply that if he (Mahon) were right in their disputes about Poussin, then Blunt had to be wrong; but Mahon instead sees Blunt’s disagreements as stemming from dishonesty in his scholarship. Steiner, on the other hand, insists upon Blunt’s exemplary care as an honest and discriminating scholar. It is his seemingly unshakeable belief in the character of Blunt the honest scholar that compels Steiner to diagnose some kind of fundamental split in Blunt’s personality. He includes in his long essay on Blunt a kind of ode to this figure:

Blunt has literally put in intelligible order central rooms in the house of Western art. [...O]nly the expert can fully gauge the labor, the scruple, the degree of flair and concentration involved. “Scruple” is worth insisting on. The business of attribution, description, dating demands complete integrity on the technical level. [...] The outright value of a painting or drawing or engraving, the worth of a sculpture on the crazed art market depend immediately on expert attribution. The temptations are notorious. (Berenson allegedly yielded to them on occasion.) Blunt’s austerity was above question. His scholarship, his teaching exemplify formidable standards of technical severity and intellectual and moral rigor.<sup>90</sup>

Perhaps because he is not an ‘expert’ himself Steiner can imagine an art historian as a martyr to truth. Actually, Blunt’s practices, though not notorious as bad, were open to question, from time to time. Mahon may go too far but he is on to something. Blunt was advisor to the National Gallery of Canada between 1948 and 1956 for European art and

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<sup>88</sup>That honour likely belongs to John Costello’s *Mask of Betrayal: Lies, Spies, Buggery and Betrayal* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1988). The word ‘buggery’ was discreetly dropped from the subtitle when the book was republished in 1990.

<sup>89</sup>Barrie Penrose and Simon Freeman, *Conspiracy of Silence: The Secret Life of Anthony Blunt* (New York: Vintage, 1988) 295.

<sup>90</sup>Steiner, *ibid.*, 170-71.

acted as their agent for purchasing in London. Blunt had identified a painting as being by Poussin<sup>91</sup> and, when doubts began to surface about its attribution, he seems to have intrigued to have it sold to the Canadian gallery, possibly as an expedient to having it removed from the offices of a London dealer (Tomas Harris) where it was beginning to stimulate too much debate.<sup>92</sup> Blunt's reputation depended on his teaching and writing primarily, where historical exegesis and interpretation matter more than the exactitude of such details. (Nothing is greater proof of this than how Blunt's approach to Poussin remained dominant despite his personal disgrace.) Where Blunt did display something like uncommon honesty was in the humility he showed when willing to reconsider an opinion.<sup>93</sup> What Blunt was unwilling to do was throw over a seemingly sound interpretation because of the odd stray detail. Steiner's scholar-martyr more closely resembles the detail-obsessed Mahon, and not the generalizing Blunt. On another occasion, Blunt suppressed an early erotic painting by Poussin, failing to include it in his 1966 catalogue raisonné, *The Paintings of Nicolas Poussin: A Critical Catalogue*. In a recently published study of Poussin's early erotic work, Timothy Standring concludes: "Anthony Blunt in effect censored this picture deleting it from Poussin's *oeuvre* on the

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<sup>91</sup>The 'Poussin' in question, called *Cleopatra and Augustus*, would later be disattributed from Poussin and is now regarded by the National Gallery of Canada as being of a mid seventeenth century Italian school. Blunt's early championing of this one painting – he had identified it as a Poussin in 1938 – was proving to be an embarrassment, although he would never himself concede it was not by the painter, and its new attribution remains controversial. See Anthony Blunt "A Newly Discovered Poussin," *Apollo* 26.160 (1938): 198-99.

<sup>92</sup>Blunt's exposure in 1979 as a Soviet spy would lead some members of the Canadian public and, on one occasion their parliamentary representative, to wonder whether the Gallery had not been taken for a ride by a corrupt and incompetent communist spook. See Thomas Charles Cossitt, MP (Progressive Conservative), member for Leeds-Grenville. Mr. Cossitt asked if Blunt had arranged for the National Gallery to buy any "fakes." His *penchant* for punchy Question Period language may have done him a disservice as the minister (also Progressive Conservative, at the time) was able to reply in the negative, having been briefed that the painting in question was a "misattribution," not a "fake." (Hansard, HOC 30 Nov., 1979), question number 459.

<sup>93</sup>Carter, 432-33.



grounds of the work's apparent indecency."<sup>94</sup> Blunt was not, in fact, always impeccably devoted to artistic truth.

There is, I think, a position between Mahon's thesis of Blunt's art historical depravity that leads him to lie for convenience sake at every turn and Steiner's Jeekyll-and-Hyde view of a Blunt who struggles 'scrupulously' for truth in scholarship at one moment and plots diabolically to subvert it elsewhere the next. This position would suggest a Blunt who recognizes much in Poussin's restraint, intellectual sophistication and even *froidueur* to admire and identify with and yet who sees the complexities and incongruities of Poussin – exemplified, perhaps, by the painter's early erotica – as posing a genuine threat to Blunt himself should anyone else suspect other affinities between Blunt and Poussin, and draw further inferences from that. (As I shall go on to explore in Part Two of this thesis, there is also a subversive aspect of Poussin, which could only heighten his apprehension, if Blunt recognized it or even if he only sensed that it could be there.)<sup>95</sup> Blunt sought not to distort Poussin severely but to 'manage his image', as one might say today. And so what we may call 'Blunt's Poussin' is a category that contains Blunt's claims about the painter but also what his work and writings serve to disguise about the painter. This Poussin flows out of a complex of circumstances that arise from Blunt's sexuality, possibly also relating to his spying, but especially to his world's response to that sexuality.

Evidence for this state of affairs is present in the very circumstances that organize this thesis. Certain scholars perceive what Carrier calls 'affinities' between Blunt and Poussin and yet these are difficult impressions to precisely describe or define.

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<sup>94</sup>Timothy Standring, "Poussin's Erotica," *Apollo* March (2009): 85.

<sup>95</sup>See Chapters 3 and 4.

Meanwhile, Blunt's *general* vision of Poussin remains largely convincing to art historians. One possibility is that Blunt cleaned up Poussin and the pieces leftover from that process still haunt the picture of Poussin we have received, in large part from Blunt. Those 'leftovers' include the stray paintings and drawings that lie outside of Blunt's overall narrative and in inconvenient details about which Mahon believed Blunt was inclined to lie. These stray works may include Poussin's erotica, for instance, and Standing's article declares that "many scholars," implying Blunt, "were embarrassed by the prominence of eroticism in Poussin's early work."<sup>96</sup> Blunt was certainly no prude and so if he were embarrassed the cause would likely entail a personal inconvenience of some kind. These leftovers may also include – and this is what I undertake when investigating 'a queer Poussin' in Part Two – certain governing aspects of Poussin's painting, such as a concern with multiplicity and the destabilizations and subversions that they engender, which Blunt was unable and probably unwilling to explore. Blunt may well have sought to 'straighten out' Poussin and make sure he was presentable for the world at large. Such a view is really the most moderate position on Blunt's intellectual honesty given a spectrum of interpretations that runs between the opposed extremes of Mahon and of Steiner. Such pruning, which I have linked to what is now called by ugly phrase 'image management' is not unusual and often becomes second nature to many closeted homosexuals, let alone to double-agents.

### Queer Historiography

Bias affects art historical writing and it happens in two ways. First, there is the personal bias that the art historian brings and, second, there is the general bias that exists in a

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<sup>96</sup>Standing, 82.

discipline against pursuing interpretations that go against the grain of a given culture's or epoch's assumptions. These two kinds of bias are related, of course, but they are still distinct; they affect the process of undertaking art historical work differently. In this particular study I am interested in Anthony Blunt's personal biases, which I assert involve a dual recognition: the recognition of certain correspondences between Poussin and Blunt's political and/or sexual identities, and the recognition that these correspondences posed a danger to Blunt's own position. This interest follows upon the suggestions, noted in the last section, by scholars such as David Carrier, Sheila McTighe and George Steiner. I believe that the multiplicity inherent in Blunt's sexuality and his spying (or, otherwise, his treacherous duplicity) is in each case a manifestation of a queer identity, which is a subject I take up in detail in the last section of this chapter. But, for the moment, it is important to raise the issue of queerness, which relates to the second kind of bias that interests me.

Queer issues and homosexuality have until recently been overlooked and, often deliberately, understated in art historical studies. Even now the overwhelming focus has been upon the sexuality of the artist or the client, and not homoeroticism or queerness in the work itself. This is of necessity difficult to demonstrate and so, even with the advent of Gay and Lesbian Studies in art history, homosexual and queer subjects have tended to be overlooked or else regarded as dubious, on scientific grounds. There is a want of evidence. Meanwhile, heterosexual eroticism faces no such disciplinary challenge. It is assumed to be present unless there is some concrete evidence to think otherwise. In short, heterosexuality continues to be thought natural while homosexuality must be established on a basis of firm, often textual, evidence. Its presence is doubted where archival

evidence is lacking even if the evidence of our eyes is overwhelming. That evidence is itself often dismissed, though, as we are reminded not to use our own eyes but, rather, ‘period eyes.’<sup>97</sup> Such strict historicism is not needed in locating heterosexual eroticism, however. This is because, whether consciously or otherwise, it is still assumed to be natural, unbiased and, in effect, timeless. In discussing each of these kinds of bias I shall be using models taken from other incidents in art history and grounding my own work in the examples they afford. Regarding the question of personal bias I shall base my approach to Blunt on Keith Moxey’s analysis of Erwin Panofsky’s account of a work of Albrecht Dürer. For the disciplinary bias against queer readings I shall use James Smalls’s critique of art historical resistance to accepting homoeroticism in some work of Anne-Louis Girodet.

A queer account of Blunt and Poussin will, therefore, necessarily be a historiographical one. Critical approaches such as feminism and the social history of art argue that structuring, external circumstances are important to understanding the work of artists. The exclusion from training of female artists or the changing ideological-aesthetic requirements of bourgeois *salons* are rightly understood to be not only germane to the history of art but determinants of the particular art history that we have. I concur with Keith Moxey in his assertion that a similar approach can and should be extended to art historians themselves.<sup>98</sup> My model for approaching a historiography of this kind is Moxey’s short essay “Panofsky’s Melancholia” in his book *The Practice of Theory:*

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<sup>97</sup>This term was made current by the art historian Michael Baxandall. See Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>98</sup>See Keith Moxey, “Panofsky’s Melancholia” in *The Practice of Theory: Poststructuralism, Cultural Politics, and Art History* (Ithaca NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1994) 65-78.

*Poststructuralism, Cultural Politics, and Art History*.<sup>99</sup> Moxey analyses Erwin Panofsky's interpretation of an Albrecht Dürer engraving, *Melencolia I* (1514), in terms of the eminent art historian's position as a German Jew, forced into exile by the Nazis' rise to power. Panofsky wrote in order to celebrate Dürer's Germanic art at the very time when the Nazis were trying to eradicate all traces of Jewishness from German culture. Moxey details the striking similarities between Panofsky's situation and those qualities which he attributes to Dürer, demonstrating that art historical writing is never an objective-less or agenda-free process. Moxey does not merely write in an intellectual-biographical vein nor does he thereby contest the value of Panofsky's commentary of Dürer. Rather, in recounting this history of Panofsky's art historical interpretation, Moxey shows that the meanings Panofsky finds there were potential all along in the original image, even while Panofsky is especially motivated to lay bare this *affinity*, exposing what commonality he and Dürer share in embracing a German identity by choice. Panofsky's interpretation is not a misreading. Rather, all readings are partly interpretive leaps, which we make depending upon our individual biases and the general biases of a given time and place. Near the outset of his essay, Moxey writes:

A frequent criticism of approaches that attempt to make issues of race, class, and gender relevant to art history [...] is that they are "ideological." By defining them as ideological, conservative critics implicitly contrast them to the art historical discourse which is considered ideology-free. They suggest that these new initiatives give knowledge a political bias that they plainly regard as subversive of the truth.<sup>100</sup>

Art historical interpretations, whether "ideological" or not, should neither be considered 'valid' nor 'invalid.' They cannot be measured against any truth that is free of all bias.

But this does not mean, as the critics Moxey mentions imply, that with so-called

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<sup>99</sup>Ibid.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 65.

ideological readings “anything goes.” Rather, like all readings these are more or less trenchant, more or less illuminating; and an aspect of their interpretive vigour is how openly they account for their ideological bias. Moxey accounts for Panofsky’s reading but he is also engaged in demonstrating that if Panofsky goes wrong it is precisely because he believes in transparent access to a fixed meaning in the work. Reading is always a freighted, active process.

Moxey reinterprets the image *Melencolia I* in order to locate what mechanisms within the picture permit the kind of personal use and meaning Erwin Panofsky has made of it. Using Queer Theory as an interpretive tool, I shall unpack Blunt’s Poussin just as Moxey set out to examine the relationship between the artist (Dürer) and the art historian (Panofsky). While Moxey’s theme was Germanness, mine will be queerness, which I understand to include all aspects of Blunt’s complex of identities and not exclusively those aspects directly or obviously connected to his sexuality. It is my understanding that the complex *itself* is queer. The application of a queer approach to an object of study is called ‘queering’. To queer Blunt does not merely mean to ‘out’ Blunt as a homosexual. Rather, it means to draw connections among his identities, his writings, the rest of his work as a prominent art historian, and the effects of all these things, using Queer Theory to put them in context.

Moxey’s approach and the interpretive interests of Queer Theory (when applied in art history) have a central concern in common. They both aim to go beyond normative constructions of art history. They critique this scholarly discourse for assuming a certain transparent access to truth and for being, because of that, ironically ahistorical about themselves. In the introduction to his volume *The Practice of Theory*, Moxey explains:

“An awareness of how historical narratives are invested with the values of the present serves to historicize the activity of the historian.”<sup>101</sup> He continues:

I propose to use theory to understand history and history to understand theory in order to argue that we can construct a more perceptive account of the cultural and social function of what we do if we acknowledge that that history necessarily engages in the fabrication of metaphysical narratives that bear an arbitrary relation to reality. The historical enterprise takes on a fresh significance and a new meaning once the nature of its claims to knowledge have been recognized and accepted for what they are. Historians are thus empowered to eradicate the myth of objectivity with which our discipline has struggled so long, as well as to manifest the concerns that animate the culture of which they are a part.<sup>102</sup>

Moxey’s critique (published in 1994) is of the positivism in historical studies that, even though it has been challenged in numerous ways for some time now, remains a habit of thought, almost a reflex, today. The ‘theory’ Moxey has in mind here is deconstruction but, even as he was writing, Queer Theory was emerging as a theoretical methodology, derived from deconstruction to a considerable extent, and sharing some of its concerns. Foremost among these is a concern with language.

The question of language and, more precisely, how linguistic structures and processes govern negotiations that construct meanings is the major concern of one of the major texts of Queer Theory. This is a process whereby certain meanings are privileged and may be acknowledged whereas others have to be disavowed and suppressed, even while they remain negatively structuring. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet* argues that conceptual impasses maintain the entire structure of sexual and gender identity. The coming into being of homosexuality as a category in the nineteenth century creates its complement, heterosexuality, and together they form one of two intersecting

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<sup>101</sup>Keith Moxey, introduction, *The Practice of Theory: Poststructuralism, Cultural Politics, and Art History* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994) 2.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid.

and mutually-undermining binaries within which modern identity is articulated. First, homosexuality is one of two forms, a normal and an abnormal type of human sexuality; second, homosexuality is conceptualized as the threshold between the normative categories of masculine and feminine gender. These two conceptions work against each other and make of homosexuality a vexed or queer category, yet one that organizes all identity, like an axle upon which all other identities turn. For example, she argues, leaving the closet has become the dominant metaphor for all self-disclosure, as noted above, but it also requires that it be enacted over and over, for its affirmative effect to be maintained.<sup>103</sup> We acquire a taste for self-disclosure by means of this process and the “delectability” of these disclosures starts to determine how society as a whole experiences knowledge.<sup>104</sup>

Sedgwick looks for areas where two opposite tendencies seem to have locked horns and finds in their impasse an organizing pattern for our identities. Her book is a study of these processes but it explores them by means of an engagement with literature. In a key section, she finds one of these patterns reflected in the Herman Melville novella *Billy Budd*.<sup>105</sup> Her analysis points to some key issues in the workings of

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<sup>103</sup>Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 68

<sup>104</sup>*Ibid.*, 67

<sup>105</sup>Written over the last two decades of the nineteenth century and repeatedly revised, the precise time when the category of homosexuality was being organized, the novella was not finally published until 1924. The character Billy Budd is regularly described as a ‘handsome sailor’ and the story takes place aboard ship. Billy’s personal and physical appeal seems to inspire both jealousy and frustrated desire, in the (homosexual) John Claggart character (the ship’s master-at-arms) initiating a power contest in the plot as well as in the eyes of the captain, who likens him to an ‘angel’ at one point. Claggart maliciously accuses Billy of trying to incite a mutiny and, when he brings his charges to the captain, and the three meet. Billy finds himself unable to utter a word, because of a speech impediment. Instead, he hits (and unintentionally kills) Claggart. Billy is court-martialled and sentenced to be hanged. Sedgwick contends that the relationship among Billy, the captain and Claggart is organized by homosexual desire and the various social constraints set up to block that desire. Claggart’s so-called “natural depravity,” as Melville describes it, indicates that he is perceived as the organizing figure in the complex homoerotic dynamic. See Herman Melville, *Billy Budd, Sailor: The Definitive Text*, ed. Harrison Hayford and Merton M. Sealts, Jr. (Chicago:



heteronormativity. Sedgwick asks: “Is men’s desire for other men the great preservative of the masculinist hierarchies of Western culture, or is it among the most potent of threats against them?”<sup>106</sup> It is important for her point that both elements are present. It is resolved in this work of fiction but, Sedgwick contends, it is an organizing tension within society that is permanently unresolved. Sedgwick finds the category of homosexual organizing for Western society’s self-understanding. The real presence of homosexual desire must struggle against heteronormativity. And yet heteronormativity cannot abolish homosexual desire; it even depends upon its continuing presence to assert heteronormative dominance. Melville’s novella is used to show that we need to seek to understand cultural practices or artefacts through the organizing impasses of those cultures.

And so heteronormativity remains an organizing impasse and it tends to make queer meanings invisible and, when they are too obvious to go unseen, it instead works to make them unspeakable. Of course, this situation has improved a great deal over the last four decades. The approach of Gay and Lesbian Studies in scholarship, like political activism in the wider society, has reclaimed and asserted these meanings. Heteronormativity has certainly been pushed back. The approach of Queer Theory is different. Beginning with work like Sedgwick’s on *Billy Budd*, Queer Theory tries to expose heteronormativity so that its effects can be understood, not just clear a space where homosexual identities and homoerotic meanings can flourish and be recognized. It

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The University of Chicago Press, 1962) 75-76. The fears of mutiny, the killing and the subsequent trial intensify an atmosphere of nebulous danger that Sedgwick interprets as symbolizing the intense need to repress the rampant male-male desire that is loose throughout the text. She asserts that “every impulse of every person in this book that could at all be called desire could be called homosexual desire, being directed by men exclusively toward men.” (Sedgwick, 92.) In the novella, the tension between the possibilities of mutiny or punishment is maintained until the last moment.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 93.

is an aggressive interpretive project that threatens to destroy the conceptual ghettos created by the assertion – but the managed assertion – of gay identities.

These insights should structure how we are to understand Anthony Blunt's career and identities. First of all, his life was lived mostly before the liberation movements of late twentieth century. His sexuality always had to be lived underground but what is striking is that, given this, he chose to go *even more* underground. What Blunt's attitudes were to all his secrecy we cannot know for sure, but what is clear is that he chose secrecy and multiplicity at every turn. In this way Blunt built a persona that was anti-normative. Blunt's sexuality was important and probably basic in this formula but his multiplicity is not reducible to this sexuality. It is, after all, multiple. It has many facets. While Blunt's sexuality is certainly a transparently appropriate thing to look at by means of Queer Theory, there remains resistance – expressed most clearly by Carrier<sup>107</sup> – to look at his academic career in the same light. Heteronormativity still operates and is opposed to releasing queer sexuality from its prescribed pen. In the case of Blunt's spying, there was a greater willingness to associate that social transgression with his sexuality at the time of his exposure in 1979 and 1980, as Steiner hints.<sup>108</sup>

Looking at Blunt's treachery through the lens of his sexuality today, meanwhile, risks alarming a different set of critics who might worry that homosexuality could be redefined as subversive again just when it seemed to be accepted by a decisive plurality in Western societies as 'normal'. Sedgwick's argument, however, implies this is a hopeless goal: heterosexuality as a concept is premised upon its opposite, homosexuality, which is necessarily constructed as 'abnormal' within this particular binary opposition.

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<sup>107</sup>Carrier, *ibid.*, 419. See above.

<sup>108</sup>Steiner, *ibid.*, 182.

Heteronormativity might be reversed to an extent but it and homosexuality are doomed to be life partners. Queer Theory emerges as the viable alternative, at least in scholarly discourses about sexuality. It concerns itself not with stable identities but with what undermines them. Queer should not be allowed to become just another species of theory within a taxonomy of theoretical approaches, each with its proper object of application, a danger which appears to have motivated Teresa de Lauretis's original disowning of it.<sup>109</sup> It must be a queering of theory because even theory, no matter how postmodern, no matter how anti-essentialist it may be, happens within a Western cultural paradigm in which homosexuality (among other things) has been set up to lose. In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick writes: "there currently exists no framework in which to ask about the origins or development of individual gay identity that is not already structured by an implicit, trans-individual Western project or fantasy of eradicating that identity."<sup>110</sup> Because heteronormativity is a bias, a tendency, and not an inquiry, not in any way scientific, it can enjoy and benefit from the cooperating effects of incompatible discourses.<sup>111</sup> Queer Theory, therefore, aims to challenge heteronormativity at every turn by disrupting its deployment of these discourses. Consequently, it does not seek to build a positive and internally compatible discourse of its own. Operating as it should, Queer

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<sup>109</sup>See David Halperin, "The Normalization of Queer Theory," *Journal of Homosexuality* 45 (2003): 339-40. De Lauretis sees the theoretical project as severely if not hopelessly contaminated. I share neither her gloomy outlook nor the political commitment that, disappointed, underlies it (neoliberalism is not my particular enemy) but the danger she identifies, more generally, is of each discourse being used to express the values of the system it was established to resist or undermine.

<sup>110</sup>Sedgwick, 41.

<sup>111</sup>In a 1997 essay Naomi Scheman explains, in a passage drawing from Foucault, Halperin and Sedgwick herself, the way Western heteronormativity achieves this. She writes that heteronormativity's "power comes from its deployment of two mutually incompatible discourses – that of biological normality and that of virtue [...] Arguments against one mode of stigmatization tend notoriously [...] to buttress the other [...] Arguing that gay men and lesbians don't choose their sexuality reinforces the view of that sexuality as sick, whereas arguing that gay men and lesbians show no more signs of psychopathology than do straight people reinforces the view of their sexuality as chosen and culpable." Naomi Scheman, "Queering the Center by Centering the Queer: Reflections on Transsexuals and Secular Jews" in Diana Tietjens Meyer, ed., *Feminists Rethink the Self* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997) 127.

Theory is not pro-queer so much as it is anti-heteronormative. In art history, in general, it means bringing queer discourses into terrain where they appear not to belong. In the case of Anthony Blunt, in particular, it means looking at his art historical interests (as well as his double life as a spy) through the same queer lens as his homosexuality. Most of all, it means pushing back against those habits of thought that suggest any of these seemingly less appropriate areas of application might ‘just’ be better explained by something. The reflexive disavowal encapsulated in the word ‘just’ is the calling card of the habitus<sup>112</sup> of heteronormativity. In exploring the relationship between Anthony Blunt and Nicolas Poussin we ought to be ever watchful, in case of its appearance.

The reflexive dismissal of queer meanings may be seen in one case where queer meanings are looked for in historical art and such meanings are dismissed for want of evidence. As mentioned in the Introduction, it is not until 1996 that there is a major, avowedly queer take on an artist or on art that is not, beyond all dispute, centered on a queer or homosexual related subject: James Smalls’s “The Queer Case of Girodet: Making Trouble for Art History.” Smalls’s short article outlines the application of a queer approach to an artwork that has become a gay icon, but was not made by an artist who is known, for certain, to have been homosexual. Although Smalls is certainly indebted to Whitney Davis’s article on Anne-Louis Girodet de Roucy-Trioson’s 1793 painting *The Sleep of Endymion*, [Fig.1.1] “Renunciation of Reaction in Girodet’s *Sleep of Endymion*” (1994),<sup>113</sup> it makes a major contribution to articulating a queer (as opposed to merely

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<sup>112</sup>A sociological term, ‘habitus’ means those learned behaviours of thought and unthinking dispositions that become taken for granted and organizing of social views, sensibilities, and aesthetic taste. See John Scott and Gordon Marshall, eds., *A Dictionary of Sociology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) sv. “habitus.”

<sup>113</sup>Whitney Davis, “Renunciation of Reaction in Girodet’s *Sleep of Endymion*” in *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations*, ed. Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly, Keith Moxey (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1994) 168-201.

‘gay’) approach to art history. While the nude youth laid out in Girodet’s painting may attract homosexual desire – just as Poussin’s half naked Narcissus may in *Echo and Narcissus* – it is Smalls’s critique of art historical heteronormativity, which he sees as engaged in excluding such perceptions in advance from consideration as worthy evidence, that makes his approach a queer one. Smalls argues that the discipline of art history arranges its categories of evidence and knowledge such that the space for queer readings is systematically eliminated. ‘Queer’ exists exactly in connotation and reverie that cannot be marshalled into any of the various “levels,” as Davis calls them (such as political, or psychoanalytic or social-historical), where art history prefers to operate and locate meanings. Extending this metaphor of levels (which originates in an article by Thomas Crow on the painting in the same volume),<sup>114</sup> Whitney Davis had called for a ‘vertical’ art history, which, like an elevator, might connect the levels of a social, or formal, or psychoanalytic accounts of the work. Smalls argues that such a vertical linking is necessary to recover queer meanings.

In the catalogue essays for a 2006 retrospective of Girodet, the art historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau responded to Smalls’s essay with one of her own, “Is Endymion Gay? Historical Interpretation and Sexual Identities.”<sup>115</sup> Solomon-Godeau aims to refute the applicability of a gay interpretation to the Girodet painting. She quotes James Saslow’s pronouncement that, hard as it may be to understand its meaning, gay art is “simply and eloquently there”; she then calls this ‘there’ “elusive.”<sup>116</sup> Solomon-Godeau

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<sup>114</sup>Thomas Crow, “Observations on Style and History in French Painting of the Male Nude, 1785-1794,” in *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations*, ed. Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly, Keith Moxey (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1994) 141-167.

<sup>115</sup>See Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “Is Endymion Gay? Historical Interpretation and Sexual Identities” in *Girodet: 1767-1824* (Paris: Gallimard, Musée du Louvre Éditions, 2006) 81-95.

<sup>116</sup>Solomon-Godeau, *Ibid.*

is careful to distinguish between a gay and lesbian art history and a queer art history.<sup>117</sup> She characterizes the difference in this way: “In the former instance what is at stake is the notion of a more or less stable sexual identity (gay or lesbian), which in one manifestation or another is thought to “speak” itself in and through the work, just as the work may reciprocally “speak” of the sexual identity of the artist.”<sup>118</sup> She goes on to say that any example in such a gay and lesbian art history “turns out to be very difficult to substantiate.”<sup>119</sup> Having described the scope of a gay and lesbian art history as naturally narrow – and that, taking a queer approach, Smalls has moved beyond its appropriate boundaries – she goes on to argue that a full consideration of the role of gender (in its entirely normative sense) would clarify those aspects of Girodet’s work that she thinks Smalls is misreading as homoerotic. She writes:

[R]eferring to both gay and queer considerations, what seems conspicuously absent on a theoretical level is consideration of those issues related to sexual difference, femininity, gender ideologies, and needless to say, women. These elisions are themselves a consequence of the absence of feminist theory in these approaches, and it is one of the striking features of contemporary queer theory, *as* theory, that much of it appears to dispense with precisely those elements in feminist theory that are most productive in rethinking sexuality and representation.<sup>120</sup>

What she proposes, of course, is very close to the reading in her own book on the art of the period, *Male Trouble: a Crisis in Representation* (1997).<sup>121</sup> But I find hers a strange complaint about Queer Theory. It apparently disregards the entire point of the critical approach. She is right that the discursive norms of art history, which would demand documentary evidence or something equally conclusive, make locating a gay or queer

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<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 90.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., 88.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid.

<sup>120</sup>Solomon-Godeau, 90.

<sup>121</sup>See Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Male Trouble: a Crisis in Representation* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997).

consciousness terribly difficult. That is one reason why queer art history attacks them in the first place.

My reading of Smalls is that he ponders whether there is a queer Girodet as a means of raising this issue of the discourse, hence his subtitle “Making Trouble for Art History.” It is this focus on discourse that identifies Smalls (I would say) as undertaking a real Queer Theory art history. Solomon-Godeau does to Smalls’s argument exactly what Smalls contends is always done to arguments about sexual orientation in historical art:<sup>122</sup> she strips away its elements, level by level, and, historicizing each, introduces enough doubt to undermine the grounding of any subjective impression of a homosexual presence. This example is useful, I believe, to clarify what is at stake in Smalls’s argument. Smalls points out that the issue is not whether or not we can see something as homoerotic, the issue is what structures collude to make homoeroticism invisible in so many cases. A queer art history, in other words, is one that interrogates the discursive limits of art history on questions such as sexuality and gender. It may or may not seek to locate queers in history, but its own disciplinary orientation is critical. For these reasons it is a viable tool for exploring the margins of queer consciousness, by venturing into terrain where known queers have not been – and may not be – located. It can be about the disciplinary structures, it need not be about queers, as such.

Keith Moxey warns that art historical discourse, even while it insists on careful attention to period (and, in this sense, to historicity) can easily lose sight of its place, embedded in history and framed by assumptions common to its own period. This becomes an acute problem when looking at art historical writing of the past. Of course in time these often unintentional biases (as well as the intentional kind) become all too

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<sup>122</sup>Smalls, 26.

obvious. No reader could mistake them when reading Giorgio Vasari, for instance. But the danger is most acute when looking at art history of the recent past, such as that written by Erwin Panofsky or Anthony Blunt. In the wake of newer and seemingly – it always seems so – more sophisticated theories, it becomes easy to see these works as naïve, on the one hand, or else (as interests me here) as presenting naïve views in a basically transparent way. No one would suppose that a writer of art history, or a writer in any other scholarly field, would write unmindful of the limits of current propriety – both professional and personal. Those dispositions and sensibilities change, of course, and old inclinations can be conjectured aloud in new ways years after the fact. The work of a queer historiography is to open up these avenues by calling attention to the practices and habits of mind that would block them off. It is here both to allow for speculations and to frame them theoretically.

### Being Blunt

In a private recording he made after his exposure and that was broadcast for the first time in January 2008, Anthony Blunt said:

Before the war the students' common room was in the basement [of the Courtauld Institute, when it was located in Home House, 20 Portman Square, London.] And a wall mural painting represented the staff. All I can remember was that I was represented holding a glass of – well let's hope it was wine – and a copy of Karl Marx. And of course this has now been painted over, quite rightly. But no doubt in twenty or thirty or a hundred years this interesting, unknown masterpiece throwing great light on art history in England in the thirties will be uncovered.<sup>123</sup>

This is typical of Blunt and typical of his wry humour. After his exposure Blunt liked to toy with those who may be looking for revelations. A journal Blunt had made on his 1935

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<sup>123</sup>“Spy Blunt’s Art Tapes Revealed,” *Newsnight*, BBC2 (Wednesday, 23 Jan., 2008.) Source online. Retrieved 22 Aug. 22, 2009. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/newsnight/7205603.stm>>



Russian trip, for instance, was found with a few pages torn out and scrawled upon it was the suggestive phrase 'to be destroyed.'<sup>124</sup> While such an object may suggest evidence of a clandestine meeting or compromising notes, I consider this doubtful. All other evidence suggests that Blunt was drawn into spying slowly, about two years later, largely under the influence of Guy Burgess. The notebook is otherwise innocent, mostly containing notes as to the colour of Poussin paintings at the Hermitage. (Colour reproductions were not then available.) Another possible explanation suggests itself. As it was Blunt who organized his own donation of papers to the Courtauld Institute's archives it seems entirely possible that an inscription like the one on the Russian notebook could be a piece of mischief intended, like his sometimes ambiguous remarks elsewhere, to muddy the waters. After his exposure Blunt made several statements deploring his decision to become a spy, or, rather, to thereby betray the United Kingdom, as in his broadcast interview with the BBC in 1979 and in his secret autobiography on deposit at the British Library (released 23 July, 2009); but he also sometimes made light of his former activities – or at least of his communist affiliations – in hints and teasing remarks. When he had nothing much left to hide Blunt seemed able sometimes to enjoy the slippage among his various masks.

Although Blunt was freer after his exposure to engage in such games, even before he seemed to be constantly testing the limits of his situation. George Steiner observes:

He risked or courted exposure at almost every point: sexual, political and it may be, in one or two instances, professional (the connoisseurship proved suspect and Denis Mahon scored tellingly against Blunt's entire vision of Poussin). The lofty edifice of fame and social privilege which Blunt achieved – the knighthood, the Surveyorship of the Queen's

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<sup>124</sup>See Blunt Papers, CI AFB 489.

Pictures, the domination of the Courtauld Institute after 1947, the plethora of honorary fellowships, the British Academy, the special relations with the Louvre and the international art establishment – hinged on an incessant practice of clandestinity.<sup>125</sup>

Steiner goes on to suggest these slips may be signs of strain. He writes: “Anthony Blunt might have been exposed and stripped naked a hundred times over. On several occasions, in cold drunkenness, he blurted out the truth to unbelieving or vaguely amused listeners.”<sup>126</sup> But these instances of self-disclosure need to be set in the context of a few other odd remarks that Blunt made from time to time and that hinted at his situation. Taken all together, these suggest a pattern of playful partial self-disclosure. Such slips happened together with statements that could, on the other hand, be regarded as attempting to conceal his activities or, at least, to cover up his real thinking and cast him as a typical upper middle class Englishman.

As early as 1941, Blunt took the opportunity to suggest – at least to anyone studying his writings for signs of confessional admissions – that he had come to value the peace and the order of traditional Western civilization more than his former political ideals. Of course, at this time, he was to the world at large a young art historian who had until recently been a young, Marxist-oriented art critic. (He was also at this time already a Soviet spy.) In 1941 he published a book on the French architect François Mansart. This book was based on lectures given at the Warburg Institute in the summer of 1940, just before the Blitz, and published just as it was ending. In his preface, Blunt draws attention to this timing, using it as a polite disclaimer in a masterpiece of understatement. He writes:

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<sup>125</sup>Steiner, “Ice Cold in Arcadia.” Blunt was made KCVO (Knight Commander of the Royal Victorian Order) – for his services to art – in 1956. This order of chivalry is reserved in recognition for personal services to the monarch, and not public services to the state.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid.

The following lectures were begun in the middle of June and delivered at the Warburg Institute in August 1940, that is to say at a time when it was impossible to visit any of the buildings discussed here, to have access to the drawings mentioned, and even to some of the most important sources in the way of books and engravings. Moreover the moment was not favourable for concentrated work.<sup>127</sup>

Blunt continues the theme in his Introduction, noting with approbation the pragmatic and non-doctrinaire attitude of a French King: He writes:

In Rome the Papacy succeeded in establishing an ecclesiastical autocracy, as the equivalent of which the art of the full Baroque was evolved. In France, on the other hand, as a result of Henry IV, Richelieu and Mazarin, a new form of essentially secular, bourgeois monarchy was created [...]. The attitude of the most progressive minds in French politics is to some extent symbolized in that splendid [...] remark of Henry IV: “Paris is worth a Mass” – a remark that indicates not callousness, but a clear realization that after thirty years of religious civil war it was more important to live in peace and prosperity than to murder your neighbour for a point of dogma.<sup>128</sup>

Blunt has emerged – or so it would appear – as a young man matured by the realities of war and who has given up the dogmatic or doctrinaire flirtations of his recent youth. He has embraced pragmatism and even maybe come to admire the moderate wisdom of a system of enlightened monarchy. Of course, none of this rings true for someone who was a committed – and by now active – agent of Joseph Stalin, which is exactly the point.

The pattern continues. Three years later in his important essay “The Heroic and Ideal Landscape in the Work of Nicolas Poussin,” Blunt casts a small but gratuitous aspersion at political revolutions, when comparing them with artistic revolutions. He writes – though arguably in a spirit of complaint – that Poussin’s artistic development around 1648-50 “created a revolution in the [landscape] genre, even though *like many*

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<sup>127</sup>Anthony Blunt, *François Mansart and The Origins of French Classical Architecture* (London: The Warburg Institute, 1941) 9.

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*, 13.

*revolutions* this one produced no permanent effect.”<sup>129</sup> (It should be noted, as well, that political turmoil and revolution – surrounding the Fronde, a mid-seventeenth century rebellion against the king by the landed aristocracy – is also a theme in this essay.) Again, with apparent casualness, Blunt has let slip what is supposed to be an accidental confession of his new, non-radical point of view. When it is read together with an appreciation of some ostensibly offhand remarks made by Blunt in a 1965 interview with the BBC, a short program called *The Queen’s Gallery*, a general tactic towards casting aside suspicion may be seen. In the 1965 interview he is less able to come across quite so casually and he is actually at pains to observe (while trying to appear casual) that a cameo portrait of Tsar Nicolas II and Alexandra’s children in a Carl Fabergé egg is “very touching because, of course, they’re *all* dead.”<sup>130</sup> The trouble is that the interviewer cuts Blunt off before he could finish his seemingly accidental remark, even though he had started. Blunt is awkwardly forced to reiterate what is clearly intended to look like an uncalculated, spontaneous statement to fill up a pause in conversation. It could be argued that these remarks could just be intended to ‘muddy the waters’ as well and afford Blunt some ‘plausible deniability’ – that last one, perhaps, even to suggest he had become a little simple-minded in his prejudice against communism. But the 1965 remark is made after he secured his immunity deal and should have felt safe. This way of dropping remarks that are really *highly-crafted* ‘casual’ observations suggests, instead, a habitual stance of deception that I argue is really an identity built around diverse masks and

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<sup>129</sup>Anthony Blunt, “The Heroic and Ideal Landscape in the Work of Nicolas Poussin,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 7 (1944) 157. Emphasis added.

<sup>130</sup>See Anthony Blunt, interview, *The Queen’s Gallery*. BBC (1965). *Anthony Blunt: A Spy Case Package*. BBC videodisc recording. 2003.

contradictory subject positions. It is striking how easily self-concealment, in one instance, and careful self-disclosure, in the next, seem to coexist.

This stance could emerge *around* Blunt's scholarship – that is, he could express this dynamic when speaking publicly, in interviews or in prefaces, as an art historian – but it could also emerge in his scholarly work itself, as one Poussin scholar has maintained. Sheila McTighe has investigated this issue; she discusses several political landscape allegories that are generally understood to comment critically on political disruptions in France at the time of the Fronde. Among these are the pendants *Landscape with the Funeral of Phocion* and *Landscape with the Gathering of the Ashes of Phocion* (both 1648), first discussed by Blunt in the 1944 essay on landscape. McTighe writes: “Blunt first proposed, then dropped, the thesis that Poussin's late work was closely associated with *libertinage* [...] Blunt's later reluctance to deal with the issue of *libertinage* may have had roots in his personal situation.”<sup>131</sup> She suggests that Blunt censors his own reading of this group of Poussin paintings to suppress his own belief in Poussin's late connection to the secret atheist circle of the *libertins* and that he does this to avoid drawing attention to his homosexuality, spying, or both.<sup>132</sup> (As to which, McTighe is rather coy: “personal situation” is all she will say.) The *libertins*, largely a group of philosophical poets, believed that a society needed to be ruled by a secret circle of enlightened intellectuals who would guide affairs quietly behind the scenes. By

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<sup>131</sup>McTighe, 16.

<sup>132</sup>Interestingly, the Poussin scholar Todd Olson quotes Blunt on Poussin's brief tenure as First Painter in Paris, before returning to Rome, which also suggests some perception projection or identification: “he was made First painter to Louis XIII, but threw away this opportunity in order to go back to freedom in Rome.” Todd Olson, *Poussin and France: Painting, Humanism and The Politics of Style* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002) 9. See also Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, 173. It is a telling choice of words. Blunt was, of course, Surveyor of the Queen's Pictures and thus a member of the Royal Household – first art historian, in effect, to Elizabeth II. To characterize Poussin as choosing *between* freedom and his royal post seems to project an anxiety about his own trap in London, against which he seems to oppose an imaginary ‘freedom’ located, it would seem, in Italy.

contrast, David Carrier suggested that the secretive Poussin, encoding cryptic meanings for his radical friends – not necessarily all *libertins* – looks suspiciously like Blunt himself and wonders if this is not a self-projection.<sup>133</sup> Given all these concealments and disclosures, the question arises: is Blunt hiding himself or flaunting himself in his writings on Poussin?

Before homosexuality's legalization, prominent homosexuals needed to do both, to some extent, by constructing an acceptable cover identity and making it impossible to (acceptably) call attention to the unspoken one, while still being visible, at least to one another. It was illegal and sometimes harshly punished to engage in homosexual acts for most of Blunt's life. The then-recent British cultural memory included prominent homosexuals destroyed by indiscretion, of which the most notorious case had been Oscar Wilde's, of course. Later on, after World War II, homosexuality came to be seen as a sign of political deviancy and evidence in itself of possible treachery.<sup>134</sup> And so, as Blunt actually was a traitor to the United Kingdom, his spying and his homosexuality each made the other much more dangerous. For years after the defection to the Soviet Union of his friends Guy Burgess and Donald MacLean, Blunt had to be careful how to present to fellow scholars his shrewd decision not to visit the United States, whose government he accurately supposed suspected him of spying and, in the mid 1950s, may well have

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<sup>133</sup>Carrier, review, 571.

<sup>134</sup>Known colloquially as the 'homintern,' there was presumed to be a conspiracy of homosexuals advancing long-term communist aims by undermining Western cultural values and institutions. Fear of homosexual cultural sabotage was spread by U.S. President Harry S. Truman (who called them "parlor pinks," in a sly *double-entendre*). Though not actively pursued in the United States either by HUAC or the F.B.I. (for the likely danger, perhaps, that such a line of enquiry might pose to Roy Cohn or even J. Edgar Hoover), respectively, the dread of Moscow working through homosexual communities remained a fixture of the Cold War down to the Presidency of Richard Nixon. It effectively ended after Stonewall. Of course, there was some truth to it; and the circle of Anthony Blunt and Guy Burgess is its most significant historical instance. But espionage services of every political hue have made ample use of homosexuals, though largely for the more prosaic fact of their susceptibility to control via blackmail.

arrested him.<sup>135</sup> Politically as well as personally as well as professionally Blunt set himself up so that he could switch from one contradictory persona to another. It is not adequate to ignore such unusual circumstances when evaluating his art historical work. In Blunt's case, I claim that this goes farther, that his position is not merely a pragmatic ruse or an acquired habit but the genuine articulation of queer identity.

We have seen already that Judith Butler maintains that "gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original."<sup>136</sup> According to her, gender identity is made through performances, but these performances must be enacted over and over again. The need for repetitions shows that identity is fluid and complex. She writes: "That there is a need for repetition at all is a sign that identity is not self-identical [...] It requires to be instituted again and again, which is to say that it runs the risk of becoming *de*-instituted at every interval."<sup>137</sup> As identity is coterminous with the performance that engenders it, in her view, the history of different performances in different contexts establishes different personae. These differences may be slight and unintentional or they may be significant and deliberate, but the subject is an effect which is always appearing in different ways and to different extents to the different people around him or her. The queer subject is one that understands the complexities and contradictions of gender identity and operates complexly within the diverse discursive communities that he and/or she inhabits.

Identity happens in performative repetition, but it may also be adulterated by irony and contradiction. Contradictory identities are performed at different times. This is at least one way that Queer Theory articulates identity: it necessitates irony. Irony is

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<sup>135</sup>Carter, 396. Blunt does shortly thereafter travel to the United States but he had to be careful.

<sup>136</sup>Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. H. Abelove et al. (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 313.

<sup>137</sup>*Ibid.*, 315.

commonly associated with homosexuality but my discussion of it here links the specific discourse on irony provided by Linda Hutcheon in her book *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* with Judith Butler's account of identity construction.<sup>138</sup> For Hutcheon, irony is governed by 'discursive communities,' which she defines as "the complex configuration of shared knowledge, beliefs, values, and communicative strategies."<sup>139</sup> These communities are complex and overlapping and, thus, different meanings can be directed to particular communities. In this way irony is pervaded by structures of inclusion and exclusion.<sup>140</sup> Irony is not merely saying one thing and meaning another, it presupposes that some hearers – but not everyone – will understand privileged and thus private or even secret meanings. Queer irony is a way of being multiple that, once one is accustomed to it, affords an unusual security. For a spy, as for a homosexual of Blunt's time, being entirely known, known in full by any one person would be equated with danger rather than security. Secrecy allows for multiple layers of disposable intimacy and, if one persona becomes too damaged or too conspicuous, it may be shed and thereafter disavowed. Everyone else may be counted upon to say, as it would be in Blunt's case, "well, that isn't the Anthony that *I* know." Outwardly this may look like false intimacy or false trust but it is genuine trust and intimacy, but with in-built redundancies.

Blunt's writings, meanwhile, reveal an ongoing attraction for the imponderables and the open questions associated with Poussin scholarship. Blunt appears (in a dispassionate manner) to revel in the unexplained judgments of the expert: he constantly

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<sup>138</sup>See Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995). See also Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990. (See especially the conclusion, "From Parody to Politics," 142-149.)

<sup>139</sup>Hutcheon, 91.

<sup>140</sup>*Ibid.*, 55.



makes assertions that things are ‘probable’ or ‘likely.’ Most conclusions are qualified, either by ‘perhaps’ or by ‘certainly.’ In short, Blunt’s style and approach constantly remind his reading audience of the incommunicable knowledge of the author, of his sober judgment, of his *reserve*. This style and approach, which foregrounds the author and thereby makes an issue of his authority is at once a serious strategy for establishing that authority (in every sense) and, at the same time, playful and ironic. It accords well with Roland Barthes’s conception of *jouissance*, the (quasi-orgasmic) pleasure enjoyed through the sliding of signifiers during the act of writing (presented in his short book *The Pleasure of the Text* of 1975).<sup>141</sup> In Blunt’s writing on Poussin, however, the interplay of vast (and kaleidoscopically shifting) erudite referencing engenders this pleasure, as well. The august Blunt, associated with (and related to) British royalty seemed the driest of dry Englishmen. He appeared as formidable and as forbidding as the neo-stoic artist he championed. If this aspect of their ‘affinity’ now seems fatuous, it used to be unconsciously compelling. A very strange aspect of Blunt’s reputation was that the flaws in his scholarship (Denis Mahon demonstrated many) did not threaten and actually may have helped him affirm his stature as a Poussin authority, suggesting a source of authority somehow outside scholarship and reaffirming a gentlemanlike reserve that was above both professional jealousies and points of detail. Perversely – or maybe *queerly* – Blunt

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<sup>141</sup>See Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du Texte* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1975). Barthes distinguishes between two ways texts can be encountered: ‘pleasure’ (*plaisir*) and ‘*jouissance*’, which means both ‘bliss’ and ‘orgasm’, and has Lacanian psychoanalytic overtones, as well. His distinction corresponds to the difference between what he calls ‘readable’ texts (*textes lisibles*) – or maybe ‘texts as read’ – and ‘writeable’ texts (*textes scriptibles*), or ‘texts as written.’ (This latter distinction first appears in Barthes’s *S/Z* of 1970.) The writer is active and engaged while the reader remains essentially passive. *Textes scriptibles* are always being reorganized and reestablished in the process of writing as the elements of their structure slip and slide from one position to another, whereas ‘pleasure’ is less free-flowing, more controlled and does not call into question the author’s subject position, as does its ‘orgasmic’ alternative. See also Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1970).

seemed able to construct a defence of his stature and authority using his own scholarly imperfections.

The orderliness and scholarliness of Poussin studies would have afforded Blunt the outward mask of control and stable identity: as an art historian he is a specialist in a highly refined and nuanced discourse. This mask could at once be a model and a cover story. But Poussin – in his instability and multiplicity – also may have afforded Blunt an *inward* mask, performances of a protean identity meant only for himself. Poussin's works often combine Arcadian visions, which, as we shall see, are freighted with homoerotic meaning, while still presenting reassuringly serious and reassuringly rarefied anagogical meanings. This is one instance of a general tendency to resist self-sameness. Blunt could have used Poussin's multiplicity to both chart and navigate his own.<sup>142</sup> Could it not be that Blunt sought out Poussin studies precisely so that the kaleidoscopic play of scholarship could shift and shift indefinitely? Blunt is sometimes quite straightforward in admitting technical deficiencies on Poussin's part, especially in relation to his drawing. It is doubtful Blunt sought out a painter of impeccable formal merits to champion (he might have found many). Rather, he may have sought a painter of imponderable scholarly

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<sup>142</sup>Blunt sometimes appeared to recognize Poussin's multiplicity, in the more obscure corners of his art historical work. Poussin's preparatory drawings sometimes show the evolution of two different ideas that emerge combined as a hybrid concept in some finished paintings. One major example of this is the vexed issue of whether Poussin's maritime scene in Philadelphia represents the subject of the *Birth of Terrestrial Venus* or the *Triumph of Neptune and Amphitrite*. (See note on Charles Dempsey above) Frank Sommer, Michael Levey and Dempsey debate this in a series of short articles published in the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* between 1961 and 1966. Blunt observes in his 1966 catalogue that different preparatory drawings suggest different identifications. He does not draw (in print, anyway) the conclusion that both subjects may be combined in an amalgamated or hybrid subject in the painting itself. But, unlike Sommer, Levey and Dempsey, Blunt seems open to multiple meanings coexisting in this one composition. He writes: "The most plausible solution seems to be that Poussin was playing at one and the same time with various related themes [...] and that the painting which finally emerged, though actually representing Neptune and Amphitrite, retains echoes of the other subjects. Such overlapping of motives would not be unusual in Poussin's mythological paintings." Blunt, *The Paintings of Nicolas Poussin: A Critical Catalogue* (London: Phaidon, 1966): 121. For Blunt's discussion of the source drawings, see also Blunt, *The Drawings of Nicolas Poussin* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979) 90-93.

minutiae. What Elizabeth Cropper and Charles Dempsey interpret as a block, therefore, something that Blunt could not resolve, may instead be a recognition of something that he would not resolve but sought nevertheless to keep in its place. Blunt may have found in Poussin's work a model for his own hiding in plain sight. We cannot know for certain. But I shall maintain that, in Poussin's art, queer content is seemingly disguised but actually expressed through a rational, ordering style: in Part Two I explore this area. For the moment it is enough to observe that between Poussin's multiplicity and the elegant, albeit somewhat elaborate, layered artifice that is Blunt's complex of identities, there are correspondences.

Blunt's careers and his life were marked by his exposure by Margaret Thatcher in 1979, which caused reverberations that have affected art history by causing a reevaluation of Blunt's failings and claims but also by adding, inevitably, to the mystery and allure of Poussin. (He is now not just an artist's artist or an art historian's artist but also a spy's artist and a traitor's artist.) Meanwhile, the reaction to Blunt's exposure in 1979-1980 renders in a flattened form, like an x-ray, the internal structure of Blunt's identity complex. To understand Blunt's queer identity structure, it is helpful to understand how it was perceived in a state of forced disintegration.

On 21 November 1979 Margaret Thatcher, elected Prime Minister only the previous May, stood up and read a long statement to the House of Commons.<sup>143</sup> The key sentence was: "I thought it right to confirm that Professor Blunt had indeed been a Soviet

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<sup>143</sup>In her statement of 21 November, Thatcher elaborated upon a shorter reply to a planted question that she had given the week before in Prime Minister's Question Time. In her biography of Blunt, Miranda Carter reports that "Downing Street contacted a backbench Labour MP, Ted Leadbitter, who had been thinking about asking a question about Security at Question Time on 15 November, and asked him to turn it into a question about Blunt. Leadbitter Agreed." Carter, 472. For Thatcher's complete statement, see Appendix 1. See also Prime Minister [Margaret Thatcher] in response to Mr. Leadbitter, *Hansard* HC Deb 15 November 1979 (vol. 973): 679W-681W. Text online. Accessed 23 Nov. 2009: <[http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written\\_answers/1979/nov/15/security](http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1979/nov/15/security)>.

agent and to give the House the salient facts.”<sup>144</sup> Her facts included these: that the eminent art historian had worked as a Soviet agent until he was uncovered by British intelligence in 1964; that Blunt had been a talent-spotter for the Soviets at Cambridge; that, after he joined the army in 1939, he was seconded to British wartime counterintelligence and routinely passed information to the Soviets; that Blunt had been under suspicion since the defection of his friends Guy Burgess and Donald MacLean, then both diplomats, in 1951; that he was decisively uncovered after the defection in 1963 to the Soviet Union of Blunt’s third friend Kim Philby, a journalist and former MI6 counterespionage liaison to Washington; and that in 1964 Blunt secured immunity from prosecution in exchange for his full confession and for agreeing never to publicly reveal his activities, a deal offered because the government did not want to alert the Soviets to the fact that Blunt had confessed.<sup>145</sup> Thatcher’s announcement repudiated the agreement made with Blunt,<sup>146</sup> although she stated that the government could not end his legal immunity, that his confession would be inadmissible as evidence against him, and that there was no other substantial evidence upon which any hope of a successful prosecution could rest. Thatcher’s statement exposed a deep cultural rift between Blunt’s world and that of contemporary Britain (in 1979).<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup>Prime Minister (Margaret Thatcher), *Hansard* HC Deb 21 Nov.1979 (vol. 974): 402-410. Text online. Accessed 16 November 2009: <<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1979/nov/21/mr-anthony-blunt>>.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid. The Security Services always suspected that Blunt’s confession was less than full because he refused to ever implicate any friends, ones who had not already defected to the U.S.S.R., at least.

<sup>146</sup>Thatcher regarded the promise of government silence to be implicit in the undertaking made to Blunt and this was deliberately violated. This fact contributed to her decision to inform Blunt’s solicitor of the government’s intention in advance. Penrose and Freeman, 501-502.

<sup>147</sup>Thatcher’s manoeuvre was carefully stage-managed. Within minutes of Thatcher’s first statement it was announced from Buckingham Palace that Blunt’s knighthood would be withdrawn. (Carter, 473.) It is important to emphasize what an extraordinary dishonour this withdrawal was; prior to Blunt’s the last knighthood to be withdrawn had been that of Roger Casement, an Irish revolutionary and, interestingly, also a homosexual, who was hanged in 1916.

Blunt's official denunciation was strictly related to the events of his covert career but the ensuing public reaction reflexively combined that with his sexuality. Underlying the apprehension of Blunt's crime there was a category of identity – a thing that he was rather than a thing that he did – that had become unacceptable. A complex and duplicitous identity relating to this sexuality, his social position and his art historical career is what revolted the Britain of 1979-1980. By comparison, the so-called "Fifth Man" in the Cambridge Spy Ring, John Cairncross,<sup>148</sup> caused no comparable reaction when he was unmasked ten years later, although his alleged activities were more serious.<sup>149</sup> Also, Cairncross was exposed in 1990 as the Cold War was ending and as Thatcher was about to be dropped as the leader of the Conservative Party.

Thatcher's statement of 21 November preceded a Parliamentary debate full of vitriol, mutual accusations, as Members of Parliament – both Labour and Conservative – attempted to cast themselves as purer than their opponents in loathing the deal that had been made with Blunt. These were explosive revelations but, in the debate that followed, they led to a curious kind of cleansing ritual, with former holders of high office (such as the former Prime Ministers James Callaghan and Edward Heath, then both still MPs) exorcizing past sins, even if they only regarded them, at worst, as sins of omission.<sup>150</sup> Blunt's exposure proved to be cathartic for a British political and journalistic elite that needed to purge itself of decades of doubts, nuance and indecision in order to adapt to

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<sup>148</sup>Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story of its Foreign Operations from Lenin to Gorbachev* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990) 247n.

<sup>149</sup>Cairncross is alleged to have provided the Soviet Union with critical nuclear weapons intelligence. See Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive: The KGB in Europe and the West* (London, Penguin Books, 2000), 150n.

<sup>150</sup>Edward Heath, the last conservative Prime Minister before Thatcher – and Blunt's immunity had been granted by the Conservative Ministry of Alec Douglas-Home – comes across as acutely embarrassed by Thatcher's announcement, but steadfast in denying any coverup. See, especially, Mr. Edward Heath *Hansard* HC Deb 21 November 1979 (vol. 974): 465-66. Text online. Accessed 16 Nov. 2009. <<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1979/nov/21/mr-anthony-blunt>>.

Thatcher's politics and the coming to power of her constituency. These elites took advantage of the opportunity afforded by this new ideological beginning.

A Conservative MP (Alan Clark, coincidentally the son of Blunt's predecessor as Surveyor of the King's Pictures, the art historian Sir Kenneth Clark) identifies another convenient outcome for the Thatcher government of Blunt's exposure. He confided in his diary that the controversy surrounding Blunt's exposure "diverted attention from the really alarming manner in which our economy seems to have been conducted."<sup>151</sup> But while the exposure proved useful to Thatcher immediately, it also helped to validate a major theme in Thatcherism and advance her vision of Britain. The change in the cultural climate in Britain at the dawn of Thatcherism is central to understanding Blunt's fortunes. 'Thatcherism' is a term that was coined by the British sociologist and cultural critic Stuart Hall<sup>152</sup> to mean a political formulation inclined to approach concrete problems with images in the guise of solutions.<sup>153</sup> Hall's 1979 essay "The Great Moving Right Show," where he first used the term, was written before Margaret Thatcher's Conservatives advanced to power and, in it, he explains that Thatcherism repeats and rearranges notions from the British past, principally from a Victorian middle class world-view into a new, simplified – and simplifying – image politics.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Alan Clark, *Diaries: Into Politics* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2000) 136. Quoted in Carter, 473.

<sup>152</sup> Hall's coining of this term is contested. See Richard Vinen, *Thatcher's Britain: The Politics and Social Upheaval of the 1980s* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 4. What is clear is that Hall was using it for the first time in a peculiar sense that involved a "populist capitalism." Other early uses of 'Thatcherism' related primarily to strictly economic aspects of Margaret Thatcher's policies.

<sup>153</sup> See Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques, *The Politics of Thatcherism* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1983.)

<sup>154</sup> Stuart Hall, "The Great Moving Right Show" in *Marxism Today* (Jan., 1979): 17. He calls this 'rhetoric' and identifies it with the 'radical right' of the National Front. This is a bad misreading and with hindsight appears to dilute the insightfulness of his analysis. But it is an attempt to understand a phenomenon then so new in Britain – rightwing populism – that Hall's analysis may be excused for grafting then-present circumstances onto quasi-Fascist variations from the past.

I wish to argue that Thatcherism destroyed Blunt because Thatcherism is all about politics packaged in unconflicted images. Blunt's complex articulation of a manifold identity collapsed – in its glare – into a monstrous fusion of self-contradiction and perversion. Blunt was seen as a preposterous amalgam of Establishment elitism and communist treachery that, in 1979, only a known queer could satisfactorily embody. The shock caused to public opinion by Philby's discovery and the Profumo Scandal had convinced the British security services that they should never reveal publicly what they knew about Blunt.<sup>155</sup> Blunt's secret immunity deal of 1964 would appear to have offered him the perfect solution, a way out of the trap in which he had found himself: Blunt was caught but no one was allowed to know about it. He was a knight; as Surveyor of the Queen's Pictures, a member of the royal household; and an art-historical institution. He seemed to have negotiated a treacherous course brilliantly between betraying his friends and ruining his own position. Why, then, did it go so badly wrong? It was not Blunt's activities so much as the construction of his identity that caused his seemingly superb solution to detonate. Too many people who knew the truth became repulsed by Blunt's manifold persona as the climate in Britain changed in the later 1970s. But they had not learned more recently. Rather, the changed political and social climate itself allowed for and demanded his pillorying. Thatcherism was the result of a change in the self-understanding of British society. It responded to circumstances and then, once it got going, it started to drive them. People began to talk. People began to see Blunt's situation

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<sup>155</sup>Carter, 446-8. The Profumo Scandal involved the discovery that John Profumo, a Cabinet Minister, had been involved with a girl, Christine Keeler, who was also involved with Yevgeny Ivanov, a Soviet naval attaché and KGB member. Profumo had lied about his involvement to the House of Commons. The scandal ultimately destroyed the government of Harold MacMillan. See "Times Obituary: John Profumo," *TimesOnline* (10 Mar., 2006). Text online. Accessed 17 Dec. 2009. <<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article739657.ece>>

differently. It became appealingly clear that a cathartic example could be made by exposing, and destroying, an effete phenomenon like Blunt's web of personae. Speaking in an interview in January 2008 on the BBC 2 flagship newsmagazine *Newsnight*, Miranda Carter recounted something of the atmosphere of the time and explained the effect on British society of Blunt's exposure. She said:

There was a very scary right wing chill running through the country and the way that papers leapt on Blunt and [...] tore him to shreds – not really for what he had done because they didn't know what he had done – but because he was an intellectual, he was homosexual and he was posh [...] I think a lot of people felt that if they stood up they'd be next.<sup>156</sup>

The aristocratic betrayal exemplified by the case of Kim Philby had remained a trauma haunting the British political class. Just as Margaret Thatcher's repositioning of British foreign policy would later provide a catharsis like the fundamentally symbolic (but politically highly transformative) Falklands War,<sup>157</sup> her reordering of British society, away from an overtly cultured Establishment and towards a yeomanry of instinctive self-reliance, needed its sacrificial victim. Blunt suited that role very well.

From the moment of Blunt's exposure in 1979, it was usual to combine his spying and his homosexuality in what the British political class and media appeared to regard as one composite crime. In the weeks that followed, Blunt's spying was forced to share equal billing with his homosexuality when it was not overshadowed by it. *Private Eye* led the way but other publications, particularly in their political cartoons, identified the two

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<sup>156</sup>Miranda Carter, interview, "Newsnight" *BBC2* Wednesday January 23, 2008.

<sup>157</sup>Thatcher had been expected to lose a General election in 1983. Her economic policies had not reversed recession and caused great pain. The Conservatives had been in third place in the polls. Because of the Falklands War she gained a 20-percent lead. This came from sizeable portions of working-class and racial minority communities who, through the new image politics, were made to feel a part of a great if totally remote – and therefore symbolic – victory. This transformative sentimental boost is known as the 'Falklands Factor'. Hall sees it as part of a continuing strategy to think politics not in language, which can communicate conflicting interests, but in images, which are detached from the material concerns of political dispute. See Hall, "The Empire Strikes Back," in *The Politics of Thatcherism*.



issues. After Blunt's press conference, *Private Eye* ran its cover (as "*Private Spy*") with the caption "Blunt Lashes Out." In a doctored photograph, it depicts a disgruntled Blunt in a picture gallery. A figure unidentifiably cut off by the margin says "I hear the Queen is terribly upset" and Blunt, seeming to misunderstand that he was not the 'queen' in question responds "I most certainly am."<sup>158</sup> [Fig.1.2] The next issue included a poem entitled *Lines on the Unmasking of the Surveyor of the Queen's Pictures*. The middle stanza reads:

Who'd have guessed it – "Blunt a traitor"  
 And a homosexualist?  
 Carrying on with Tar and Waiter –  
 There's a sight I'm glad I missed.<sup>159</sup>

In the same issue a fake advertisement pretends to sell a commemorative plate, part of fictitious four piece set of the Cambridge spies. (Curiously it is designed by a "Brian Poussin," suggesting even Blunt's art historical interests are foolish or even sinister.) Similar items would appear over the next several issues. Meanwhile, political cartoons – virtually without exception – played on Blunt's spying and homosexuality together. On 20 November a cartoon by Raymond Jackson (JAK) appeared in the *Evening Standard* featuring a rough looking middle-aged man, a tough, seemingly applying for a curatorial job. He says "I may not know much about art but I'm married and I've been cleared by MI5." [Fig.1.3] On the same day in the *Daily Star* a Bill Caldwell cartoon shows the film set for a movie – *007 Pulls it Off* – with the director announcing to a tuxedo-wearing actor surrounded by girls in bikinis: "We've decided a real spy would be surrounded by gays – that OK with you 007?" [Fig.1.4] On 19 November a *Daily Mail* cartoon by Stan McMurtry (MAC) has a frightened-looking senior Whitehall bureaucrat taking a phone

<sup>158</sup>*Private Eye* 468 (23 Nov. 1979): cover.

<sup>159</sup>*Private Eye* 469 (7 Dec. 1979): 15.

call while several suspicious colleagues (all huddled over a newspaper that reads “Spies: How many More?”) look on. Implying a dangerous liaison with Brezhnev, the mandarin worriedly scolds: “Leonid darling! I’ve told you not to ring me at the office.” [Fig.1.5]

There are many other such examples but perhaps the most bizarre manifestation of the conflation of spying for the Soviets and homosexuality happened during the debate following Thatcher’s statement to the House of Commons. The issue, which underwent protean transformations during an exhausting and raucous debate lasting many hours, at one point took the form of rivalry between England’s two ancient universities, at which so many MPs had matriculated. At one point Sir Michael Neubert, the Conservative member for Romford (of Downing College, Cambridge) asked:

The pernicious idea that Communism was the only defence against Fascism swept through a whole generation. It was not confined to the Cambridge clique. In “My Silent War” Philby wrote it cannot be so very surprising that [he] adopted the Communist viewpoint in the thirties: so many of [his] contemporaries made the same choice. So, why not Oxford? I ask that question in all seriousness. At a time when public servants were almost exclusively, and certainly predominantly, from Oxbridge, is it likely that Oxford undergraduates were not similarly affected and penetrated by the Soviets?<sup>160</sup>

Michael English, the Labour member for Nottingham West (merely of the ‘red brick’ University of Liverpool) interjected “they were cleverer.”<sup>161</sup> The same Alan Clark, the Conservative member for Plymouth Sutton (and of Christ Church, Oxford), retorted: “No, heterosexual.”<sup>162</sup> Blunt’s sexuality and his spying then were seen as a common state of unreliability, unsoundness in the simpler, Thatcherite order. Curiously, from Neubert’s remarks, it is clear that the political context of the 1930s was understood, although it was

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<sup>160</sup>Sir Michael Neubert, *Hansard* HC Deb 21 Nov.1979 (vol. 974): 486. Text online. Accessed 16 November 2009: <<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1979/nov/21/mr-anthony-blunt>>.

<sup>161</sup>Michael English, *ibid.*

<sup>162</sup>Alan Clark, *ibid.*, 486-7.

either wilfully or unwittingly misremembered. The public discourse was of a British culture washing itself clean of decades of complexity, of difficulty, and of doubt.

At this point, it is interesting to bring in one last voice that has commented on the career and exposure of Anthony Blunt, a very different one, writing from a very different perspective. E. Michael Jones is an ultra-conservative Catholic intellectual and a prolific author, published with various Catholic presses. He holds a doctorate from Temple University but was dismissed from his teaching position at St. Mary's College (a Catholic University) for what it complained was his "religious absolutism."<sup>163</sup> Jones has remained highly controversial and has had lectures he was to give cancelled after accusations of anti-Semitism.<sup>164</sup> Jones is worth bringing in, however, because his views are so far from mainstream criticisms of Blunt that he comes very near to the kind of conclusions a queer approach also provides. Of course, what I understand as queer, Jones simply understands as evil and sin; but if that powerful (and preordained) judgment is suspended, what emerges is an insightful understanding of the structure of Anthony Blunt's thought-world.

Jones's contribution comes in the form of an essay, "Homosexual as Subversive: The Double Life of Anthony Blunt," published as one chapter of his book, *Degenerate Moderns: Modernity as Rationalized Sexual Misbehavior*. He writes:

The logic is the logic of subversion, shared by homosexuals and communists alike. In the intellectual world of England in the 1930s, homosexuality, whose practice was rampant in public schools and

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<sup>163</sup>This incident was reported in a sociological study of conservative Catholic dissent in America. See Michael W. Cuneo, *The Smoke of Satan: Traditionalist and Conservative Dissent in Contemporary American Catholicism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999) 40-41. Cuneo terms this movement "Roman Catholic Fundamentalism."

<sup>164</sup>See "Catholic University Nixes Lectures," *The Washington Times* (13 Feb., 2008) n.p. Source Online. Accessed 6 June 2011. <<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2008/feb/13/catholic-university-nixes-lectures/>> The charges of anti-Semitism, about which I do not offer an opinion, stem from Jones's apparent view that only Roman Catholic Christianity is a true and valid religion, all others being error (and, therefore "wicked"). According to the article, Jones insists that he rejects all "racism" on the grounds that it is against Catholic teaching.

universities, had established a pool of intellectuals alienated from the goals of their own and, for that matter, any society. With the arrival of fascism and the worldwide economic crisis, the alienated intellectuals now saw a mechanism whereby they could put their alienation into practice. Sodomy provided the motivation [...] and communism provided the means. Just as Victorian irreligion led inexorably to Bloomsbury immoralism, so Bloomsbury's theory led to Marxist praxis.<sup>165</sup>

Subversiveness, that is, an anti-normative stance, is seen as the common element linking Blunt's spying and his sexuality. Jones's concern is not limited to homosexuality either, but he goes on to embrace (and deplore) all sexual licence, in a view that (had he not deplored it) would otherwise almost mimic a queer one. Jones continues and finds, in the case of Blunt, the clearest example of his book's overall thesis:

On a wider scale it is more plausible to claim that there is only one generator of urban modernity in the West and that is sexual license, of which homosex is merely a subset, an important one albeit, but only part of the picture. Modernity, as the recent spate of revisionist biography is starting to reveal, is rationalized sexual license.<sup>166</sup>

Complaining that in a 1973 autobiographical essay in *Studio International*, when discussing his youthful Marxism, Blunt failed to provide any insight into his personal (that is, for Jones, his sexual) motivations, Jones concludes:

Yet, in a sense, what can one expect from a man whose life was based on duplicity, a man who led any number of double lives? In such a life, everything becomes a cover for something else until shadows and realities merge into one inextricable lived lie.<sup>167</sup>

Jones's own bias is refreshingly clear but – when its distorting effect is accounted for and then duly discounted – his explanation of Blunt seems to get the closest (in print) to providing a full understanding of what being Blunt might mean. In Jones's extreme of antipathy, there is a strange kind of empathy. The phrase "lived lie" passes a severe

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<sup>165</sup>E. Michael Jones, "Homosexual as Subversive: The Double Life of Sir Anthony Blunt," in *Degenerate Moderns: Modernity as Rationalized Sexual Misbehavior* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993) 70-71.

<sup>166</sup>Ibid., 73.

<sup>167</sup>Ibid., 75.

judgment, of course – and one is tempted to reply with Pontius Pilate’s question: “what is truth anyway?” – but Jones’s picture reveals something of the structure, though none of the character, of queer multiplicity.

Blunt’s double life as a homosexual and triple life as a spy are inextricable; for Blunt, they represent the complicated articulation of complicated set of loyalties that, at a later time, would collapse into the simplistic caricature of an effete traitor. But Blunt’s original life, as an art historian, should not be forgotten and needs to be brought into any global interpretation of Blunt. I shall go on after the next chapter to explore queer properties in the art of Nicolas Poussin. The picture that emerges as a consequence of that is of an artist who resembles too much the art historian who is championing him, or at least that art historian’s public persona: reserved, high-minded and somewhat austere – yet built upon a queer foundation, but pictorially (rather than experientially, as with Blunt). Understanding this same dynamic, in Blunt’s case, has been a necessary first step in understanding the affinities Blunt and Poussin share.

**CHAPTER 2:**  
**ARCADIA AND THE SPLITTING OF ANTHONY BLUNT**

This chapter presents two subjects: Anthony Blunt's relationship to the Arcadian tradition and the emergence of his twin careers as an art historian and a spy. I contend that Arcadia corresponds to this splitting of Blunt. What have appeared to some observers as discrete parts or phases of Blunt's life may rather be organic parts of a coherent whole, whose coherence, perhaps, Blunt endeavoured to disguise.<sup>1</sup> This chapter argues that Blunt's development into an art historian and his decision to become a Soviet agent are two sides of one coin: they both can be linked to the crisis that was emerging in his career as an art critic in the last years of the 1930s. The split is his solution. I propose, also, that Blunt's appreciation of Poussin is conditioned by a homoerotic tradition always latent in pastoral subjects but coming into sharper focus by the turn of the last century. This chapter also argues for an important divergence between two seemingly similar things. It will present two alternatives, two paths that could describe the coming together of homosexuality and Arcadia in the early twentieth century. One path is that of a gay Utopia – an alternative Eden – homosexuality's mythic origin in a garden of pleasure. This alternative was largely envisioned by photography. The second alternative, which I argue corresponds to Blunt, is a queer navigation of contradictions and the manifold possibilities of Arcadian difference. This chapter proceeds, then, in two sections. It charts Blunt's early career until the split that occurs in the late 1930s. It then presents an overview of the Arcadian pastoral tradition and its homoerotic and queer significance.

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<sup>1</sup>See, for instance, Miranda Carter, *Anthony Blunt: His Lives* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2001). Carter identifies what she sees as separate strands meticulously separated by Blunt and she calls these his 'lives.' See also the discussion of George Steiner in Chapter 1.

### The Splitting of Anthony Blunt

Anthony Blunt's aim throughout his academic career had been to provide the appearance of well-ordered development in Poussin's work and a coherent relationship between it and the painter's intellectual *milieu*, as we saw in the last chapter. Yet Blunt was aware of the difficulties that attend such an account. Despite being identified as an empirically-oriented art historian, Blunt resisted and sought to dismiss all kinds of evidence that contradicted his very orderly account of Poussin's development, an account which could not withstand the criticisms of his critics – especially Denis Mahon's – and is no longer accepted at all. As I also noted in Chapter 1, in *Nicolas Poussin: Friendship and the Love of Painting* Elizabeth Cropper and Charles Dempsey note that in his 1967 monograph *Nicolas Poussin* Blunt “clearly felt defensive”<sup>2</sup> about his project. Cropper and Dempsey see this defensiveness as, above all, concerning Blunt's assessment of Poussin's quality as a painter and a draftsman.<sup>3</sup> I do not believe, however, that Blunt's belief in Poussin's merits as an artist can be in serious doubt. Blunt clearly showed an early tendency to identify passionately with the art he discusses. Later, he may have learned to disguise such feelings but can we believe he would change entirely his emotional attitude to art? Blunt's lifelong fascination with Poussin hardly suggests a minimal investment. Rather, I think, we may conclude that he judged a passionate enthusiasm for Poussin, or any artist, as incompatible with the role he was adopting for himself as a rigorous and dispassionate art historian. A spy, in any time, and a prominent homosexual for most of Blunt's lifetime would have a need for discretion in self-disclosure so constant that it surely would become second nature. But which is really the cover and which the identity? Blunt's

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<sup>2</sup>Elizabeth Cropper and Charles Dempsey, *Nicolas Poussin: Friendship and the Love of Painting* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 5.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

careers and his sexuality all have many points of mutual implication and many behavioural parallels. And so, it is not Poussin that I see Blunt having doubts about. It is, rather, the picture of him Blunt feels obliged to paint.

Blunt's earliest art writing, written when he was still a schoolboy, expresses an enthusiasm for works that suggests sublimated erotic investment. In the professional art historical writings of Blunt's later career, on the other hand, his is a dry and detached tone. This may be but the acceptable face, disguising an engagement with art that is still eroticized in a way quite unlike the German scientific manner Blunt would come to acquire. A charge of passionate engagement, derived from English aestheticism,<sup>4</sup> would remain latent under Blunt's later manifest professional style, seemingly so much the contrary. On only rare occasions did Blunt let his professionalized demeanour slip, as when he referred to Poussin as a "first love" in his 1967 monograph *Nicolas Poussin*.<sup>5</sup> And these slips happened in a preface (such as with the monograph) or in seemingly offhand remarks.<sup>6</sup>

Blunt's early writings on art deal with the theme of love in mythological landscapes and pastoral subjects. His first known piece of writing on art is a jejune essay called "a paper on Titian," now among his papers in the Archives of the Courtauld Institute in London.<sup>7</sup> He read this at the inaugural meeting of the Anonymous Society in November 1923, an art society he co-founded at Marlborough, his public school.<sup>8</sup> In it, Blunt, just sixteen years old, already ranks Poussin as the equal of Rubens and almost of

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<sup>4</sup>The writings on art immediately available to Blunt in English in the early 1920s were Oscar Wilde, Walter Pater and John Ruskin.

<sup>5</sup>Anthony Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin* (Hong Kong: Pallas Athene, 1995) xvii. See also Chapter 1.

<sup>6</sup>Even Blunt's 'offhand remarks' could sometimes be carefully chosen, however (hence 'seemingly'). See Chapter 1.

<sup>7</sup>Blunt, "Paper on Titian." Anthony Frederick Blunt Papers, Courtauld Institute Archives (CI/AFB 503).

<sup>8</sup>See Carter, 33.



Titian. Along with Giorgione and Giovanni Bellini, he is one of only five painters mentioned in the essay. True, the author was just sixteen but his written style is remarkable – and a bit absurd – for how it attempts to blend a considered scholarly voice with romantic abandon. Of Titian’s 1516-18 *Worship of Venus*,<sup>9</sup> [Fig. 2.1] he writes:

Never have the joys and [the word is illegible] of these little *amorini* been more marvellously depicted. One would almost think that the artist must have painted this picture in his extreme youth when all the fire of love was still guiding his hand but this was not so as it was executed about 1515 or 1520 when the artist was over 40 years of age.<sup>10</sup>

Already in this first piece of writing on art Blunt aims to sound like an expert. At the same time he could not yet conceal his emotional investment in the work.

In this essay, Poussin makes only a brief appearance but the appearance is all the more noteworthy for that. It suggests that Poussin is already a fixture amid Blunt’s thinking. Of Titian’s *Bacchus and Ariadne*,<sup>11</sup> [Fig. 2.2] he writes:

In some ways this is the most perfect of Titian’s works; everything seems to combine to make it so: the amazing poetic feeling, the daring colour scheme, and the superb composition. The passionate rush of Bacchus from his chariot towards Ariadne, the figure, as it were, poised in space give[s an] astonishing idea of motion. The figures of the bacchantes on the right must I think have inspired many of Rubens and Poussin’s finest works. The colour to [sic] is marvellous, this the removal of varnish might, I feel, improve still more.<sup>12</sup>

In 1923 Poussin was widely regarded as minor, derivative and dull.<sup>13</sup> He was not at all what he is now and what Blunt helped to make him.<sup>14</sup> It is unusual that a schoolboy would rate him so highly. He certainly was not an obvious artist at the time to bracket

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<sup>9</sup>Today in the Prado, Madrid.

<sup>10</sup>Blunt, *Ibid.*, 10. The omitted word, unreadable in Blunt’s handwriting, may be “gambits.”

<sup>11</sup>1520-23, in the National Gallery, London.

<sup>12</sup>Blunt, 11.

<sup>13</sup>Carter, 28.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 28-29.

with Rubens.<sup>15</sup> Later, Poussin is the subject of Blunt's first serious scholarly publications, his *Art Bulletin* article "Poussin's *Et in Arcadia Ego*" and his article "A newly discovered Poussin" in *Apollo*, both in 1938.<sup>16</sup> And, of course, Poussin would emerge as the central subject of study in Blunt's career as a professional art historian. If anything, Poussin appears to be the permanent standard by which Blunt judged merit. A clue to the importance of Poussin may be found precisely in how he lurks behind Blunt's choice of Titian as his subject for his paper. Titian – unlike Poussin – was at the time regarded as an artist undeniably of the first order. Blunt notes the well-known influence of Titian on Poussin. In a sense, it was a way of presenting on Poussin to the Anonymous Society by proxy, or else an attempt to move beyond him, to an artist of unquestioned stature. Either way, Poussin is not only present in Blunt's first writing on art but in some sense he haunts it. The circumstances of Blunt's first encounter with Poussin cannot be firmly established, though his appearance already in Blunt's earliest writings on art proves it must have been early just as his lifelong centrality in Blunt's thinking on art proves it must have been powerful. Blunt was raised in Paris, where his father was chaplain to the British Embassy, and he remembers visiting the Louvre in the years before World War I, when he might have been seven at the oldest. In 1973 Blunt wrote: "My earliest recollection connected with works of art is that I can just remember going to the Louvre before the 1914-1918 war."<sup>17</sup> We can suppose that he saw some paintings and, given his

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<sup>15</sup>The first English language book on Poussin was only published in the same year Blunt wrote his paper. See William Rothenstein, introduction, in Esther Sutro, *Nicolas Poussin* (London: Jonathan Cape and The Medici Society, 1923) 11.

<sup>16</sup>The 'Poussin' in question, was that *Cleopatra and Augustus* in the National Gallery of Canada (see Chapter 1).

<sup>17</sup>Anthony Blunt, "From Bloomsbury to Marxism," *Studio International* (Nov., 1973): 164.

early interest in art, was likely impressed.<sup>18</sup> Although Blunt spent the bulk of the war years in Paris, the Museums were closed after 1914. In his recently disembargoed “Memoir” Blunt wrote of this period that “If one wanted to look at works of art one was automatically compelled to look at architecture,”<sup>19</sup> a fact which he linked to his later interest in architecture.<sup>20</sup> Given these observations and given Blunt’s early and abiding interest in Poussin it would seem plausible that the Louvre’s collection of Poussins made some kind of impression upon him and at an early age.

It is not just Poussin and Titian who intrigue Blunt in this early essay but the pastoral mode itself. Of another Titian painting, he writes: “Never, probably, has a pastoral scene been more perfectly treated except in Giorgione’s *Concert Champêtre* in the Louvre.”<sup>21</sup> That Blunt is thinking about pastoral motifs at this point may be significant when it is taken together with another incident from Blunt’s early life. Blunt and his friends, the future poets Louis MacNiece and John Betjeman, established a journal called *The Heretick* at Marlborough, which sought to upset what they saw as an appalling denigration of all aspects of culture except for athleticism in the school’s life. An essay called “Art and Morality” by Blunt caused a scandal for directly praising the aestheticism of Oscar Wilde and the journal would be shut down by the school authorities after only the second issue.<sup>22</sup> The cover art for the first issue presents their struggle against the dominating, and, in the Public school world of the 1920s, often abusive rule of the athletes. This, however, happens in a quasi-Arcadian setting. The journal’s motto

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<sup>18</sup>If so, however, we cannot know by which. Blunt added: “I cannot remember any of the pictures, I can merely remember the fact.” Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Blunt, “Memoir” MS (1983), 2. (MSS Reading Room, British Library, King’s Cross, London.)

<sup>20</sup>Blunt, “From Bloomsbury,” ibid. See also Carter, 10.

<sup>21</sup>Blunt, “Paper on Titian,” 3. The picture (c.1508) is now also attributed to Titian.

<sup>22</sup>Carter, 30-31.

“Upon Philistia Will I Triumph” is taken from Psalm 108 but it is clearly the philistinism of the school, rather than the ancient Philistines, that must be vanquished.<sup>23</sup> On the first cover, [Fig. 2.3] three satyrs, possibly stand-ins for the three editors, conspire against a rather cloddish, athletic Marlburian wielding a field-hockey stick. In England Arcadia has associations suggesting the roles of the trickster and the non-conformist. Puck’s wood in William Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and the forest as a place of noble exile in *As You Like It*’s Forest of Arden, itself likened in that play to the (then) folkloric figure of Robin Hood in Sherwood Forest,<sup>24</sup> all characterize the pastoral Idyll as a site of social or political resistance and non-conformity. Such resistance may be all the more poignant for being hopeless; it is a noble kind of futility. On the second issue’s cover, [Fig. 2.4] ripples in a sylvan pool symbolize the merely ephemeral effect of the first edition against the ‘invincible’ and ‘inane’ culture of Marlborough. A deliciously ironic poem on the frontispiece explains it:

Blankly, bright, a placid pond  
 Flatly mirrors the leaden sky  
 Mud-framed while imminent beyond  
 Twisted riot of trees impends.  
 Swiftly parabolic to smash –  
 Flash of white water and clinquant splash –  
 To shiver the mirror a stone descends.

Ripples opulently wide  
 Centrifugally, smoothly, glide;  
 Wavelets lapping stir reeds

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<sup>23</sup>Indeed, in the Psalm Philistia is but one of a number of locales to be put down or insulted: “Moab is my wash-pot; over Edom will I cast out my shoe; upon Philistia will I triumph.” *Psalms* 108:9. This version comes from the *Book of Common Prayer*. The King James Version has “over Philistia” for “upon Philistia.”

<sup>24</sup>In I.i.111-113 Charles says of the exiled, rightful duke: “They say he is already in the Forest of Arden / and a many merry men with him, and they live / like the old Robin Hood of England. They say many / young gentleman flock to him every day and fleet the / time carelessly as they did in the golden world.” The pastoral theme is emphasized with references to the easy life of the Ovidian Golden Age and the use of words like “flock,” suggesting the Duke is a kind of Shepherd. The play is set in a duchy of France but Arden clearly evokes Arden wood in Warwickshire, near Shakespeare’s home of Stratford-on-Avon.

Writhe the glutinous green weeds;  
 The Water's steely countenance  
 Enlivened, flickers to a dance.

Ephemeral animation! Ripples wane  
 Fading, gliding, smoothly die;  
 The flat metallic face again  
 Glassy, invincible, inane;  
 Blankly bright the pond again  
 Stares and stares at the Leaden sky.<sup>25</sup>

The poem drolly contrasts its own excessive length with the brief moment of the pebble splash that is its subject. It is loaded with a cutting irony reminiscent of a waspish, queer pose. The tone, vaguely campy and overripe, suggests the decadence, aestheticism and even gender-bending attitudes that would appear in the Blunt-MacNiece correspondence.<sup>26</sup> Both covers use the visual tradition of Arcadia to illustrate a playful and puckish rebellion against an oppressive, and decidedly straight, school ethos.

This episode is one in a long line of Blunt's rebellions against the normative roles that his class and his country prepared for him. This group of friends, avoiding their classmates and their classmates' concerns and valorizing a set of rich and, at times, foreign-accented cultural concerns, were perceived as un-English – or even somewhat queer – in the context of an athletically oriented public school. Blunt's early exposure to things French and his early fluency in that language, which was to lead to some exclusion and bullying at Marlborough,<sup>27</sup> emerge as a source of contrarian cultural power. Blunt would return repeatedly to criticism of England's insularity and cultural backwardness in his career as an art critic. Indeed, the episode of *The Heretick* can be seen as an early

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<sup>25</sup>“Lines Elaborating a Simile Suggested by the Impact of the First Number of the ‘Heretick’ on Marlborough,” the *Heretick*, Vol.1.2. Jun. (1924): i.

<sup>26</sup>Carter reports: “An unmistakable camp thread ran through MacNiece’s missives: ‘I shall give you a peony to wear,’ he wrote when Blunt announced he was coming to an Oxford ball – ‘if you’re good.’ They’d invented girls’ names for each other: MacNiece was ‘Susie’, Blunt was ‘Antonia’.” Carter, 48.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 18-19.

appearance of his art critical stance, just as his paper to the Anonymous Society suggests the subversive eroticism beneath his later art historical interests.

Blunt went up to Cambridge in 1926. The friends he made there, among them his fellow spies Guy Burgess, Donald Maclean and Kim Philby, the intellectual and – eventually – radically intellectual environment, and his own initial academic failure as a maths student before succeeding in modern languages, honed and organized an inchoate tendency both to political and social idealism and instinctive rebellion.<sup>28</sup> These would underlie his cool – even chilly – and intellectually rationalist reserve. Meanwhile, Blunt’s rough beginning to his academic career, particularly his shame at not having succeeded in mathematics, which was among the most prestigious departments at Cambridge at that time,<sup>29</sup> would leave Blunt both with a preference for apparent logical rigour and an urge to prove himself in some way.

Between Blunt’s time at university and his twin decisions to become a professional art historian and to become a spy, he had a shorter career as a polemicist and art critic, beginning in 1928. Blunt was a socialist and even – though briefly – a publicly-avowed communist. Blunt’s critical agenda for art and his political commitments, however, would both enter a period of crisis by 1937. In 1938 Blunt would give up art criticism altogether. Blunt began writing as a critic/reviewer first of art books and he was, from the first, almost abusive of his subjects. He started at Cambridge in the magazines *The Venture* and the *Cambridge Review*. In his writings he seems to invite – and in his deposited papers he meticulously preserved – the angry letters he received from the authors he reviewed. Of Sacheverell Sitwell, Blunt wrote “he is not a great art critic [...];

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<sup>28</sup>Blunt started out in mathematics but he performed badly (for him) in his first set of exams, earning only a second, which he felt as a major blow. See Carter, 48-49.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

a visit to the Church of Santa Chiara in Naples, followed by a reading of [Sitwell's] *Southern Baroque Art*, makes one wonder if he is even a good one."<sup>30</sup> He accuses Sitwell of self-plagiarism and not having read the appropriate literature, suggesting that even a guidebook such as Baedeker presents the factual material more correctly.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, Blunt also attacked R.H. Wilenski, a writer of popular art histories, alleging that in his task "in writing [a book called] *The History of European Art* in seventy-six pages [...] Mr. Wilenski has clearly attempted the impossible." Blunt continues: "But he need not have failed so grossly."<sup>32</sup>

Because of the abrasiveness of his style and his controversial, pro-modern views, Blunt was offered a weekly column called "Art" as well as frequent book reviews in the major weekly magazine *The Spectator* in 1932. He thus became a professional art critic. Blunt relished his exchanges in print with the offended subjects of his reviews. Being deliberately provocative, he seemed to seek out such exchanges. He would then sometimes offer sarcastic mock apologies, as when replying to published letters of complaint by J.W. Goodison and Geoffrey W. Rosetti. He wrote: "Bad temper and bad manners, as these gentlemen acutely discern, are the weapons upon which I principally rely, and I stand disarmed before such excesses of urbanity."<sup>33</sup> Sometimes he would correspond more pleasantly with outraged people who had written in to his editor. In

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<sup>30</sup>Blunt, *Cambridge Review* 12 Feb., 1932. Sitwell's reply dated eight days later is typical of the letters of complaint that Blunt meticulously preserved. He writes: "[It is] nearly obvious that you have never been to Spain or Portugal, and I cannot help, whilst being flattered by any attention to my subject, being struck by the petulant note in your review as though you knew more about it than anyone else, and could express yourself much better. If this is so, why have you not appeared in print before upon the subject? This is not ill-natured criticism – not nearly [as] ill-natured as your remarks upon me – but only the expression of my wish that you quickly put matters to right with a few books upon the subject." Sacheverell Sitwell to Anthony Blunt, 20 Feb., 1932. Anthony Frederick Blunt papers, The Courtauld Institute (CI AFB 489).

<sup>31</sup>Blunt, *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup>*Cambridge Review* 13 Jul., 1930. 499.

<sup>33</sup>*Cambridge Review* 3 May, 1929.

1933 Ezra Pound was offended by Blunt's review of a book on Henri Gaudier-Brzeska by Horace Brodsky, which omitted to mention Pound's own memoir of Gaudier-Brzeska while calling another book, by Harold Stanley (a.k.a. 'Jim') Ede,<sup>34</sup> "the one really good and authoritative book on Gaudier."<sup>35</sup> Pound wrote to the editor of the *Spectator* and his letter was evidently forwarded to Blunt and is now among his papers at the Courtauld Institute.<sup>36</sup> Pound also wrote a postcard to Blunt personally, which, even more than the letter, displays his idiosyncratic – and vaguely Vorticist – bad spelling and typography:

I have no intention of reading Brodsky's book to find out whether your estimate is just. Your review was written in a manner insulting to me / but being a god damn Briton you probably didn't know that any other book save Ede's mess was in existence. As you show ignorance of the Memoir / pubd / in 1916 / you are necessarily an English authority on Gaudier literature. Not that any Engman / ever wants to learn anything he dont know. Ede being in a museum is obviously omniscient.<sup>37</sup>

Blunt apologized, apparently in a self-assertive and cheeky way, in a postcard of his own depicting the fifteenth century Massacre of Otranto,<sup>38</sup> impressing Pound. Pound wrote back: "Complimenti / yr / p/c<sup>39</sup> izza lot funnier'n mine. Deelighted to find there is still an Englander with traces of the speret ova man in him. // Any relation to the real Blunt, be chance?" (By 'the real Blunt' Pound apparently meant Blunt's notorious cousin Wilfrid

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<sup>34</sup>H.S. Ede, *Savage Messiah: The Life of Henri Gaudier-Brzeska* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931).

<sup>35</sup>Blunt, *The Spectator*, 24 Sept. 1933.

<sup>36</sup>Ezra Pound to the editor, *The Spectator*, 4 Oct., 1933. Anthony Frederick Blunt papers, The Courtauld Institute (CI AFB 489). The Letter was found loose-leaf within a scrapbook. At the time the author consulted it, its existence was unknown to the archivists and may, subsequently, have been filed separately and given a distinct reference number. As the letter was unknown to the Courtauld Institute's archives, not mentioned by Miranda Carter when she otherwise discusses the Pound/Blunt correspondence (Carter, *ibid.*, 104), and as its colourful contents are potentially of interest to Pound or Gaudier-Brzeska scholars, the full text is included here in Appendix 1 (and, for a facsimile, see Fig.2.5).

<sup>37</sup>Ezra Pound to Anthony Blunt, 2 Nov., 1933. Blunt papers (CI AFB 489).

<sup>38</sup>In 1480 armies of the Sultan Mehmed II, who had conquered Constantinople in 1453, laid siege to the city of Otranto in Apulia and, upon its surrender killed 800 survivors, who refused to renounce Christianity and therefore came to be regarded as martyrs. Unfortunately, Blunt's original message written on this card which Pound appears to have regarded as amusing is not preserved.

<sup>39</sup>Read 'post card'.



Scawen Blunt, an opponent of British imperialism and a hero of Pound's.)<sup>40</sup> Blunt seemed to relish the experience of butting heads with figures of the cultural establishment. But to make a conquest of Ezra Pound, already a famous modernist poet and notorious figure, must have been very satisfying.

Blunt used the controversies his criticism engendered as a controversialist would, to advance himself. But from time to time his attacks were nastier and seemed more heartfelt. Resuming his attack on Wilenski in the pages of the *Cambridge Review*, Blunt writes of his *The Meaning of Modern Sculpture*: "There is something curiously old-fashioned about Mr. Wilenski's methods which contrasts with the vulgar modernity of his journalese. Had he been a nineteenth century Englishman he would probably have been a Methodist parson, for his book is nothing less than a hell-fire sermon."<sup>41</sup> Blunt appears to have been offended by Wilenski's characterization of classical sculpture as irrelevant for modern times; he found the book in general to be a catalogue of indefensible criticisms of classical sculpture. Reviewing another book on modern sculpture the very next day, now in *The Spectator*, Blunt wrote, in an aside, "Modern Sculpture is now vindicated from the disrepute into which it had fallen owing to the recent *defences* put forward by Mr. Wilenski."<sup>42</sup> Wilenski – one imagines him reading these two reviews side by side one morning – writes Blunt a furious, panicky letter imploring him "for goodness sake read my book carefully before you write about it again."<sup>43</sup> Wilenski adds that while he is prepared to ignore the *Cambridge Review* piece, he had just written to the editor of *The Spectator* and, if Blunt were to repeat his review of *The Meaning of Modern Sculpture* in

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<sup>40</sup>Carter, *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup>*Cambridge Review* 28 Oct., 1932.

<sup>42</sup>*The Spectator* 29 Oct., 1932. My emphasis.

<sup>43</sup>R.H. Wilenski to Anthony Blunt, 31 Oct., 1932, Blunt Papers (CI AFB 489).

*The Spectator*, he would have to write yet a further letter, and he was very busy, and would Blunt please just stop writing about him altogether. A series of pointed attacks, two coming on successive days, must have seemed like an accelerating barrage, a literary-critical obsession, one that would doom him to a life of nothing but replying to Blunt's hounding of him. Actually, Blunt did leave him alone after that, except to praise a book of his on Ruskin in 1933. Blunt's biographer, Miranda Carter, argues that in turning on the older generation like this Blunt, like many in his cohort, were expressing "an almost tangible Oedipal fury [...] at the anachronisms of orthodoxy and authority of complacent [...] England."<sup>44</sup> She quotes Blunt's near-contemporary George Orwell to say that "by 1918 everyone under the age of forty was in a bad temper with his elders, and the mood of anti-militarism which followed naturally upon the fighting [of the 1914-1918 War] was extended into a general revolt against all orthodoxy and authority."<sup>45</sup> This may be true but it needs to be qualified. Two things about Blunt's particularly fierce assault on Wilenski stand out. First, Wilenski was criticizing naturalistic styles of art as inimical to modern aims and, second, Blunt accuses him of possessing a narrow-minded point of view, reminiscent of those of a teetotal religious moralist. Beyond others who merely rebelled against the generation they held responsible for the First World War, Blunt hated the critical line that abstract work could jettison modern art's relation to the artistic past. He supported modern art as far as cubism but, from there was either ambivalent or hostile to abstracted styles, and withering in his criticism of pure abstraction. About Picasso he was usually ambivalent in these years. About Ben Nicholson, on the other hand, he was

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<sup>44</sup>Carter, 92.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 93.

scathing. He attacked his work as being insipid, and him as a painter of nothing.<sup>46</sup>

Meanwhile, Blunt's own ambivalent feelings about his religious upbringing come out in contradictory ways in his sense of a moral and political mission for art, on the one hand, and his use of the stereotype of the Methodist parson as among his nastier terms of abuse, on the other. (Blunt's father was an Anglican priest possessed of a strong spirit of moral reform, extremely frugal and strictly teetotal.)<sup>47</sup>

Blunt had a deep investment in artistic realism and he could not accept its being banished from the modern art he was advocating. Increasingly, from 1934 to 1938, Blunt was starting to advance a coherent line on what modern art should be. He was an early promoter in England of Diego Rivera, being probably the first to mention him in print in that country, in the BBC magazine the *Listener*. Blunt writes:

Rivera paints like Giotto because he paints for the same reason. He has a particular idea to convey to the world and his method of expression is developed for that purpose. His idea – that of Communism – is unlike that of Giotto – the idea of Mediaeval Catholicism – but the fact that both artists are engaged in conveying something more than purely pictorial feelings brings them close together.<sup>48</sup>

Striking is Blunt's opposition of 'ideas' with 'pictorial *feelings*.' For Blunt to really support and promote an artist – as with his life-long love Poussin – he had to believe that, at least in part, the painting was outwardly a means of transmitting systematic ideas. Prior to the Second World War that seemed to mean some sort of realism. Blunt's critical writing from this time is markedly different from his teenage writing on Titian. It is rationalistic but strident and sometimes fanatical. By contrast, the earlier writing was

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<sup>46</sup>See Blunt, "Art: Sleepers, Awake!" *The Spectator*, 11 Oct., 1935.

<sup>47</sup>Carter, 9.

<sup>48</sup>Blunt, "Time and Place in The Arts – II," *The Listener*, 2 Jan., 1935.

florid, impassioned and a little maudlin. Blunt may still have been struggling to find an outlook and a written style that could fit the contradictions in his own personality.

Although Blunt was not yet a communist, he concludes a later piece on Rivera with the observation that “Rivera’s frescoes are the *Kapital* of the Illiterate.”<sup>49</sup> His stance of hostility to what he saw as a peculiarly English philistinism, and his sense of opposition to country and class would condition his attraction to Communism and ultimately lead to his decision to become a Soviet spy. Blunt had travelled in 1935 to the Soviet Union with a group of Cambridge contemporaries. He was seemingly attracted by communism’s systematic view of society, which offered theoretical models for understanding art and politics alike.<sup>50</sup> As the 1930s wore on and, especially, as the Spanish Civil War polarized political thought, Blunt became more and more of a political Marxist. Broadly speaking, he came to support the orthodox socialist realist line and even promoted a few British painters who seemed to be working towards its objectives, such as William Coldstream.<sup>51</sup> He could never really bring himself to praise any of the art coming out of the Soviet Union, however, which he critiqued upon his return in a piece called “Soviet Art.” Even Moscow’s famous *Metro* left him uneasy. He wrote that its use of classical orders is “regrettable” and that it is “perfect in comfort and efficiency but it has a Parisian *chic* and one almost expects a top-hat to emerge from its doors.”<sup>52</sup> He saw this kind of Soviet art as no better, but no worse, than that prevailing in America. He observes that there is an exact equivalence between the Moscow subway and an American movie palace, each bringing a small element of luxury into the lives of people

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<sup>49</sup>Blunt, “Diego Rivera” *The Listener*, 17 Apr., 1935.

<sup>50</sup>See Carter, 176.

<sup>51</sup>See Blunt: “Art: Specialists,” *Spectator* 22 Oct., 1937; “Art: The London Group,” *Spectator* 5 Nov., 1937; and “Art: Realists Fall In,” *Spectator* 23 Mar., 1937.

<sup>52</sup>Blunt “Soviet Art” *Spectator* 27 Sept., 1935.

starved for any.<sup>53</sup> Over the next two years Marxist ideas would appeal to him more and more, even in relation to art; yet he would continue to find it difficult to attach them to any art of which he could approve.

And, as Nazism was emerging as the leading ideology among the Fascist powers, its own visceral opposition to abstraction became more troubling, therefore. The week after his article on Soviet art, Blunt tried to settle the problem through an argument that, while eminently rational, is rather too pat, reading like casuistry. In this late 1935 piece called “Art and Dictatorship” he defended the Soviet line and tried to explain how it was opposed to the Nazi one. He wrote:

The liberal will be firm in his position: All dictatorship in the arts is fatal because it kills the artist’s individuality [...] Look at Russia and Germany – Russia banning abstract painting as bourgeois and Germany banning exactly the same painting as *Bolschevismus*. This Liberal point of view is splendid but it doesn’t work. The case of Russia and Germany is peculiar and explicable [...] The main function of abstract art [...] is to destroy the bourgeois ideology. Therefore it is a menace to German Fascism and must be banned. On the other hand, though not a menace in Russia, it is irrelevant there, since it is to be supposed that bourgeois ideology is no longer a serious danger, and what is irrelevant is also wasteful and therefore not to be tolerated.<sup>54</sup>

Over these two years Blunt continued to struggle with this dilemma. He contributed an essay called “Art under Capitalism and Socialism” to a book, published in 1937, *The*

*Mind in Chains: Socialism and the Cultural Revolution*, edited by C. Day Lewis. Here, he

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid. Blunt’s views comparing Soviet and Western or American tastes coincide very closely with those presented in Clement Greenberg’s seminal essay, “Avant-garde and Kitsch,” which is roughly contemporary. Greenberg writes: “Dwight Macdonald points out that kitsch has in the last ten years become the dominant culture in Soviet Russia. For this he blames the political regime – a not only for the fact that kitsch is the official culture, but also that it is actually the dominant, most popular culture [...] neither in backward Russia nor in the advanced West do the masses prefer kitsch simply because their governments condition them toward it. [...] Superior culture is one of the most artificial of all human creations, and the peasant finds no ‘natural’ urgency within himself that will drive him toward Picasso in spite of all difficulties. In the end the peasant will go back to kitsch when he feels like looking at pictures, for he can enjoy kitsch without effort.” (See Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch.” *Partisan Review* 6:5 (1939) 34-49.) Quoted from source Online, *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*. Accessed 2 Jun. 2011. <<http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/kitsch.html>>

<sup>54</sup>Blunt “Art and Dictatorship” *The Spectator* 22 Nov., 1935.

went further, arguing that only two styles in art – what he calls “New Realism,” by which he meant work such as Rivera’s, and what he calls “Superrealism,” i.e. surrealism – could claim to be true revolutionary art.<sup>55</sup> It does not take Blunt long to dismiss surrealism, however. He points out that while aiming at the destruction of bourgeois society, it repeats many of the features of *bourgeois* art and could well end up solidifying it: he observes that it “is above all the art of an intellectual *élite*, and it is in the highest degree obscure and esoteric.”<sup>56</sup> He goes on to make a point quite reminiscent of that in “Art and Dictatorship.” He observes that the Soviet Union, as a workers’ state, had abolished bourgeois ideology in society; and so bourgeois ideology did not need to be entirely removed from its arts, since the society was already beyond it. He expressed concern that surrealism was so violent a force it might end up “destroying all standards,”<sup>57</sup> that is, it could turn out to be nihilistic. He cites Lenin to say “that socialist culture will take over all that is good in bourgeois culture and turn it to its own ends,”<sup>58</sup> before ultimately concluding with Lenin again that, while artistic freedom is not to be interfered with, Communists will guide its overall development according to principles of central planning.<sup>59</sup>

Blunt’s more systematic ideas, emerging in the essay for C. Day Lewis’s book, show the new influence of a more intellectually rigorous brand of Marxist art theory, or rather, Marxist art historical scholarship. With the rise of the Nazis in Germany, many art historians – Jewish, Marxist or merely principled opponents of Nazism – fled to Britain

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<sup>55</sup>Blunt, “Art under Capitalism and Socialism,” in C. Day Lewis, ed., *The Mind in Chains: Socialism and the Cultural Revolution* (Folcroft: Folcroft Library Editions, 1972) 114.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 115.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 116.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 119.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid. 122.

and to America, neither of which had much in the way of a scholarly tradition of art history at that time. These immigrants had a galvanizing effect. In London, these scholars settled around the transplanted Warburg Institute<sup>60</sup> and the newly-founded Courtauld Institute of Art,<sup>61</sup> both at the University of London. Blunt's introduction to professional art history came via this group of émigré scholars, who were working primarily at the Warburg Institute in what was then presumed to be its temporary home. Among this group, however, was also the Hungarian art historian Frederick Antal whom Blunt befriended and who could offer him, at this critical time, a view of art and art history that was avowedly Marxist, yet not limited to immediate concerns.

In his first book, *Artistic Theory in Italy 1450-1600* (1940), Blunt described his debt to Antal in the preface. He writes: "to Dr. F. Antal I am indebted for instruction in a method which has, I fear, been applied in an only too slipshod manner [...] and for many ideas on individual points."<sup>62</sup> The method, of course, was Antal's sophisticated Marxist art history, which Blunt interestingly fails to identify in the preface.<sup>63</sup> In a short biographical essay published in *Studio International*, remarkable at its time (1973) for its frankness, Blunt said a little bit more about Antal's influence.<sup>64</sup> Only in his unpublished

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<sup>60</sup>Beginning as a repository for the library (really a multifaceted research collection) of the cultural theorist and art historian Aby Warburg (1866-1929), the *Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg* (Warburg Cultural Science Library) was initially affiliated with the University of Hamburg but moved to London in 1934 to avoid the oppressive cultural policies of the new National Socialist regime. It was originally intended that it would relocate again, to the United States, but those negotiations were not successful and it instead became a founding element of the University of London's research institute, the School for Advanced Study.

<sup>61</sup>Founded in 1932 by Lord Lee of Fareham, Sir Robert Witt, and Samuel Courtauld, an industrialist, the Institute was to be a place for the professional study of art which otherwise did not exist in England. Courtauld donated his house, his impressive impressionist-dominated art collection, Witt his library and money sufficient for the institute's functioning was raised. The Institute is now based at Somerset House.

<sup>62</sup>Anthony Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy 1450-1600* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1962) vi.

<sup>63</sup>He does name Guy Burgess, which, years later, would prove the greater embarrassment (although after Burgess's defection, Blunt never removed his name – no doubt wisely – in later editions.) Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Blunt writes: "There were not very many Marxist art historians at that time. There was Friedrich Antal [...] who had not at the time written very much but had formulated a completed Marxist doctrine that he

memoir did Blunt go any further. There he writes that, despite his political commitments and preference for realism he found socialist realist works “were manifestly of inferior quality and would not supply the kind of model required for a revival of realism in Western Europe.”<sup>65</sup> He continued that what was needed was “a worthy cultivation of the great European tradition of painting of Giotto, through Masaccio and Michelangelo, whose art we maintained, expressed the aspirations of the most ‘advanced’ classes of their times.”<sup>66</sup>

Antal was also lecturing at the Courtauld Institute and he had been involved in cultural administration during the brief-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919, working under Georg Lukács, who was then People’s Commissar for Education and Culture; his task had been to nationalize (or appropriate) private art collections for a new state museum. After the Hungarian Soviet regime fell he fled first to Italy and later to Germany. Antal was responsible for what, at that time, was the most sophisticated variant of Marxist art history, arguing that the rise and fall of styles, broadly groupable as ‘classical’ and ‘romantic,’ are cyclical and follow the rise and subsequent overthrow of competing class ideologies. As each, in turn, is rising, its ideological need is for clarity and order and so a realistic and spare style ensues. And as each is approaching its final historical crisis and downfall an obscure, personal and escapist mode of art is needed to

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would expound at great length verbally.” Anthony Blunt, “From Bloomsbury to Marxism,” *Studio International* 186.960 (Nov., 1973): 167.

<sup>65</sup>Anthony Blunt, “Memoir” MS (1983), MSS Reading Room, British Library, King’s Cross, London, UK., 19. Unless otherwise stated, all MS pagination refers to the original manuscript (not the later 71-page typescript). Of Antal’s influence, Blunt writes: “The great exponent of this view of art history was the Hungarian Friedrich Antal who had settled in England after 1933. I came to know him in 1935 or ’36 when he was working on his history of Florentine painting [...] and I was much influenced by his ideas.” (Ibid., 20.) This book was Frederick Antal, *Florentine Painting and Its Social Background* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966) First published London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, Ltd., 1948.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid, 19.



disguise its fate in the historical dialectic.<sup>67</sup> Such an outlook appealed to Blunt for various reasons. Firstly, it asserted the superiority of realist art. Secondly, it implicitly valorized the plainly classical work of Poussin as having been culturally ascendant in its time. Also, it became a very convenient tool to dismiss as ideologically bourgeois the surrealism and abstraction that he so disliked and had already been calling “escapist.”<sup>68</sup> Under a simplified application of Antal’s schema these art movements become elitist, obscure and esoteric, the very words he used in “Art Under capitalism and Socialism.” They could be rejected as reactionary. It may still have been a problem that no work save Mexican muralism fit the bill for a contemporary ‘classical’ art.

Meanwhile, modern art was taking a path very different from the one Blunt would chart for it. The display of Picasso’s *Guernica* at the Paris World’s Fair in 1937 brought Blunt’s crisis to a breaking point. Blunt now had to confront an abstract or semi-abstract work that seemed to be fully engaged in the political crisis of the day. In a tortured review in an October 1937 issue the *Spectator* called “Picasso Unfrocked” Blunt tried to expose the work, somehow, as a failure. He wrote: “Fundamentally, it is the same as Picasso’s bullfight scenes. It is not an act of public mourning, but the expression of a private brain-storm which gives no evidence that Picasso has realised the political significance of *Guernica*.”<sup>69</sup> Writing in to the *Spectator* Herbert Read, for one, did not accept it. He wrote in:

The particular form of opposition to modern art adopted by Mr. Blunt comes from middle-class doctrinaires who wish to ‘use’ art for the propagation of their dull ideas. That the drab realism which these

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<sup>67</sup>See Frederick Antal, *Classicism and Romanticism, with Other Studies in Art History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

<sup>68</sup>See Blunt, “Art: Sleepers, Awake!” *The Spectator* 11 Oct., 1935.

<sup>69</sup>Blunt, “Picasso Unfrocked,” *The Spectator* 8 Oct., 1937.

philistines have enforced in Russia and Germany should become the art of a country like Spain is happily [...] impossible to entertain seriously.<sup>70</sup>

In his reply Blunt did not appear to accept his own argument either, first treading water, denying that he ever tried to use ‘art for some end’ before changing the subject to Mexico, in order to dispute Read’s implied contention that realism could never work in Spain. He denied that he had claimed Picasso was a bad artist, just that he was “the last refinement of a private art.”<sup>71</sup> It was a disingenuous and weak reply and eventually, in his scholarship, Blunt would embrace Read’s account of *Guernica*, even lifting his description of it as a “Modern Calvary.”<sup>72</sup>

It was the advice at that time of the art historians displaced from Europe – a group that included, Fritz Saxl, Edgar Wind, and Rudolf Wittkower, as well as Antal – that to be taken seriously as an historian Blunt should give up his art criticism.<sup>73</sup> In 1938 Blunt published two of his earliest papers as a professional art historian (both on Nicolas Poussin).<sup>74</sup> Meanwhile, Blunt obtained an appointment as a publications editor at the Warburg and a stint as a guest lecturer at the Courtauld Institute, of which he would eventually become Director. In particular, he assisted in the publication of an English-language *catalogue raisonné* of Poussin’s drawings working with Walter Friedländer, whose English was notoriously horrible.<sup>75</sup> Blunt, it was observed, came to dominate the problem and Friedländer, hobbled by his own bad English, was displaced by Blunt as the

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<sup>70</sup>Herbert Read, letter to the editor, *The Spectator* 15 Oct., 1937.

<sup>71</sup>Blunt, letter to the editor, *The Spectator* 22 Oct., 1937.

<sup>72</sup>Carter, *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup>Anthony Blunt, “Poussin’s *Et in Arcadia Ego*,” in *Art Bulletin* 20 (1938): 96-100. Anthony Blunt, ‘A Newly Discovered Poussin,’ *Apollo* 27.160 (Apr., 1938): 197-199. (His very first publication was on another subject the year before.)

<sup>75</sup>Carter, *ibid.*

resident expert on Poussin.<sup>76</sup> The very ‘scientific’ approach taken to art by the Institute scholars appealed to that preference for rigour and systematic thinking that Blunt always displayed. Its emphasis on meaning and iconography indicated a focus on realist or representational art, which Blunt preferred. It became a way for Blunt to follow one part of the trajectory he had begun in his criticism in the *Spectator* and it was a systematic approach promoting representational art.

Although the circumstances under which this occurred are naturally obscure, it was at this same time that Blunt agreed to become a Soviet agent. He seems to have become a spy formally, committing himself for good, in exactly the same year – 1937 – in which he started to pursue a career in academic art history.<sup>77</sup> He gave up being an art critic at about the same time, publishing his last pieces in 1938. In giving up being an art critic in order to pursue two parallel careers, one as an art historian and one as a secret Communist agent, Blunt could resolve what was becoming an embarrassing problem for him. Antal’s brand of Marxism already revealed how Blunt’s interests in art could be better satisfied through historical analysis rather than contemporary advocacy. And, meanwhile, he could simultaneously be infinitely more useful as an agent for social and political change.

Blunt’s artistic and political ideals could be made congruent, even if that congruence was a secret known only to him and a very few friends. What we see in Blunt’s careers after he ceases to be an art critic is a man who is not duplicitous – or not only that – but one capable of working in two ways, at the same time, towards what is in effect a single, seemingly impossible goal. In his dual career he becomes what appears to

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

be a contradiction but is rather the reverse of a contradiction. The outward untenability of his views and his mission, which he was trying to hold together, become reflected and reversed in his subsequent careers, as in a mirror. To escape the contradiction he was becoming Blunt became instead, in a characterization of him that is now well-known, an enigma.<sup>78</sup> His critical project promoting a socially-progressive, engaged, good and realist art was not going anywhere in Britain – or Europe – in the late 1930s. Blunt’s political and intellectual trajectories were not parallel, they were colliding. In splitting himself and his work Blunt was undoing an artificial constraint in his situation.

### Arcadia

Just where and when Blunt first becomes interested in pastoral and Arcadian themes is not possible to learn from remaining evidence.<sup>79</sup> What is clear is that his interest was established by the time he was at Marlborough. His first paper mentions both Poussin and pastoral art and a pastoral, mythological theme is seen in his work on the short-lived school newspaper, the *Heretick*. It would be strange if Blunt’s early interest in Arcadia and his lifelong interest in Poussin were not connected.

An artist working in many genres, Nicolas Poussin is nevertheless most associated with Arcadian, pastoral subjects. They are his best known and among his most influential pieces. Poussin’s oeuvre is by no means reducible to this thematic but it emerges early and repeatedly in his production and it must be regarded as central within any project of

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<sup>78</sup>In Alan Bennett’s play *A Question of Attribution*, the character of Blunt observes that it is inappropriate for the Queen to describe as a ‘fake’ a supposed Titian which has merely been misattributed. It is clear, however, that the Queen may be referring to Blunt’s own recent exposure as a spy by the security services. The Queen asks: “If something is not what it claims to be, what is it?” Blunt replies: “an enigma?” The Queen retorts: “That is, I think, the sophisticated answer.” See Alan Bennett, “A Question of Attribution,” in *Alan Bennett: Plays Two* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998): 301-351.

<sup>79</sup>See the discussion of Blunt’s childhood in Paris, above.

understanding Poussin as a whole. It will be my argument in Part Two of this dissertation that a series of concerns coming out of these pastoral works, and the tangle of bacchanalian, elegiac and philosophical themes they contain,<sup>80</sup> may be seen to organize much of the rest of his oeuvre, even in works that seem quite different. The pastoral, Arcadian thematic has at many times overlapped with a homoerotic sensibility. No one – yet – has made the argument that there is anything queer about Poussin but the Poussin scholar Richard Verdi notes that in the following century when Poussin’s famous 1640 scene of the *Arcadian Shepherds*, also called *Et in Arcadia Ego*, is often copied to suggest a *heterosexual* pastoral idyll, artists find it necessary to alter the scene by boosting the number of shepherdesses so that there is an exact male-female balance.<sup>81</sup> Although it had not necessarily always been so, by the turn of the last century Arcadian pastoral regained a distinct homoerotic charge, and it did so particularly within educated and literary circles in England, though also in France.<sup>82</sup>

By the time Blunt began his career, the homoerotic painting, literature and photography depicting Arcadian themes that had developed in Poussin’s wake would be

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<sup>80</sup>The themes of life and death bound to the pastoral, whether they emerge in mourning, bacchanalian revelry, erotic love or meditations on freedom all belong to a cultural-mythological complex that is basic to ancient fertility religions. “[In] the long course of pastoral elegy from its beginnings in primitive worship [...] many of its conventions may be explained by reference to early myth. Hylas, Hyacinthus, Narcissus, Linus, Adonis – these personifications of the destruction of the tender life of nature came to be known as youths beloved of gods, fond of hunting and rural life, famously musical, and destined to an early death [...] The name Adonis itself is a misnomer coming from semitic *Adon*, or “lord,” by which the deity Tammuz was worshipped in Egypt and western Asia [...] A familiar device [...] common in pastoral poetry] has received Ruskin’s designation of ‘pathetic fallacy,’ by which both the animate and the inanimate things in nature mourn or rejoice with mankind [...] Ultimately, the sorrow of nature for the death of humanity looks back to an earlier time when the death was that of nature, not humanity. Thus what was once the source of sorrow – the withering of vegetation – becomes the mourner.” Thomas Perrin Harrison, “Introduction” in *The Pastoral Elegy: An Anthology*, Harry Joshua Leon, trans. (New York: Octagon Books, 1968) 1-2. See also James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1929) 324.

<sup>81</sup>Richard Verdi, “On the Critical Fortunes – and Misfortunes – of Poussin’s Arcadia” *The Burlington Magazine* 121.991 (1979): 96.

<sup>82</sup>Richard Howard, “Translators Note,” in *André Gide: Corydon*, Gay Modern Classics (London: GMP Publishers, Ltd., 1985) viii.

readily available to a homosexual art historian. Blunt, moreover, was at a cultural crossroads, familiar with cultural traditions both in England and in France. Blunt's ongoing encounter with Poussin is one that was inevitably conditioned by the later reception of Poussin. And this reception was strikingly at odds with itself. In the first place, Poussin was subject to a traditional assessment coming out of his biographers Félibien and Bellori that held he was a most serious-minded *peintre-philosophe*, a neo-stoic classicist who assiduously avoided all that was not grave, refined and ennobling.<sup>83</sup> Meanwhile, Poussin had in fact painted many erotic mythological scenes, and with these, was also the initiator of a visual tradition that carried over from the neo-classical tradition to distinctly sensualised, romantic paintings around the turn of the nineteenth century.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, it can be argued that a strong connection exists between Poussin and an arguably homoerotic group of paintings that appeared in the late eighteenth century and continued through the first decades of the nineteenth century, such as Anne-Louis Girodet de Roucy-Trioson's *The Sleep of Endymion*, seen in the last chapter.<sup>85</sup> This tradition made a plausibly homoerotic vision of Arcadia visually available for the first time and they were followed, first by painters, such as Thomas Eakins in America, and then by several photographers, both in America and in Europe, who, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, crafted out of Arcadia what became a visionary homosexual utopia.<sup>86</sup> It was subsequent to these various artistic developments that Blunt encountered Poussin and so I maintain they can and do condition his encounter with Arcadia.

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<sup>83</sup>See Claire Pace, *Félibien's Life of Poussin* (London: Zwemmer, 1981). See also Giovanni Pietro Bellori, *Le vite de' pittori, scultori et architetti moderni* (Rome: Mascardi, 1672)

<sup>84</sup>See discussion of this in the section "Queer Historiography" in Chapter 1. See below (in re. James Smalls), as well.

<sup>85</sup>For the controversy surrounding this interpretation, see the section "Queer Historiography" in Chapter 1.

<sup>86</sup>See Robert Aldrich, *The Seduction of the Mediterranean: Writing, Art and Homosexual Fantasy* (London and New York, Routledge, 1993) 152.

Arcadian photographic homoerotica, such as the work of Wilhelm von Gloeden, focuses this influence particularly. This body of work builds on the sensualized and arguably homoerotic body of mythological and history painting from the decades around the turn of the nineteenth century. This body of photographic work was widely known within homosexual circles – and far beyond – in the early twentieth century.<sup>87</sup> The tendency for homosexuals to participate in the Mediterranean homosexual network of which von Gloeden was a major part was particularly pronounced among the English,<sup>88</sup> and so it is extremely likely Blunt would be familiar with von Gloeden's work. To what extent was Blunt's Poussin already informed by the turn of the century experience of Arcadia's homoerotic significance? In this section I propose that it may well have been considerable.

My contention is that Blunt was informed by a received tradition of Arcadian homoeroticism in multiple ways: just as the classical respectability of the props and conventional treatments in some of the photography of von Gloeden's circle allows its homoerotic dimension to pass unnoticed by more obtuse members of its widest audience, so too the homoerotic dimension of the Arcadian tradition, which I argue in Part Two of this dissertation is also a queer subtext locatable in Poussin, would be invisible to an audience blinded by the prejudices of the time that made homosexuality, if not unthinkable, certainly unspeakable in public or, at least, in polite society. Many viewers would still recognize the common strands between homoerotic Arcadia and Poussin's

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<sup>87</sup>Some of von Gloeden's tamer works were published in *National Geographic*, his 'nudes and Arcadian scenes' won an award from the British Royal Photographic Society, and Edward VII, Kaiser Wilhelm II were among many famous visitors to his studio. Among his patrons were some of the Rothschilds. A later heir, Victor Rothschild, was a youthful friend of Blunt's and gave him the £300 he used to buy his Poussin. See Aldrich, 143-6. See also Thomas Waugh, *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from Their Beginnings to Stonewall* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) 73.

<sup>88</sup>Aldrich, 69. See also Waugh, 81.

*oeuvre*, however. It is in Part Two of this dissertation that I argue how effective a tool for understanding overlooked qualities of Poussin such a sensibility can be. Here I present merely the context in which such a sensibility is to be located.

The Arcadian tradition, now strongly associated with the phrase ‘et in Arcadia ego’, comes from the pastoral mode of literature and, much later, borrows from it to make a body of genuinely Arcadian visual art. Theocritus (316-260 BCE) was an Alexandrian Greek poet and, probably, a native of Syracuse in Sicily who pioneered at least the high-art mode of pastoral poetry.<sup>89</sup> The literary adjective ‘alexandrian’ is almost synonymous with a late and affected style characterized by “ornateness and obscurity.”<sup>90</sup> Certainly Alexandrian poetry emphasizes detail and refuses to subordinate the part to the whole.<sup>91</sup> Theocritus’s pastoral scenes concern the cross-over of the mythological world with humble shepherds and deal with love and the bounty of nature. Whether in poetry or in visual art a taste for the pastoral tends to emerge during a ‘late’ period (which is how the Baroque might be described), perhaps as a longing for rustic simplicity. Pastoral has been defined as “putting the complex into the simple.”<sup>92</sup> While there is nothing simple about Theocritus’s poetics, there is in his subject matter. From the very beginning, then,

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<sup>89</sup>Anthony Holden, “Introduction” in *Greek Pastoral Poetry: Theocritus, Bion, Moschus, the Pattern Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974) 10-11. This is disputed by David Halperin, who regards this as seeing him “through the prism of a post-Virgilian tradition” and attributing to him something “alien to his aesthetic objectives.” That Halperin disputes this conventional characterization, however, still affirms that it is conventional. David M. Halperin, *Before Pastoral: Theocritus and the Ancient Tradition of Bucolic Poetry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983) 8. Some argue that the origin of pastoral is even earlier, beginning no later than a passage in Book XVIII of Homer’s *Iliad* which describes on the Shield that is being made by the gods for Achilles a grape-gathering scene that becomes an “example of the pastoral ethic” in which, “despite its simplicity this subject’s spiritual qualities [... make it] worthy of the depiction by an immortal [Hephaistos] on a hero’s armour.” Holden, 9. Homer’s passage itself even makes reference to an earlier poet of such simple subjects, Linus, who is also the originator of the kind of song deployed in the ekphrasis. Halperin, 247.

<sup>90</sup>J.A. Cuddon, ed., *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Penguin, 1991) [sv. “Alexandrianism”]

<sup>91</sup>Halperin, 174.

<sup>92</sup>Steven F. Walker, *Theocritus* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980): 9.



this aesthetic motive anticipates the later *formal* appeal of pastoral as a ‘classical’ and therefore pictorially simple theme at the time of Poussin in seventeenth-century Italy and over the following century among the Italian poets who react against Baroque stylistics by embracing classical pastoral simplicity.<sup>93</sup>

The name ‘Arcadia’ appears in Theocritus but first becomes definitely connected with this tradition in the Roman poet Virgil’s *Eclogues*, also called *Bucolics*, probably published in 39 or 38 BCE.<sup>94</sup> It was Virgil’s choice, not Theocritus’s model, to set the scene of his pastoral idylls in the Greek district of Arcadia. Arcadia is a mountainous region of the Peloponnesian peninsula between the Argolid plain and Sparta. Since Mycenaean civilization, which was based on the Argolid, it was known as remote and backward, extremely rustic and wild.<sup>95</sup> Virgil’s Arcadia, a “symbol of rural serenity,” cannot clearly be connected with this place.<sup>96</sup> Rather, it is identified with Sicily, and in fact most of the poet’s major mythological references (such as to Daphnis)<sup>97</sup> refer to things that were said to have happened in Sicily.

Virgil’s most famous eclogue is his fourth, which prophesies that a future golden age would be foretold by the birth of a boy. It was taken by later Christians as a prophecy

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<sup>93</sup>Alberto Asor Rosa, *L’Arcadia e Goldoni*, Storia e antologia della letteratura italiana, vol. 11 (Florence: La Nuova Italia, editrice, 1975) 1.

<sup>94</sup>The original title *Bucolica* indicated the rural setting of these poems and that they were based on the poetic cycles by Theocritus. *Bucolica* itself is derived from the Greek τὰ βουκόλικά, meaning “ox-herding poems.” See Richard Hunter, “Introduction” in Theocritus, *Idylls*, trans. Anthony Verity, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): vii.

<sup>95</sup>Hunter, ed. 98

<sup>96</sup>Halperin, 129.

<sup>97</sup>Daphnis’s name (from Greek δάφνη) means “laurel” or “bay” tree. He was the son of Hermes and a Sicilian nymph who exposed him in a laurel tree. Shepherds found him and raised him as a foster child, taking his name from the tree. They raised him as a shepherd and the god Pan taught him to play the pipes. He was said to be the inventor of pastoral poetry. He was also said to be a young man of extraordinary beauty and Pan (see below), Apollo and Artemis are some of those said to have loved him. In another tradition, the nymph Chloe fell in love with him, and he with her, and they married. But Aphrodite also loved him but he was so “uxoriously faithful” that he refused the goddess and she killed him as a punishment. See Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths: Vol. 1* (London: Penguin Books, 1984), 82. [§17.j.5] Pan, a god associated with Arcadia, is also the patron deity of Greek pederasty. Halperin, 124.

of the coming of Christ, which accounts for the poet's subsequent veneration in the Middle Ages. While the identity of this boy is not made clear, Virgil's conception of Arcadia is of a prelapsarian world which may yet be redeemed. Virgil was not alone. The poet Ovid also wrote of Arcadia though his Arcadia was not a paradise but a wasteland, whose inhabitants were, in Erwin Panofsky's words, "primeval savages [whose] life was similar to that of the beasts."<sup>98</sup> There is a contrast, as later between the views of Hobbes and Rousseau, as to the character of an imagined state of nature. Virgil's vision is also balanced by that expressed in another set of poems, his *Georgics*, which depict agricultural labour as toilsome, emphasizing the practical rewards that come from hard work. Even from the outset, the pastoral could be adapted to explore moral and political problems: the supposed innocence and idleness of the shepherd is inflected in complicated ways when highly class-stratified societies fantasize about pastoral life. (In the *Eclogues*, for instance, Virgil moves back and forth between amorous songs of rustic love and political commentary on contemporary land reform in Sicily.) Thematically, death is present in Virgil's paradise: a tomb bearing a memorial inscription to Daphnis set within the idyllic woods of Arcadia appears in Virgil's *Eclogue V*:

Daphnis ego in silvis, hinc usque ad sidera notus,  
Formosi pecoris custos, formosior ipse.

[Daphnis was I, within the woods, known from here all the way to the stars; Of shapely sheep I was the guardian, but I was even shapelier myself.]<sup>99</sup>

Though also a burial inscription and plainly derived from that of Daphnis, "et in Arcadia ego" is not a Virgilian phrase.

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<sup>98</sup>Erwin Panofsky, "Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition," *Meaning in The Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955) 299.

<sup>99</sup>Virgil, *Eclogue V*: 43-44. Translation by author.

While Virgil continued to be read, the rustic naturalness, eroticism and inevitable paganism of the Pastoral mode discouraged its unadulterated use during the Middle Ages. Many of its themes, however, could be found in other genres then, which are really sub-genres of it, especially in variations of the Courtly Romance. Interest in the pagan, the erotic genres and all kinds of High Classical poetics revived, of course, with the advent of Renaissance humanism. The pastoral genre itself was revived in the 16th century Renaissance. In his *Arcadia* (1504), the Neapolitan poet Jacopo Sannazaro, who was familiar even with the Greek text of Theocritus, fixed the early modern, romantic vision of Arcadia in escapist terms as a lost world of idyllic bliss, recollected now only in mournful dirges.<sup>100</sup> Re-emerging in a Christian era, Arcadia becomes a mixture of Virgil's utopia<sup>101</sup> and the Garden of Eden. A new element of nostalgia appears in the Renaissance re-emergence of pastoral.

[I]t displays a nostalgia for the past, for some hypothetical state of love and peace which has somehow been lost. The dominating idea and theme of most is the search for the simple life away from the court and town [...] In a way it reveals a yearning for a lost innocence, for a pre-Fall paradisaical life in which man existed in harmony with nature. It is thus a form of primitivism and a potent longing for things past.<sup>102</sup>

However, the Arcadian (or pastoral elegiac) tradition is a subset of the pastoral and includes the idea of death residing within or arising in this retreat.<sup>103</sup> It also, through Aphrodite's murderous relationship to Daphnis, includes the violent love for mortals of gods and so, I would argue, it also typically involves attempts at class-discordant seduction. An obscure subgenre of the pastoral, the medieval Old French and Provençal

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<sup>100</sup>Harrison, 10.

<sup>101</sup>Halperin, 37. With 'utopia' here, I intend both its primary sense of Ούτοπος (*Ou-topos*), "no-place" and Εύτοπος (*Eu-topos*), "good place," its probable secondary derivation, meaning a place of universal well-being. Virgil's Sicily-identified Arcadia is displaced in its dual location and becomes, like utopia, a nowhere-land and a model for contemplation.

<sup>102</sup>Cuddon, 689.

<sup>103</sup>Harrison, 11.

tradition of *pastourelle* involves the attempted or successful seduction of a shepherdess or peasant girl by a knight. Usually, a poetic debate ensues and the shepherd girl typically remains unconvinced or else she is rescued, through trickery, by local shepherds.<sup>104</sup>

Pastourelle is ironic and parodies both pastoral and courtly romance. (A later and, perhaps, the best-known example of this motif occurs in the 1787 Mozart opera *Don Giovanni*, where the eponymous Don attempts to seduce the peasant-girl Zerlina but is thwarted, not by shepherds, but by a former female conquest, Donna Elvira.)<sup>105</sup> Seduction and death combine to establish a balance between punishment and innocence that underlies the Arcadian sub-genre of the pastoral, which thus becomes analogically related to Eden and the scene of The Fall. But, perhaps because of the *vanitas* tradition in the visual arts, it is the Arcadian tradition that becomes central within the visual pastoral.

In early sixteenth-century Venice, pastoral settings begin to enter the paintings of Titian and those of Giorgione.<sup>106</sup> The first explicit pictorial representation of the pastoral as *memento mori*, now bearing the inscription *et in Arcadia ego*, is Giovanni Francesco Guercino's so-entitled painting of 1618-22, [Fig. 2.6] which was commissioned by Cardinal Giulio Rospigliosi, who is also the inventor of the phrase *et in Arcadia ego*.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>104</sup>See William D. Paden, "Introduction" in *The Medieval Pastourelle, Vol. 1*, Volume 34, Series A: Garland Library of Medieval Literature (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1987) x.

<sup>105</sup>See Lorenzo da Ponte (Librettist), *Don Giovanni o l'empio punito* [*Don Juan, or the Rake Punished*, by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart], Act 1, scenes 7-10. "Don Giovanni o l'empio punito," *Karadar Classical Music*. Source Online. Accessed 22 June, 2009. [http://www.karadar.it/Librettos/mozart\\_don\\_giovanni.html#2\\_3](http://www.karadar.it/Librettos/mozart_don_giovanni.html#2_3)

<sup>106</sup>Giorgione's *Tempest*, of 1508 could perhaps lay claim to being the first pastoral painting, although its meaning has so far been so impervious to interpretation it would be hard to say. The so-called *Fête Champêtre* in the Louvre, of 1508, 1509, or 1510, now attributed to Titian, would otherwise have the strongest claim.

<sup>107</sup>See Louis Marin "Toward a Theory of Reading in the Visual Arts: Poussin's 'The Arcadian Shepherds,'" in Donald Preziosi, ed., *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, Oxford History of Art (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 274. A curious consequence of Rospigliosi's authorship of the phrase is that Erwin Panofsky's later diligent philological investigation in search of its true meaning becomes somewhat superfluous – or, indeed, 'academic'. Any answer he should come to is, in a sense, only as good as the Cardinal's Latin. The indeterminacy of the phrase's meaning should, rather, be embraced.

The inscription (the first instance of the phrase) gains force from a prominent skull in the foreground, beneath which its words are carved.<sup>108</sup> But this pastoral-elegiac theme in painting is most famous for its appearance in two paintings, which Rospigliosi also commissioned, by Poussin. These bear the same phrase: an earlier painting (1627), [Fig.2.7] now in the Devonshire Collection at Chatsworth (an English country house),<sup>109</sup> and an even better-known second version (1640), [Fig.2.8] now in the Louvre.<sup>110</sup> Both paintings are called either *The Arcadian Shepherds* or else *Et in Arcadia Ego* (as was the Guercino painting upon which the first is based). In both paintings, the inscription was meant to juxtapose death and the pleasures of Arcadian life. Poussin's paintings focus strands of a visual pastoral and Arcadian tradition that hitherto had been fairly disparate, used by different artists to different and, as in the case of Giorgione's *Tempest*, to sometimes mystifying ends. A classicizing style, inaugurated especially in Poussin's 1640 version, returns the visual tradition of Arcadia to the Virgilian aesthetic of simplicity, even though that picture is loaded with very complicated philosophical and semiotic content. Poussin is well-known as an unusually literary painter and, in turning his hand to a manifestly Arcadian subject, he seems to recapture perfectly the literary concerns of the genre. His work exactly puts "the complex into the simple."<sup>111</sup>

Erwin Panofsky published two versions of a famous essay on these paintings: one in 1936 and a later, expanded and revised, text in 1955.<sup>112</sup> Panofsky's revised text, "*Et in*

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<sup>108</sup>Panofsky, 304.

<sup>109</sup>Chatsworth House in Derbyshire is the principal seat of the Cavendish family, the hereditary dukes of Devonshire. The Devonshire Collection is run by a semi-independent trust, and Poussin's painting is usually housed on the estate.

<sup>110</sup>This work is discussed at greater length in the section "A Final Look" in Chapter 4.

<sup>111</sup>Walker, *ibid.* See above.

<sup>112</sup>The original essay, published in 1936 was "*Et in Arcadia Ego: On the Conception of Transience in Poussin and Watteau*," in *Philosophy and History: Essays Presented to Ernst Cassirer*, ed. Raymond Klibansky and H.J. Patton (New York: Harper and Row, 1936) 223-252. Reprinted 1963.

*Arcadia Ego: Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition*,” (1955) opens with an extensive genealogy of the Arcadian tradition in both poetry and painting. His particular focus is the process by which, in different media, the Arcadian tradition develops into a genuinely elegiac one. However, the core of Panofsky’s essay – in either version – is a comparison of the 1640 version of *Et in Arcadia Ego* with the earlier, so-called ‘Chatsworth’ version. Poussin’s earlier painting includes the death’s head that is a holdover from Francesco Guercino’s original 1624 treatment of the theme<sup>113</sup> and so Panofsky argues that the consequent visual personification of death as the speaker is congruent with what he takes to be the inherent meaning of the Latin phrase, a meaning from which the later version diverges.<sup>114</sup> Panofsky notes Poussin’s debt to Guercino’s original in this first version of the subject but he maintains that the later painting has changed its relationship to the tradition entirely: the figures are no longer “checked in their progress by a terrifying phenomenon” (the slab surmounted by a death’s head), but rather are “symmetrically arranged on either side of a sepulchral monument.”<sup>115</sup> Panofsky observes that, in the first version, this obstruction blocks a forward, rushing motion from the left and establishes an

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<sup>113</sup>Other differences are present, including the river god Alphaeus, which is accounted for by Anthony Blunt’s discovery that this earlier *Et in Arcadia Ego* picture belonged to a pair including the Metropolitan Museum’s *Midas Washing his Feet in The River Pactolus*, which is noted in Panofsky’s 1955 version of the essay. See Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, 312, and Anthony Blunt, “Poussin’s *Et in Arcadia Ego*,” in *Art Bulletin* 20 (1938): 96n.

<sup>114</sup>Panofsky, *ibid.*, 315. The centrepiece of both Panofsky’s essays is his reading of the phrase “*et in Arcadia ego*.” He begins with a consideration of Latin grammar. *Et in Arcadia ego*, according to Panofsky, was usually but erroneously understood to mean “I too have lived in Arcadia.” It is common for short phrases in Latin to lack a principal verb but, in these cases, strict conventions apply as to which verb should be provided by the reader. Panofsky asserts that this phrase can only mean: “even in Arcadia [am] I,” as ‘*et*’ which can mean both ‘also’ and ‘even,’ modifies whichever noun immediately follows it. (*Ibid.*, 306) The phrase should thus be translated “I am even in Arcadia,” which would imply that it were spoken by personified Death. As an inscription upon a tomb the implication is that death is present even in Arcadia. And, as death is speaking where conventionally we would expect an epitaph in the voice of the dead person, it is an eerie ventriloquism. Panofsky notes that there have been two longstanding ways of understanding the phrase: an incorrect tradition, found on the Continent, and a correct tradition, retained in Britain. (*Ibid.*, 310.) His key point is that the later version of the painting is a less faithful illustration of genuine meaning of the phrase.

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*, 312-313.

“element of drama and surprise.”<sup>116</sup> In the latter, the clear narrative element has been removed: there the figures constitute a stable tableau.<sup>117</sup> Panofsky remarks that this change represents a disjunction between the meaning of the phrase *et in Arcadia ego* and the structure of the painting that now supports it.<sup>118</sup> In the absence of the death’s head, he suggests, the viewer is “almost” compelled to mistranslate the phrase so as to belong to what would now be a speaking tomb.<sup>119</sup> The larger argument is that, in making this change, Poussin has completed the return, now in visual form, to Virgil’s elegiac Arcadia, and away from the *memento mori* tradition derived from medieval art that had lingered as far as Poussin’s first version of the picture.

Panofsky also maintains that Poussin engaged directly with the more recent poetic tradition. He sees the rectangular tomb as a direct inspiration by Sannazaro’s *Arcadia*. He writes:

[The 1640 painting] was facilitated, if not caused, by Poussin’s familiarity with Arcadian literature [...]. But the reverent and melancholy mood of the Louvre picture reveal fresh contact with Sannazaro. His description of the “Tomb in Arcadia” [...] actually foreshadows the situation visualized in Poussin’s later composition:

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<sup>116</sup>Ibid., 312.

<sup>117</sup>A progression among the figures, the sense that they represent certain stages, has long been an important aspect of how the painting has been understood. They seem as if moving towards death, which may also be towards the understanding of it. They also seem to move towards a state somewhat akin to the abstract rectangle of the tomb: they are becoming rigid, represented. This movement, whereby each figure is incrementally further along than the last would seem to combine into a single represented state both understanding and death. In a 1937 paper Jerome Klein divides the four figures into two groups, organized by their mutual gazes. Klein writes: “This differentiation between the right and left groups cannot be encompassed within a strictly closed system of oppositions or a purely classic system, since the right group represents a higher state than the left and one through which it must inevitably pass.” Jerome Klein, “An Analysis of Poussin’s ‘Et in Arcadia Ego’” in *Art Bulletin* 19 (1937): 313. Klein argues that there is a narrative progression – or indeed a history – represented in the arrangement of the figures. These stages are stages in awareness of death, for Klein. That the four figures might represent stages in the dawning understanding of the significance of the phrase is scarcely surprising. Rather, it is congruent with the standard readings of many Poussin paintings, in which different psychological states are represented by a series of figures. In *Landscape with A Man Killed by a Snake* (1648), for example, the figures, set at different distances from the scene of horror in the foreground are believed to represent different states of mind, and expressing them through their expressions and postures.

<sup>118</sup>Panofsky, *ibid.*, 314.

<sup>119</sup>*Ibid.*, 316.

[...] *Et da monti Thoscani 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[....]*

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 [...].<sup>120</sup>

When discussing the meaning of the Latin phrase, Panofsky is less interested in its evident ambiguity than in establishing what he feels must be its one true meaning. This continues to go, if not unnoticed, at least underexamined by its scholarly readers. (Louis Marin, for example, would later focus on the linguistic issues at play but he simply resolves the misfit in Panofsky's essay by proposing that Panofsky must have got it wrong about the Latin.)<sup>121</sup> The semantic ambiguity and the ambiguity of mood that Panofsky mentions, however, could be echoes of each other and they could represent a pictorial approach that goes far beyond ambiguity to outright paradox. (As I shall go on to show in Chapter 4, the tomb device is one embodiment of that paradox.) Despite his definite views about the Latin, Panofsky sees an important role for ambiguity in its aspect of ambivalence, at least. He remarks upon Sannazaro's use of triple rhyming to induce a mood of longing and of ambivalence, calling it "a sweet, lingering plaintiveness."<sup>122</sup> Indeed, Panofsky could have gone further: two narratives appear to be running side by side in the poem by means of this. The literal narrative tells of progression whereas the

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<sup>120</sup>Ibid., 314. Translation: "Shepherds will come from the hills of Tuscany and Liguria to worship this corner of the world just because you lived here. And they will read on the beautiful square-monument the inscription that chills my heart and makes me strangle so much sorrow in my breast." Translation by author.

<sup>121</sup>Marin, 272.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid., 304.



three rhyming words *angulo*, *quadrangulo* and *strangulo* ('corner', 'square-monument', 'strangle') are mutually associated and 'put the breaks' on the action. (This strategy is common enough in Italian poetics.)<sup>123</sup> Within the Poussin painting, the Sannazaro association locks in an ambiguity about progression versus rest that is important for Panofsky's analysis. It captures – or 'illustrates' – the hesitating, backward looking mood that the later painting emits, according to him.

In his revised essay of 1955, Panofsky discusses the intersection of two traditions that, for the first time, achieve a cohabitation in Poussin's later *Et in Arcadia Ego*: a classical tradition of Arcadian poetry that achieved its literary zenith in Virgil's *Eclogues* and a medieval tradition of *memento mori*, coming out of *danses macabres* and *vanitas* traditions. Clearly, Panofsky prefers what he sees as Poussin's favouring of the Virgilian register in the later painting. He writes:

In Virgil's ideal Arcady human suffering and superhumanly perfect surroundings create a dissonance [, which], once felt, had to be resolved, and it was resolved in that vespertinal mixture of sadness and tranquility which is perhaps Virgil's most personal contribution to poetry. With only slight exaggeration one might say that he "discovered" the evening [...]. At the end of Virgil's *Eclogues* we feel evening silently settle over the world[....]<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup>Ibid., 304. Dante Alighieri, for instance, uses it in a similar fashion in his *Inferno*, Canto V, which includes the famous encounter with Paolo and Francesca, where Francesca da Rimini tells the story of how she and her adulterous lover (and tutor) Paolo became damned after reading a romantic tale about Lancelot, which led them to give way to their passion for each other. The tale is recounted but the scene is also conveyed more directly in a parallel narrative buried in the rhyme (*amante, tremante, avante* or 'lover', 'trembling', 'forward'). The internal rhyme provides an alternative account, a kind of flashback, so the reader can visualize their fall into sin. Dante uses the common rhyme and stress to contrast a primary and secondary progression (twined narratives) whereas Sannazaro contrasts a narrative progression and an associative arrest. Dante's full passage is: «Quando leggemmo il disiato riso/ Esser baciato da cotanto amante/ Questi, che mai da me non fia diviso/ La bocca mi baciò tutto tremante ./ Galeatto ful il libro e chi lo scrisse:/ Quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante.» *Inferno*, Canto 5, lines 133-138. A relatively precise (though old-fashioned) line-by-line translation is available in English: "for when we came / To where it was narrated how that fair / Enchanting face was kiss'd by one so fond / So dear, he, who from me will never be / Dissever'd, kissed my lips all tremblingly. / The book, the writer served as Galahad / For us. We read therein no more that day." Ernest Ridsdale Ellaby, trans., *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri Translated into English with Verse Notes: Cantos I-X* (London: Bickers and Son, 1874) 39. See also Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieri* (Naples: Francesco Rossi-Romano, Editore, 1858) 29-30.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid., 300-301.

Panofsky concludes that “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.”<sup>125</sup> Yet, as in his determination to establish which Latin meaning is correct, Panofsky seemingly overlooks the value of the indeterminacy. What is superb in this picture is not so much that Virgil and his evening have emerged but that this poetical concern happens in the same place and at the same time as the residue of the earlier, *memento mori* approach and its contrast, the aspect of vital desire. (I come back to this point in Chapter 4.) Does Poussin, then, discover the painted evening, the visual elegiac? I believe this Panofskian implication can be accepted but only if it is accepted with the awareness that the evening is a threshold, it is liminal. The evening is an in-between time and its ambiguity, its approach, allowing two contradictory possibilities, two opposed states (night and day) to coexist and even to coningle, is its ownmost character. Understanding this painting depends on understanding the role of ambiguity, which, I feel, has been underestimated in most of the academic reception of this painting. This underestimation of its ambiguity, in turn, has led to its abiding erotic character being all but overlooked.<sup>126</sup>

Anthony Blunt, however, agrees with the traditional reading, framed so decisively by Panofsky. Indeed, he goes further and suggests that the move away from an early, even lusty, outlook implies Poussin’s embracing of a stoical point of view, detached from the pleasures of the world. Blunt writes: “In the mid 1650’s<sup>127</sup> [Poussin] painted a new version of the Arcadian Shepherds, out of which he had made one of his most perfect

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<sup>125</sup>Ibid., 301.

<sup>126</sup>I continue this discussion in “A Final Look” in Chapter 4.

<sup>127</sup>The painting is now firmly dated to 1640, before Poussin left Rome for his two year stint in Paris.

Titianesque Romantic compositions [the Chatsworth painting]; but now the mood is different. The urgency of the earlier design, with the figures rushing forward to read the inscription on the tomb, has given way to a tone of contemplation, as the shepherds kneel or stand silently, meditating on the lesson which they have just read.”<sup>128</sup> Blunt even goes so far as to associate this work, which, after all, depicts three attractively muscled shepherds lightly dressed, with Poussin’s late religious art, claiming of this painting that “Poussin’s figure compositions representing subjects from classical history reveal the same changes of style as the religious paintings.”<sup>129</sup> All this depends upon Blunt’s startling misdating of the picture. This is one of those cases – indeed it is the extreme case – where Blunt has a very different conception of a painting’s date than the scholarly consensus. Blunt regarded this version as having been painted about fifteen years after it, in fact, had been. If ever there was a place where Blunt may have advanced a line of argument that he knew (or suspected) to be wrong, it should be here. Blunt’s rival Denis Mahon certainly believed him capable of lying about art. Mahon, however, regarded any such dishonesty as habitual, even automatic. He does not envision a purposeful motive. One might speculate that Blunt would find it useful to have Poussin’s signature work safely associated with his later stoical ideals, and not be thought to come closer in time (as it actually is) with his earlier vital and lusty pictures. This may be, too, because the eroticized figures in the later *Arcadian Shepherds* are exclusively male. Richard Verdi’s observation, that when this painting is later adapted by others to suggest a heterosexual idyll the artists must increase the number of shepherdesses to rebalance the sexes, may be

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<sup>128</sup> Anthony Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin* (Hong Kong: Pallas Athene, 1995) 304.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

telling in this connection.<sup>130</sup> The mostly-male scene in this painting has, at times, proved to be a problem. Whereas the Chatsworth version features a ruddy-cheeked shepherdess lifting up her gown to attract the desiring gaze, in the Louvre version that gaze settles upon and even is made to move over the bodies of the men. The ‘uncouth swain’<sup>131</sup> to the right even adopts a pose as if to show off his muscled physique, or to flex a bicep. The only female figure, by contrast (who may or may not be a shepherdess), is elaborately clothed and – but for a trace of exposed skin where her arm meets her shoulder above the left breast – she is almost entirely covered up. I do not think this painting has abandoned the erotic tradition of the Arcadian subject at all. Rather, that eroticism has been refocused upon the handsome shepherds where it was placed at the tradition’s origin. We cannot know for sure why Blunt got the date so badly wrong, but Mahon would have to be right – Blunt would have to have *no eye at all* – to miss the allure of these male figures.

The pastoral tradition established a strong presence in the English imagination, where its apparent simplicity and its Mediterranean climes increasingly became associated with both death and pleasure – and so, in both cases, with freedom. Arcadian themes found a major place in Anglo-Saxon literatures. In the 1590s, Sir Philip Sidney published a romance, *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia*.<sup>132</sup> Pastoral themes and characters appear in later Shakespearean romances, such as *A Winter’s Tale* (1610 or

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<sup>130</sup>Verdi, *ibid.* See above.

<sup>131</sup>This is how John Milton characterizes a shepherd narrator in his *Lycidas* (1637), meaning a youthful man, often in the position of a servant, and being ruggedly unpolished in manners, a semi-wild man. See below.

<sup>132</sup>Sidney’s Corydon is “a shepherd quite susceptible of being matched with a shepherdess.” See Howard, *Ibid.* The pastoral tradition would mature into a homoerotic one in English literature.

1611),<sup>133</sup> although the genre was certainly also an influence in earlier work, as has been noted above, particularly in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595 or 1596) and *As You Like It* (1599). In John Milton's Pastoral elegy *Lycidas* (1637), presenting himself as the "uncouth swain," the poet mourns his dead friend "Lycidas," a name borrowed from Theocritus's *Idylls* and Virgil's *Eclogue IX*, but which actually refers to Milton's friend Edward King,<sup>134</sup> who had drowned crossing the Irish Sea.<sup>135</sup>

Death and seduction have been associated with the pastoral form in both visual art and literature, as has male homosexual love.<sup>136</sup> Theocritus's pederastic poem *The Harvest Festival (Idyll 7)* connects homosexual desire with the location of Arcadia from the outset. The unbridled intensity of the love for boys is symbolized by the wilderness, associated via the god Pan with Arcadia.

The Loves sneezed for Simichidas; so he, poor wretch,  
 Yearns as much for Myrto as goats yearn in the spring.  
 But as for Aratus, my dearest friend of all, he desires  
 A boy deep in his entrails [...]  
 O Pan, patron of Homocle's lovely plains, I beg you, bring  
 Him unsummoned and press him into my friend's arms,  
 Whether it is [athletic] Philinus or yet some other lad.  
 Pan, if you bring this about, may your back and shoulders  
 Be spared a beating with quills by the boys of Arcadia,  
 When they are short of game.<sup>137</sup>

<sup>133</sup>Shakespeare's character Autolycus (roughly translated 'Lone Wolf'), the roguish "Snapper-up of unconsidered trifles," is lifted, for instance, from Theocritus. See Margaret Drabble, ed., *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, Fifth ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) 53. [sv. "Autolycus"] See also Graves, *The Greek Myths: Vol. 2* (London: Penguin Books, 1984), 93. [§119.f.5] Foolish, rustic shepherds also serve as a comedic device.

<sup>134</sup>Drabble, *Ibid.*, 595. [sv. "Lycidas"]

<sup>135</sup>Pastoral elegy traditionally tends to focus on the "peculiar pathos of death by drowning." Hunter, vii.

<sup>136</sup>It is a motif that persists even today, in Ang Lee's 2005 film *Brokeback Mountain*, for instance. This film is famous as depicting 'gay cowboys' but it often goes overlooked that it falls into a well-established homoerotic framework of same-sex love among shepherds, which is what Ennis Del Mar and Jack Twist are. The mountain pasture in the film recreates one typical feature of a homosexual Arcadia, the wilderness as a place where homosexuality may be safely carried out. See Byrne Fone, *Homophobia: A History* (New York Metropolitan Books, 2000) 281. Although, like intruding death in Arcadia, unknown to Ennis and Jack they are spied on – and their stay in their idyll is terminated – by their boss, Joe Aguirre.

<sup>137</sup>Anthony Verity, trans., *Theocritus: Idylls*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) 27-28. Theocritus, "The Harvest Festival," lines 96 – 108.

In keeping with the learned referencing typical of Alexandrian poets, Theocritus here recalls a famous poem of Sappho.<sup>138</sup> Her own c.500 BCE poem of same-sex love, sometimes called *That Man* or *Poem of Jealousy*,<sup>139</sup> which describes in excruciating physical detail the pangs of love, jealousy and envy a woman (by tradition, Sappho herself) feels in her body at watching a woman she loves flirting or laughing with a man, is recalled in the unromantic, visceral emphasis here on feeling love deep in one's entrails. Arcadia may become the home of pastoral only with Virgil but already in Theocritus it is the spiritual home of boy-love, through the presiding figure of Pan. Theocritus's poem influenced Virgil's second *Eclogue*, which is a shepherd's lament for the boy Alexis, whom he loves unrequitedly.<sup>140</sup>

By the turn of the twentieth century pastoral names and themes could even function as a kind of shorthand to indicate instantly that a character was homosexual. In *The Immoralist* (1902) André Gide uses such a name, Ménalque, a frenchified version of Menalchas (a common shepherd's name in pastoral) to signal immediately (to any contemporary well-educated French reader) the character's homosexual predilections.<sup>141</sup> There was a simultaneous move to associate homosexuality with nature and the natural, which made the metaphor of pastoral primitiveness even more apt as a marker of

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<sup>138</sup>Halperin, 154.

<sup>139</sup>It is the poem beginning Φαινεται μοι κήνος ἴσος θεοῖσιν (*phainetai moi kenos isos theoisin*), or "equal to the gods that man seems to me." The poem, which is fragmentary, is famous for being reworked (and incidentally 'straightened' out with the substitution of a male speaker longing for the girl) by the Roman poet Catullus in the first century BCE as "*Ille mi par esse deo videtur*" or *Catullus 51*. (The English translation would be almost identical to the Greek fragment.)

<sup>140</sup>The Latin poem is distinctly more homoerotic than most translations would indicate. The Shepherd Corydon is lovelorn over the boy Alexis, who is described as '*formosus*' ("shapely") and as being '*delicias*' to the Master of them both, which is usually translated "favourite" but is more properly "sweetheart" or "darling." See Virgil, "Eclogue II," *Virgil: Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid I-IV*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1999) 30-31. See also C. Day Lewis, trans., "Eclogue II," *The Eclogues of Virgil* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1963) 13-15.

<sup>141</sup>Howard, viii.

homosexuality. Figures such as Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and, later, Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935) had been arguing for the naturalness of homosexuality.<sup>142</sup> This, in turn, allowed homosexuality to be metaphorized as the natural in man. The crucial figure of Walt Whitman, (1819-1892) seen in Europe as an American nature-man, forged the link. In Gide's later book *Corydon* (1911-24) Whitman is discussed in a dialogue on the question of whether 'pederasty' (here now really meaning homosexuality proper) was natural. Whitman's own exemplary naturalness was held to prove that it was.<sup>143</sup>

The phrase '*et in Arcadia ego*', itself appearing first in the paintings by Guercino and Poussin, came to be associated with nostalgia and romanticism and thus with youthful male sensitivity. Such a sensibility belonged to a continuum that was long understood to range towards homosexual love. It also implied an almost sickly sensitivity to Greek and Roman antiquity, and to Mediterranean lands where there was felt to be greater sexual licence. As early as the eighteenth century the elegiac pastoral was considered to be "effete" and "precious" – insufficiently manly.<sup>144</sup> By the early decades of the twentieth century such associations were even in the mainstream. Evelyn Waugh used the phrase as the title of the first part of his novel *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) where it is connected to the implied youthful homosexuality of the protagonist Charles Ryder and the (again, implied) lifelong homosexuality of his friend Sebastian Flyte.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>142</sup>Byrne R. S. Fone, *Homophobia: A History* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000) 272.

<sup>143</sup>See André Gide, *André Gide: Corydon*, trans. Richard Howard Gay Modern Classics (London: GMP Publishers, Ltd., 1985) 4-5.

<sup>144</sup>Cuddon, *Ibid.*, 689.

<sup>145</sup>A homosexual relationship is suggested when Charles confesses of their friendship that "our naughtiness was high on the list of grave sins." See Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited* (Boston: Little Brown, 1946) 31. This interpretation is sometimes contested, especially from the point of view of the orthodox Catholic reading of the novel. But a stark parallel is drawn between Charles and Sebastian and the flamboyantly homosexual Anthony Blanche (sometimes believed to be modelled on Anthony Blunt himself) that strongly suggests a homosexual interpretation of their involvement, albeit one subtle enough that it remains possible to be wilfully blind to it. A further, though limp, piece of evidence is the name Sebastian Flyte,

By 1945, when *Brideshead Revisited* was published, ‘*et in Arcadia ego*’ and the whole motif of pastoral nostalgia and idyll-ness was generally so associated with homosexuality through prewar aestheticism and aesthetes that its use in this novel, though discreet, verged on cliché.

The homoerotic pastoral motif was in its prime in the five or six antecedent decades to *Brideshead Revisited*. It emerged, visually, in the work of various painters, photographers or circles of photographers. At the beginning of this period, the Philadelphia-based painter Thomas Eakins repeatedly took photographs of his male students naked and swimming, or dressed in classical garb or else wrestling.<sup>146</sup> These are mainly studies for paintings. Eakins’s paintings are depictions of erotically-charged homosocial activities. The best-known is *The Swimming Hole* of 1884-85. [Fig.2.9] His *Arcadia*, however, of 1883 [Fig.2.10] clearly demonstrates the strong link between this body of work and the larger pastoral tradition. Whether or not they are homoerotic is a matter of some debate.<sup>147</sup> From 1880 to roughly 1915 there was a heyday of photographers making outdoor images of naked young men with classical Arcadian

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which both suggests the character’s flight to North Africa –where he enters into a same-sex ménage with a German deserter from the French Foreign Legion – and the flight of an arrow. Together with his surname and the sometimes artistic Venetian setting this suggests the figure of Saint Sebastian, a longstanding gay icon, as the character’s alcohol-induced illness furthermore suggests a kind of plague. Waugh is often noted for at once emphasizing and simultaneously disguising “aberrant” sexual relationships. See Christopher Hitchens, “The Permanent Adolescent,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, May (2003): 108.

<sup>146</sup>See Allen Ellenzweig, *The Homoerotic Photograph: Male Images from Durieu/Delacroix to Mapplethorpe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992) 21-25.

<sup>147</sup>For a strong assertion that they are, see Thomas Waugh, 77. It seems to me likely that they should be so regarded, for general methodological reasons but also for reasons of internal evidence. Eakins appears to have developed the composition for *The Swimming Hole* in reference to a painting by Frédérique Barzille, *Summer Scene* (1869; Fogg Museum of Art) [Fig. 2.11] that he would have seen in Paris at the salon of 1870. See Grace Glueck, “European Influences on Americans’ Views,” *New York Times*, 3 Sept. 2004. Source online: retrieved: 22 Aug. 2009. (Note continues over...)  
<<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9A05E0DA1531F930A3575AC0A9629C8B63&sec=&sp on=&pagewanted=all>> Barzille includes a number of figures based on images with a long homosexual pedigree, such as Saint Sebastian and *The Dying Gaul*. That later work makes an appearance as the image of Eakins in *The Swimming Hole*, a self-depiction that is sometimes viewed as embodying his voyeuristic desire. See Elizabeth Johns, “Swimming: Thomas Eakins, the Twenty-Ninth Bather,” in *Thomas Eakins and the Swimming Picture*, Doreen Bolder and Sarah Cash, eds. (Vermont: The Stinehour Press, 1996) 66.]



trappings. The pictorialist photographer Fred Holland Day, for instance, working in New England, often produced explicitly Arcadian scenes of young men, nude, with musical instruments.<sup>148</sup> Musical instruments became a concrete symbol of the lyrical poetry associated with Arcadia, especially lyres, flutes and pipes. Holland Day's compositions, taken together with his use of soft focus, tend to enhance a painterly<sup>149</sup> classicism at the expense of diffusing the erotic charge. There was also a Mediterranean group, which, by contrast, tended towards an acute eroticism. The central and best known photographers of this Mediterranean circle are the Baron Wilhelm von Gloeden, (1856-1931)<sup>150</sup> and his cousin, Guglielmo (né Wilhelm) von Plüschow, (dates uncertain) and somewhat later a former assistant, Vincenzo Galdi (dates uncertain).

Tuberculosis led von Gloeden to Taormina Sicily in 1876, where he apparently ended up sexually involved with various local youths whom he employed as servants and models. In the meantime he met his distant cousin Guglielmo, residing in Rome, who was a professional photographer and painter of distinctly erotic nudes. Von Gloeden learned photography from him and, after he was financially cut off in 1890, he became a very successful professional photographer, making mostly postcards of half-naked local boys in quasi-classical settings for tourists.<sup>151</sup> However, he also had a lucrative sideline making plainly pornographic images of naked youths<sup>152</sup> for a fin-de-siècle homosexual Grand Tour, of which Taormina was becoming a major destination, and jumping-off point for North Africa.

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<sup>148</sup> Roberta McGrath, *Behold the Man: The Male Nude in Photography*, ed. Alasdair Forster (Edinburgh: Stills Gallery, 1988) 9.

<sup>149</sup> Waugh, *ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> Von Gloeden was not rightfully a Baron at all, although he claimed the title as the illegitimate son of one minor Mecklenburg Baron and the stepson of another, more socially prominent one.

<sup>151</sup> For further details of von Gloeden's life, see Ellenzweig, 35-47.

<sup>152</sup> See Waugh, 82-3.

Eroticism in von Gloeden works through the contrast of textures. A richly or unusually textured object, such as a palm of some kind, leads us to imagine the texture of the boy's body against which it is placed. In *Untitled*, [Fig.2.12] the contrast is between the boy's skin, on the one hand, and his hat and the weird fish, on the other. There is also nothing classical about the plants against which these youths are often depicted, [see Fig.2.13] they are portrayed as exotic fruit, wrapped in fabric sometimes – perhaps only to be unwrapped –or else nude but for antique sandals, hats, props of a kind that threaten to break down from classical high-art respectability to a flimsy erotic pretext, made preposterous by the travesty of the token, unconvincing costume. [See Fig.2.14]

Ellenzweig writes:

von Gloeden's dramatic Mediterranean backdrops set the stage in which the modeling of his male youths' slender torsos, genitals and asses displayed like invitations, and the mix of material accessories surrounding them color the picture's homoerotic content. By framing friendship among young males with an opulent array of draperies, strewn garlands, vases, jewelry, headbands, and sunlit vistas of ocean and sky, the boys themselves become decorative objects for contemplation. They are the chief focus within a panoply of lush materials.<sup>153</sup>

Allen Ellenzweig asserts that these boys are objectified. But if that is so they are objects in a very different way than the props within which they are placed. The scene of the creation of these photographs is too transparent. The props are too absurd, the boys too knowing and too modern. Holland Day employed soft focus and strongly classical composition in order, after the Pictorialist fashion, to deemphasize that his images were photographs (and not paintings). Von Gloeden's works are drenched in their reality-effect. Most notably, the often un-classical faces of the boys, their rough, peasant looks, their skinniness or fleshiness and their emphasized genitals and pubic hair all fetishize the

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<sup>153</sup>Ellenzweig, 39.

nakedness – rather than the nudity<sup>154</sup> – of these boys and their real presence there on the scene of the photographic shoot. There is an element of nostalgia for antiquity, to be sure, but a landscape of pleasure – a pleasure taken in the artifice of it all – is also too much at hand for this to be all there is.

Von Gloeden's images are homoerotic in the manner of the work of Caravaggio, with which von Gloeden's is often correctly associated.<sup>155</sup> Class and cultural differences are highlighted but in a seemingly benign way<sup>156</sup> that emphasizes the character of the photographic representation as an encounter – an encounter that seemed to have real sexual possibilities. Noting their gritty realism and seeming availability, Emmanuel Cooper writes:

The youths [...] were far from the perfect and idealized forms represented in the marble statues of Greece and Rome; they ranged from adolescence to young manhood and, as workers on the land or at sea, their nails were often dirty and broken and their feet bore the scars and malformations of rough outdoor life [...] Most noticeable of all is the sheer sense of physical presence; their sultry looks as they address the camera exude a powerful sexuality however coded and deep it lay. Older youths would often be posed with younger ones; body contact, though circumspect, was not avoided, and sex roles were implied by such means. Most obvious of all is the varying size and state of erection of the penises [...] often on the point of arousal.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>154</sup>Whereas the nude has been reorganized (and refined) as category by being transformed into art, the naked is just the undressed human body, manifesting all kinds of flaws and blemishes. See Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956) 3-9. By not taking pains to disguise the dirty feet or other imperfections of the boys he photographs, von Gloeden portrays them as naked more than nude, according to Clark's schema, an association with emphasizes their apparent availability for sex. Clark's distinction has been questioned, of course, prominently by Lynda Nead who observes: "There can be no naked 'other' to the nude, for the body is always already in representation." For this rival understanding, see Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity, and Sexuality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) 16.

<sup>155</sup>See, for instance, Aldrich 149.

<sup>156</sup>For a discussion of why such differences should not be mapped onto a political-interpretive model reductively adapted from feminism, see Waugh 48-54.

<sup>157</sup>Emmanuel Cooper, *Fully Exposed: The Male Nude in Photography*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (London: Routledge, 1995) 156.

The roughness of the boys articulated the attraction across difference of class, an abiding feature of upper class homosexuality in this period. Inhibition and repression, effects of an internalization of societal homophobia, could be avoided through the embrace of the other. Of himself, Christopher Isherwood (1904-1986) writes: “Christopher was suffering from an inhibition, then not unusual among upper-class homosexuals; he couldn’t relax sexually with a member of his own class or nation. He needed a working-class foreigner.”<sup>158</sup> This fascination could be frustrated and involve a sense of class contempt, to be sure. A British follower of von Gloeden, Gleeson White complained that there was a “rooted dislike” among the working class, whose “beautiful unspoilt brawn” attracted him, to posing in the nude. Yet there appears to have been no such problems in Taormina, where the boys seemed to be as genuinely fond of von Gloeden as he was of them,<sup>159</sup> and one of them, Pancrazio Bucini (c.1879-c.1959), became his lifelong partner.<sup>160</sup> It would be absurd not to recognize that there is also a class-levelling effect in such erotic and romantic connections. There was community as well as tourism.

Of the youths in the pictures, Roberta McGrath writes: “These Ephebes inhabited a world of non-hierarchical stasis – a pastoral paradise, far removed from the reality of Victorian colonialism.”<sup>161</sup> (I would argue that must still be qualified. A complex colonial situation was still at work. While von Gloeden’s popularity in Taormina is not in doubt, it was still a purchased popularity. He brought a lucrative trade. This part of Sicily at this time was desperately poor and, apparently, he provided a great deal of support.) The photographic record involves the idealization of the boys through dreams and attitudes

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<sup>158</sup>Christopher Isherwood, *Christopher and His Kind*. Quoted in Waugh, 53.

<sup>159</sup>See Aldrich, 145-6.

<sup>160</sup>Bucini was one of the first youths he employed and became von Gloeden’s lover at fourteen. Although Bucini later married, he apparently remained so throughout von Gloeden’s life. Ibid.

<sup>161</sup>Ibid.

that belong to the unquestioned order of late nineteenth-century colonialism.

Nevertheless, at the same time they do carve out a space that defies late nineteenth-century heteronormativity. Cooper writes that these works evoke “an idyllic but sexual fulfilling society [.....] Desirable, available, and sexually responsive, [the boys’] world is untainted by Christian prejudice, punitive and anti-homosexual laws or repressive views.”<sup>162</sup> The appearance of the boys’ lower class rank could even signify a common shared state of outsider status. While, by the turn of the last century, Arcadia had become cast as a homoerotic idyll, it was equally well seen as a site of exile. In *Homophobia: A History*, (2000) Byrne Fone writes:

In Arcadia men could cast off their outlaw status, homosexuality could be revealed without reprisal, homosexual love could be consummated without fear of punishment or scorn. While the vision of Arcadia offered freedom, it also implied isolation and segregation; the young men in their sylvan glades had no part in society and could not influence its opinions.<sup>163</sup>

Under homophobia, the dispossession of the shepherds, who in antiquity had often been slaves, like the poverty of the boys of Taormina, becomes a signifier of homosexuality.

Much of von Plüschow’s work is similar to that of his cousin. A firm attribution is often hard to make, especially as the two photographers sometimes shared models.<sup>164</sup> Where some of von Plüschow’s works do differ noticeably from those of von Gloeden, they do so in that his scenes are more explicitly sexual, rather than merely erotic. Later on his boys would be from Rome and, like Caravaggio’s rentboys and guttersnipes, they illustrate a plebeian rather than a rustic fantasy of sexual access. Von Plüschow’s later ‘shepherds’ will be imagined as rough trade. Meanwhile, von Plüschow’s photographs

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<sup>162</sup>Cooper, 159.

<sup>163</sup>Fone, 281.

<sup>164</sup>Cooper, 157.

are distinctive for one other feature: his use of the ruins south of Naples (of Pompeii and Paestum) and also his scenes set along the ruins of the ancient Roman Necropolis road running south from Rome, the Via Appia Antica. Works such as *Three Naked Boys in The Via Appia Antica* [Fig.2.15] are the first within the oeuvre of either photographer that seem directly informed by Nicolas Poussin's famous 1640 version of *The Arcadian Shepherds*. [See Fig.2.8] In both images a large, rectangular tomb ruin with Roman busts is surrounded by the standing shepherd figures, although in von Plüschow's case the intent seems to be more to fetishistically and decadently contrast the naked *ephebes* with the imagery of death for an erotic thrill. It is easier to imagine an orgy here than a mournful service of remembrance. Yet the tomb itself is also a strong link to the ancient religious significance of the Arcadian tradition. Daphnis was a son of Hermes; and on the subject of the cult of Hermes, Walter Burkert writes:

Every stone monument may equally well be a monument to the dead; libations are made at stone cairns as well as at a grave. From this arises the worship of Chthonic Hermes, which was elaborated in the myth of the escort of souls, psychopompos. Hermes is invoked at libations to the dead, and graves are places in his care.<sup>165</sup>

This scene combines the fantasy of some kind of group-sex picnic with a somewhat serious homage to the the erotic and religious dimensions of the Arcadian tradition.

Roberta McGrath observes that the eroticism of male nudes benefits from a cultural attitude that forbade any acknowledged homoerotic reading. She writes: "And while, in private, it was this very quality of sexual idyll which made them so potent, in public they appeared chaste in a way a female nude might not."<sup>166</sup> This tension would have been quietly satisfying for a homosexual audience familiar with the erotic coding of

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<sup>165</sup>Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1985) 158.

<sup>166</sup>McGrath, *Ibid.* 9.

Arcadia. Homoeroticism is piggy-backing on an acceptable subject matter but the homoerotic significance is a kind of inside joke, an irony premised not only on homosexuals ‘getting it’ but also on the delight that everyone else might not quite be getting it.<sup>167</sup>

Could photographs like those of the school of von Gloeden inform a reading of the visual tradition that itself lies behind them? It is my contention that this might well have happened with Anthony Blunt. The wide circulation of these images makes it highly probable that Blunt was familiar with them early on. Moreover, Blunt had a longstanding interest in Italy and in Sicily, in particular. Blunt traveled to southern Italy often and seemed most relaxed there; he seemed to conceive of these trips as an escape into freedom.<sup>168</sup> In 1968 he was the author of a book on the Sicilian Baroque.<sup>169</sup> Moving both in gay circles and in circles interested in Arcadian art, travelling widely in Italy and Sicily, following, as it were, in the footsteps of the English Grand Tourists just years after the heyday of that ritual, and knowing a wide circle of people in England including some whose family visited von Gloeden and purchased his works,<sup>170</sup> it would be most unlikely Blunt had not seen at least some of his works.

Building on work by Whitney Davis,<sup>171</sup> James Smalls argues that art history’s discursive agenda and, particularly, the standards of evidence it requires, like documentary proof, serve to render less visible the rich history of homosexuality – among

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<sup>167</sup>This is in accordance with what Linda Hutcheon calls ‘discursive communities’ within irony, “the complex configuration of shared knowledge, belief and values, and communicative strategies.” See Linda Hutcheon, *Irony’s Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995) 91.

<sup>168</sup>Carter, 374.

<sup>169</sup>Blunt, *Sicilian Baroque* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968).

<sup>170</sup>Family members of Victor Rothschild, a friend of Blunt’s, were among these visitors. In 1929 Rothschild lent Blunt £100 to purchase Poussin’s *Rebecca and Eliezer at the Well*. Carter, 87.

<sup>171</sup>See Whitney Davis, “Founding the Closet: Sexuality and the Creation of Art History,” *Art Documentation* 11.4 (Winter 1992): 171-75.

many other non-normative identities or cultural manifestations – by excluding merely circumstantial evidence in a context where the survival of direct evidence might have led to criminal prosecution.<sup>172</sup> This pattern is fed by, as Smalls puts it, “the notion that critical examination of the homoerotic constitutes simply an alternative revisionist reading or is nothing more than an attempt to see something or to invent something that isn’t really there.”<sup>173</sup> He continues: “The implication of this is, of course, that the heterocentrist clearly sees things that really are there.”<sup>174</sup> It would exhibit heteronormative bias to regard the absence of proof of Blunt’s familiarity with von Gloeden’s work as evidence against it. It is inferentially almost certain that he knew it well. Of greater importance, however, is how the multi-tiered production and reception of these images affected how Blunt would understand Poussin.

How are we to understand the relationship of Anthony Blunt’s self-division in the late 1930s to Arcadia? If his self-division is itself caused by the strong implication of his political ideas in his studies of art, it may therefore lie in the significance of Arcadia for those political ideas. The Marxist conception of what is called ‘primitive communism’ may be regarded as the issue in the thought of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels that best organizes and provides a conceptual bridge between mythological Arcadia and Blunt’s communist political views. It is common today to speak of academic or theoretical Marxism; but Blunt was a Marxist only insofar as he was a communist. Strains of Marxist thinking certainly held appeal for him, as in the dialectical ideas of Frederick Antal on the

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<sup>172</sup> James Smalls, “Making Trouble for Art history: The Queer case of Girodet,” *Art Journal* 55.4 (Winter 1996): 23-24. The acceptability of von Gloeden’s work in some circles did not make it safe to possess. Pancrazio Bucini, von Gloeden’s lifelong partner, was prosecuted by the Fascist authorities in 1933 for possession of homosexual pornography. Although the police destroyed von Gloeden’s thousands of glass plate negatives, amazingly, Bucini was acquitted. (Aldrich 146-7.) Italy has had a tradition of fiercely independent magistrates and Fascist rule under the Kingdom of Italy was never total.

<sup>173</sup> Smalls, 24.

<sup>174</sup> Smalls, *Ibid.*



interplay of classicism and romanticism; but, for Blunt, Marxism was appealing because it was a visionary *political* project. The political theory of Marx and Engels included the view that the future phases of socialism and communism would recapitulate early states of social organization that had been brought into existence and destroyed by successive divisions of labour.<sup>175</sup> Adapting the ideas of the cultural-evolutionary anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan, Engels proposed in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) that, universally, at the beginning of all social history all property was held in common. The book was based on notes Marx had made while reading Morgan's *Ancient Society* (1877). Engels used Morgan's ideas of social evolution as an argument for the project of socialism.<sup>176</sup> This served, in effect, to reverse Morgan's system of valuation while keeping its structure. Progress was the central theme of Morgan, whereas in Engels's view these successive phases became a kind of descent into economic and social injustice. "Primitive" becomes a term not of disparagement in Engels, but rather carries a sense of being foundational. Communism is a state of affairs to which Engels believes we can return.

Critical for Engels's study, clearly, is the evolution of the family structure. In Engels's study the structure of sexual pairings becomes key, moving, in turn, from free love to male-dominated polygamy to strict monogamy.<sup>177</sup> Significantly, Engels's understands the institution of monogamy as inseparable from widespread prostitution, indicating that it is therefore the most generally oppressive of all historical family

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<sup>175</sup>See Eleanor Burke Leacock, "Introduction" in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and The State: In Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan* by Friedrich Engels, trans. Alec West (New York: International Publishers, 1972) 7-68.

<sup>176</sup>See Burke, 15.

<sup>177</sup>See Engels, 113.

structures.<sup>178</sup> He writes: “have we not seen that in the modern world monogamy and prostitution are indeed contradictions, but inseparable contradictions, poles of the same state of society?”<sup>179</sup> Eventually, as society approaches a state of communism, Engels is coy about whether monogamy would vanish again, as his theory tends to suggest, but he consoles his readers with the observation that the new state of affairs (so to speak) “will tend infinitely more to make men really monogamous than to make women polyandrous” before adding that “what will quite certainly disappear from monogamy are all the features stamped upon it through its origin in property relations; these are, in the first place, supremacy of the man, and, secondly, indissolubility.”<sup>180</sup> We do not know if Blunt was familiar with this text. It was not published in English until 1942 but it was available in German, of course, and Blunt read German well. My point is to assert that these ideas and these ways of understanding an original state of nature and its relationship to human sexuality was important within communist thought. The idea of a lost state of social community without encumbering property and where there is substantial sexual freedom is, of course, very like the utopia envisioned in the Arcadian tradition in poetry and visual art. Engels even discusses the tradition of pastoral poetry himself.<sup>181</sup> Although he does not link it with Primitive Communism, it can be linked; for Engels sees the pastoral idyll as the home of the outcast, the person who does not fit into the erotic order of the dominant hierarchical and patriarchal society. (Engels does not discuss homosexual sex

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<sup>178</sup>Ibid., 138-9.

<sup>179</sup>Ibid., 139.

<sup>180</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>181</sup>Engels associates it with illicit sexuality, emerging as one of the few abodes for real love affairs. He writes: “The shepherds of whose joys and sorrows in Love Theocritus and Moschus sing, the Daphnis and Chloe of Longus, are all slaves who have no part in the state, the free citizens’ sphere of life. Except among slaves, we find love affairs only as products of the disintegration of the old world and carried on with women [...who...] stand outside of official society. [...] If there were real love affairs between free men and free women, these occurred only in the course of adultery.” Ibid., 140.

or love, *per se*, but he does add the tart observation that for the poet Anacreon “sexual love in our sense mattered so little that it did not even matter to him which sex his beloved was.”)<sup>182</sup>

For Engels, those outside of official society remain as a kind of relic of earlier less-circumscribed modes of affection, even if they remain so only as slaves within an exploitative system. Otherwise, they may be sexual outlaws; but dispossession can have corresponding freedoms, in other domains. The idea of an early state of primitive communism, which reflects however dimly the highly civilized state of communism to come, provides a model for understanding what the thematic of Arcadia might have meant to Anthony Blunt in political terms. It becomes an encapsulation of a utopian vision fully compatible with his political Marxism. That that same tradition also provides an equation of this utopia with a homosexual idyll only means that the organizing vision was one that could encompass every aspect of his manifold identities. But that it could encompass them does not mean that it was in the business of resolving them, or of making them congruent or of eliminating their points of tension. It is precisely the presence of what, in an ontology of self-sameness, appear to be contradictions and of tension between diverse elements that makes Blunt’s way queer.

As a consequence of his splitting his life and work into the multiple tiers of homosexual, art historian, and Soviet spy, Anthony Blunt could achieve in division coherence. The emergent crisis of his critical engagement with art could be dispelled and every aspect of the resulting structure was purer and more authentic in its own way. Blunt, I argue, achieves not only duplicity (or multiplicity) but duality or multiple reality. This kind of coherence can be realized if the oppressive requirement of simple

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<sup>182</sup>Ibid.

consistency is removed. That simple consistency would benefit a heteronormative order. Blunt's new kind of self-divergent coherence, therefore, can and should be called queer.

Blunt does not project this multiplicity into Poussin. He is careful, as we observed in Chapter 1, to make Poussin seem coherent, indeed more coherent than he was. All along, however, there has been another possibility, as I shall explore in Part Two: that it is Poussin's artwork which has been instrumental in framing this multiplicity. Blunt's multiplicity is not a cause of it, but mirrors it and may even be one of its effects.

Poussin's art, its concerns and its style, is unusually reflected in the choices that Blunt has made, in the paths he has followed, both in the realm of art history and outside it, and in his attitudes and outlook. Poussin's art may project an effect which rebounds in Blunt, like an echo, to negatively determine, to a considerable extent, the image of Poussin that we have today. In Part Two I investigate whether we can reclaim (and not invent) a queer Poussin.

**PART TWO: A QUEER POUSSIN**

### CHAPTER 3: QUEER BODIES

The second part of this thesis explores queerness in Poussin. I start from a base of issues concerning identity and sexuality, investigating these in Poussin's early work, and I go on to examine how these issues become encoded in Poussin's overall pictorial and thematic approaches. I shall proceed from discussing the body as queer in a number of Poussin's early and sensuous paintings. Here, I argue, a homoerotic sensibility is imported from the Arcadian literary tradition. This nascent queer approach is then adapted to become a way of imagining transformation and instability. Later on, in the final chapter, I shall explore how, developing further, such a queer approach becomes encoded, much more abstractly, in certain constructions of queer space. This chapter, meanwhile, investigates how the Arcadian thematic develops in Nicolas Poussin's art in a way that rightly may be called 'queer'. It also explores how this development goes on to open up queer possibilities beyond the Arcadian realm. The tradition of the mythological landscape, of which the nominally Arcadian is really but one facet,<sup>1</sup> comes into Nicolas Poussin's work, in part, via Venetian painting<sup>2</sup> and, in part, via the poet Giambattista Marino (1569-1625). A homoerotic subtext may have been imported from this latter source. Any homoeroticism, however, arrives in Poussin's work only in a half-articulated state. This qualified,

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<sup>1</sup>Generic boundaries tend to ebb and flow in the history of art but, even from classical times, landscape settings become preferred settings for scenes from mythology – scenes such as the Judgment of Paris, Actaeon, or Polyphemus and Galatea, scenes in which tragic ends are either depicted or anticipated. These subjects would become favourites again in sixteenth- and seventeenth century painting. And, even from ancient times, the Arcadian thematic (especially in connection with its elegiac possibilities) overlaps and intrudes upon this terrain. From early on, as noted in Chapter 2, death was a primary thematic concern in Arcadian scenes and the landscape world of Arcadia is largely the same world in which the Gods and mortals interact, usually to the mortals' detriment. See Christopher M. Dawson, *Romano-Campanian Mythological Landscape Painting*, *Yale Classical Studies*, IX (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944).

<sup>2</sup>See Chapter 2.

checked or potential homoeroticism, I argue, is queer (queer because it confounds and relies on its obscurities) and establishes and conditions the destabilizing sexualisation of Arcadia. Three centuries later, these developments will hold a queer potential for the likes of Anthony Blunt. Beginning in Arcadia but extending well beyond it, Poussin develops a queer approach which may be seen in many of his works.

What are the parameters of this queerness, how is it manifested, and how does it become evident and visible? I turn now from looking at Blunt, and looking at Poussin through the lens of Blunt, to a reinterpretation of Poussin using a contemporary queer approach. In this chapter, and in the next, I shall look at the development of certain strategies in Poussin's work, a collection of pictorial, symbolic and compositional concerns through which queerness is articulated. This queer expression emerges as an approach to deal with the body, initially the bodies of young men, although it ends up having a far broader application. It first appears in some works made in the late 1620s, especially in *Echo and Narcissus* (1627). Through their emplacement within a given pictorial space, queer bodies resist the formal enclosures established around them in these paintings but I contend that this handling is not merely formal. Poussin's thematic handling of his subjects, the mythological, historical or poetical scenes his paintings portray, display early on a highly characteristic homology between composition, structure, and thematic content.<sup>3</sup> I call this whole approach queer because the artist's very techniques of representation have their origin in an instability of identities and desires

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<sup>3</sup>Poussin uses his compositional arrangements and even the objecthood of his works to reinforce thematic ideas. See David Carrier, "A Classical Artist in a Society of the Spectacle," in *Poussin's Paintings: A Study in Art-Historical Methodology* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993) 207-243. See also (in particular reference to Poussin's use of composition to reflect themes in *The Capture of Jerusalem by Titus*) Oskar Bätschmann, *Nicolas Poussin: Dialectics of Painting*, trans. Marko Daniel (London: reaction Books, 1990) 70.

that are, at their root, sexual. To rely upon an analogy with psychoanalysis, this queerness in Poussin may begin as an attempt to repress the homoerotic potential in certain subjects but it ends by sublimating it. Themes of masculine narcissism, voyeurism, pansexuality, bacchanalian abandon, metamorphosis and the consistent failure of a heterosexual erotic ideal all indicate a set of queer concerns. In these two final chapters, I propose a progressive development in Poussin's themes that, by degrees, expands from such manifestly queer subjects and distils them into an outlook on unstable identity that is as philosophical<sup>4</sup> and psychological as it is erotic (which is also how queer theory has been understood). As it develops, Poussin's queerness encompasses more than depictions of bodies and extends, increasingly over time, to depictions of spaces, places and landscapes, a shift in concerns that has been an often-recognized tendency in Poussin's artistic development. Indeed, as Poussin's intellectual interests become more dominant in his painting, so does the place of landscape.<sup>5</sup> Keith Christiansen points out that, as he turns more and more to landscape, Poussin's interest in philosophical treatises and literary allegories of natural phenomena increases correspondingly. He writes: "Poussin's intention [was] to re-create a truthful visual experience of the processes of nature and not just mere appearances."<sup>6</sup> He continues: "These pictures all date from after Poussin's return from Rome in 1642, and it is in the last two decades of his life that his interest in landscape painting – present since the very beginning [...] – crescendos."<sup>7</sup> My

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<sup>4</sup>Here I find it appropriate to repeat, to a different purpose, Blunt's original caveat that Poussin's philosophy has not the systematic rigour that a real philosopher would demand of the term but refers, instead, to his abiding interest in the representation of certain philosophical ideas. See Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967) 4.

<sup>5</sup>See, for example, Keith Christiansen, "On the Critical Fortunes of Poussin's Landscapes," in *Poussin and Nature: Arcadian Visions* (New York, New Haven and London: The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2008) 16.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.



contribution will be to show that this development carries away with it an element that remains queer.

This chapter looks at some of Poussin's earlier works, from the 1620s and 1630s, ones in which the articulation of queer instabilities in identity are organized around the depictions of bodies in various ways. (The next chapter looks at works generally later in Poussin's *oeuvre*, where the organizing articulation is based on the depiction of spaces.) Before proceeding further, however, I must address the appropriateness of using the category 'queer' in the first place, for works of this kind and from this period. This chapter, consequently, will consist of three parts. In the first, I argue for the appropriateness of an early modern deployment of the concept queer. In the second, I examine certain early works by Poussin that illustrate how a queer element is first articulated through the use of individual bodies. This discussion will focus on – but still expand from – one central example, Poussin's *Echo and Narcissus*, a work that I argue must be understood in terms of Poussin's association with the person and poetry of Giambattista Marino. In the third and final part, I expand this reading to apply it to somewhat later, mature paintings, where a queer approach is articulated through the interplay of different bodies and groups of bodies in more complex pictorial compositions. This last section will look at another painting in depth, *Bacchanal before a Herm of Pan* (1632-33). Over the course of the following discussions, I shall be relating my observations – orienting them, one may say – to ideas and concerns found in queer theory and in related philosophical and theoretical approaches, particularly in semiotics as it relates to intertextuality in the thought of Julia Kristeva, and in the critique of

identity in the thought of Gilles Deleuze. First, however, the validity, or at least the plausibility, of this queer approach must be established.

### Queer Early Modern?

Queer theory has been used almost exclusively in the context of sexuality and gender studies to show that seemingly solid categories of identity are artificial and contingent.<sup>8</sup> In cultural histories, its scope of application has tended, until recently, to drop off proportionally according to how far back in time the research area is located; it has mostly been applied to contemporary art and culture. That has begun to change. Recent scholarship demonstrates its relevance to early modern topics, revealing the potential of a broader deployment. This broadening of scope finds greater ranges of historical applicability and tends to expand upon a concern with matters of subjectivity, sexual identities, and their various performances.<sup>9</sup> Whereas an established academic dispute has concerned whether and how a homosexual identity may be said to exist prior to the nineteenth century invention of the category of homosexual,<sup>10</sup> new scholarship in the last several years proposes that the concept 'queer' is one particularly well placed to make sense of what are otherwise conundrums for readers of early modern texts.<sup>11</sup> It may even be that the early modern period, as a whole, is queer in some sense, that it combines within itself and is unable to resolve differences in a manner analogous to how queer

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<sup>8</sup>See Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, Ed. H. Abelove et al (New York and London: Routledge, 1993) 307-320. See also Chapter 1.

<sup>9</sup>Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990) 142-9. As my focus is upon the instance rather than upon the capacity of enactments of identity, I prefer 'performance' to the typical 'performativity'.

<sup>10</sup>See David Halperin, "Homosexuality: A Cultural Construct, an Exchange with Richard Schreiber," in *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990) 41-53.

<sup>11</sup>See, especially, Carla Freccero, *Queer / Early / Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

theory argues gender identity runs on and is characterized by difference.<sup>12</sup> This is an idea that has been floated in relation to some other cultural epochs also, as evidenced in Whitney Davis's remark about the art historian of the Middle Ages, that "Michael Camille didn't queer the Middle Ages, the Middle Ages queered Michael Camille."<sup>13</sup> Davis, at the same time, also developed a category that may prove important for distinguishing what, within the scope of queer inquiry, need not be homoerotic but may be organized, in part, around such a potentiality. He called work such as that Camille was working on not 'queer,' but "Not-not-homosexual."<sup>14</sup>

There has been, as I have just noted, a scholarly debate about the nature and even the existence of homosexuality in the early modern period or any other period before the coming into existence of the category homosexual in the nineteenth century. Few mean to deny or dismiss the presence of homoerotic sensibilities or homosexual practices and desires prior to the coining of the term, of course. Rather, a desire for careful historicity has usually inspired this caution. The debate has been productive. A key contribution was that of Michael Foucault who, in his 1976 *Histoire de la Sexualité*, had written: "The nineteenth century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology [...] The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species."<sup>15</sup> This

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<sup>12</sup>Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 145.

<sup>13</sup>Whitney Davis, *Annual Meeting of the College Art Association (CAA)*, Chicago, Illinois, 13 Feb., 2010.

<sup>14</sup>Davis, *CAA*. The foil mentioned was the work of Jacques-Louis David, which he characterized as merely "not-homosexual," although, in some works, that might prove susceptible to counterargument.

<sup>15</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978) 43. The original text reads: "L'homosexuel du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle est devenu un personnage: un passé, une histoire, et une enfance, un caractère, une forme de vie; une morphologie aussi [...] Le sodomite était un relaps, l'homosexuel est maintenant une espèce." *Histoire de la sexualité I: La Volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976) 59. This debate is well summarized in the introduction to Gary Ferguson's *Queer (Re)readings in the French Renaissance: Homosexuality, Gender, Culture* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2008) 1-16.

distinction between the earlier category of the sodomite and the current category of the homosexual seemed, as Gary Ferguson has put it, “to foreclose the existence and consequently the possibility of studying homosexuals [as distinct from sodomites] in earlier periods.”<sup>16</sup> David Halperin’s 1990 book *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* was influential in entrenching this Foucauldian idea (homosexuality’s novelty) and it became emblematic of the challenge posed by Queer Theory that both parts of this formulation came under its critique: namely, the view of homosexuality’s nineteenth century ‘discovery’ serves unduly to dismiss or diminish earlier manifestations; but it also unduly reifies a homosexuality that, from a queer point of view, is a contingent effect of discourses and not the stable identity category posited by academic Gay and Lesbian Studies.<sup>17</sup> This critique was articulated by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. She has written that “an unfortunate side effect of this move has been to underwrite the notion that ‘homosexuality as we conceive it today’ itself comprises a coherent definitional field rather than a space of overlapping, contradictory, and conflictual definitional forces.”<sup>18</sup> In 2002 Halperin responded, on the one hand defending the thesis of contemporary homosexuality’s coherence, but also suggesting that prior to this new category there were four other distinct categories that did sometimes overlap and that could coexist, but need

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<sup>16</sup>Ferguson, 1. There have been challenges to this formulation. In an essay published in the *Journal of Homosexuality*, J. Cady, a psychologist interested in culture and the history of homosexuality makes an opposite case to Halperin’s claims of the non-existence of a category of homosexual person prior to the nineteenth century. He reviews the work of Foucault and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and argues it tends to obscure a historical Renaissance understanding of genuine homosexuals. Although the name may date from the nineteenth century, Cady argues that a kind of love occasionally called “masculine love” clearly indicated homosexuality and came packaged with the sense that there were those with a pronounced or even prohibitive interest in it. See J. Cady, “Masculine Love: Renaissance Writing and the ‘New Invention’ of Homosexuality,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 23 (1992): 9-40. (A story of a man devoted exclusively to homosexual relations is also to be found in the tale of Pietro di Vinciolo in Boccaccio’s *Decameron*. See Ferguson, 55-56.)

<sup>17</sup>See below for how this concept of queerness has affinities with the thought of Gilles Deleuze.

<sup>18</sup>Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990) 45. Sedgwick looks upon the new category of homosexuality as just one more level of “historical accretion.” (Ferguson, 4).

not do: effeminacy, (Greek-type) pederasty (including any active sodomy), male love (including passionate friendship), and passive sodomy or inversion.<sup>19</sup> Halperin acknowledged that the earlier formulation was too restrictive and that there were “continuities, identifications, and queer correspondences between past and present.”<sup>20</sup> Indeed, he went further and wondered whether their examination might not yield a proper genealogy of the new category of homosexuality.<sup>21</sup> This itself drew upon the work of a new participant in the debate, Carla Freccero, who in a 1999 article had asked whether there might be “a way to explore the history of sex in premodernity as a genealogy of modernity’s discourses on sexuality?”<sup>22</sup>

This scholarly debate has produced an enriched sense of the various histories that pertain to homosexuality. It has also, usefully, depended more on the term queer as a larger, general category. Queers, that is queer individuals, may include homosexuals but it is a more ecumenical category, largely defining those to whom it applies negatively, in terms of how they do not fit into a normative order, and not positively, as a distinct species with certain fixed, common qualities.<sup>23</sup> If the homosexual is a species, the queer is perhaps the genus. Concerning queer individuals, Sara Ahmed writes: “For a life to count as a good life, then it must return the debt of its life by taking on the direction promised as a social good, which means imagining one’s futurity in terms of reaching certain points along life’s course. A queer life might be one that fails to make such

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<sup>19</sup>Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002) 109.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>21</sup>Ferguson, 6.

<sup>22</sup>Carla Freccero, “Acts, Identities, and Sexuality’s (Pre)Modern Regimes,” *Journal of Women’s History* 11.2 (1999): 188.

<sup>23</sup>A ‘positive’ definition of queerness might depend upon a philosophy grounded in difference rather than in identity. See the discussion of Deleuze and *Difference and Repetition*, below (section iii)

gestures of return.”<sup>24</sup> The queer, characterized by this ‘failure’, can be understood to be the general class, with the tight definitional limits of certain more precise identities being subsets of it. The relatively new category homosexual, then, is but one of a great many queer possibilities. Queerness implies a certain separation from the organizing norm of a society. Understood this way, queerness may concern but need not be reduced to sexuality or gender. And it represents, for the organizing norm, a disturbing surplus, a proof that the norm is not perfectly conceived. Queerness is a broken link in the social chain, a failure to come full circle, an anomalous independence, and a disturbing proof of individual freedom.<sup>25</sup> It resists subordination and it defies classification. It is precisely, as Annamarie Jagose defines it, “a zone of possibilities.”<sup>26</sup> A queer thing refuses to make its ‘gestures of return’ by not settling upon any stable form, which would allow its easy assimilation into a normative scheme.

In what way, then, could a whole epoch be described as queer? In the case of Whitney Davis’s remark about Michael Camille and the Middle Ages, it would seem that Davis suggests a given period of study may itself turn the work of scholarly interpretation inside out, apparently reversing the roles of the agent and the object of an interpretive act. A queer epoch may undermine the original normative patterns of thought that were brought to it and it is that effect itself that makes the epoch queer. The sense of queer here is not adjectival but verbal; the period in question is active, it *queers*. A queer epoch

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<sup>24</sup>Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006) 21. Ahmed, of course, does not seek to characterize a queer life as a bad life but rather to explain how it may be construed as bad in certain normative discourses.

<sup>25</sup>The conception of anomaly found in Deleuzian thought, again, is very close to a positive account of queerness (the negative variant in this schema would be abnormality): “The abnormal can be defined only in terms of characteristics, specific or generic; but the anomalous is a position or a set of positions in relation to a multiplicity.” Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) 244.

<sup>26</sup>Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1996) 2.

is one that may be revealed to undermine or resist some dominant form of historical understanding. While this does mean that any epoch is potentially queer in relation to others, this problem is largely unrealized. It is an interesting puzzle for the historian, plausible but ultimately irrelevant, perhaps akin to a historical counterfactual. We do have particular normative histories. We might have had others (and we might still have them someday) but, for the time being, we have only those ones that we have. Similarly, in a homonormative social order, straightness would be queer. David Halperin describes its potential breadth this way:

Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence. ‘Queer’ then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative.<sup>27</sup>

But we are not in a homonormative social order and so straightness is normative, and homosexuality (among other things) is queer. Some see queerness as radically opposed to normativity, as such. Gavin Brown writes: “Queer is [...] more than an umbrella term for all those who are ‘othered’ by normative sexuality. Indeed ‘queer’ [can be] as opposed to homonormativity as it is to heteronormativity.”<sup>28</sup> Queer is, first, a term to designate that which does not fit into the dominant order. Davis’s remark presumably refers to how Camille’s scholarship responded to the playfulness found in medieval marginalia, to the open performance of things that cannot be acknowledged and, therefore, go uncriticized and uncondemned, and to the inherent multiple and unreconciled differences in the

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<sup>27</sup>David M. Halperin, *Saint = Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) 62.

<sup>28</sup>Gavin Brown, “Autonomy, Affinity and Play in the Spaces of Radical Queer Activism,” in *Geographies of Sexualities: Theory, Practices and Politics*, ed. Kath Browne, Jason Lim and Gavin Brown (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) 196.

Middle Ages.<sup>29</sup> A normative Middle Ages can be found, of course, and it usually has been. But what Camille finds in the Middle Ages was there all along. Queer epochs are those that have been found to be queer or to have queered their interpreters. Any precise definition of what would make a queer epoch, however, would precisely miss the point: Queerness is the slippage out of fixed definitions.

In Carla Freccero's investigation of the early modern period, in the 2006 book *Queer / Early / Modern*, a whole epoch is similarly viewed as queer. Freccero considers that the early modern period and, in particular, its written traditions (she is addressing Shakespeare at this point) haunt and challenge later formulations of European history. She asserts that "early modern European textuality proleptically anticipates queer theory and queers modernity."<sup>30</sup> Her approach is modelled on an opposition of *prolepsis* and *metalepsis*, that is, a disarming anticipation of an objection (*prolepsis*) versus a later interpretation depending on an earlier one, akin to interpretive hindsight (*metalepsis* in her formulation).<sup>31</sup> Freccero characterizes what she calls the psychoanalytic dimension of Queer Theory to be metaleptic, that is, an interpretation made long after the fact (and one that entails no special challenge to historical methods).<sup>32</sup> In doing this, she proposes, psychoanalysis goes wrong. "Psychoanalytic interpretation," she writes, "performs a *metalepsis* on early modernity, belatedly attributing a cause (subjectivity) to what is, in

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<sup>29</sup>Such things are the concerns of so much of Camille's scholarship. See, for example, Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

<sup>30</sup>Freccero, *Queer / Early / Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) 3.

<sup>31</sup>The standard formulation of *metalepsis* diverges from Freccero's use and refers, rather, to a novel figure of speech that presumes some other, familiar figure of speech, for example: "if you can't think of anything nice to say, write it in your diary" (a substitution for "if you can't think of anything nice to say, don't say anything at all.") Freccero's use of *prolepsis* is standard (for rhetoric). In poetry, it is what today would often be described, with the advent of cinema, as a 'flashforward'. (Note: a 'flashback' would be *analepsis*.)

<sup>32</sup>Freccero, *Queer / Early / Modern*, 2.



fact, an effect (of culture).”<sup>33</sup> Her proleptic use of queer theory, however, posits that early modern texts queer the norms later established in modern historiography. She sees this as a much more fundamental challenge to established historical methodology, characterizing it as a “critique of historicism itself.”<sup>34</sup> In effect, her approach proposes that early modernity does not exist outside of its various historical receptions (including its contemporary reception) and that the textual concerns of early modernity trouble these historicist accounts of the epoch. Her exposure of this becomes, she admits, “perversely anachronistic” according to what she terms the “pieties” of traditional history.<sup>35</sup> A queer historiography, then, is one that takes from the work of more ‘pious’ historical approaches but does not make the expected gestures of return. It leaves itself open, like a speculation, and does not close itself neatly. While it may lay bare a great deal, it does not account for (and thereby stabilize) all of its destabilizing effects. A queer epoch, then, is contingent: it is queer only in so far as it queers but, then again, relative to some others, it lends itself to such destabilizations as well.

Freccero’s usual focus in her study of queer early modernity is that part of the period – the first two of its roughly three centuries – typically called the ‘Renaissance’. Poussin’s era, the seventeenth century, is usually included in the category early modern but not generally that of the Renaissance. Of course, such periodising is simplifying and distorting but some remarks on this discrepancy may be helpful. Seventeenth century Rome was the centre of the Baroque world, antithetical to most Renaissance values because it valued feeling over reason, faith over inquiry, authority over new discovery,

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 1.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid. She means by this that she borrows freely from mainstream histories of the period in order to undermine their foundations, an approach which reveals her debt to deconstruction.

and the collectivity over the individual.<sup>36</sup> All of these characteristics are to be found in the art predominating in Baroque Europe and the style generally called Baroque. This period was also the crucible of a quite different style and approach, the classicism that would overtake France in this epoch and that was, to a considerable extent, the survival of Renaissance values into the Baroque cultural environment.<sup>37</sup> This classicism evolved in large part among a number of French expatriate painters living or sojourning in Rome. Foremost among these was Nicolas Poussin. Poussin's work may be seen to exemplify the partial survival of what Freccero deems to be queer.

The decades around the year 1600 were a time of unusually intense change for European civilization. The Counter Reformation, quickly expanding overseas empires, and contradictory centralizing and decentralizing political forces made for an age of great instability. Poussin himself evinced an interest in the tumultuous events of his time, for themselves as well as for how they could enrich the themes of his paintings. He also explicitly links such important events to an interpretation of them as drama, for which there might, therefore, be spectatorship. In one important letter dated 17 January 1649 to his patron Paul Fréart de Chantelou Poussin mentions the looming trial of Charles I of England. He writes:

Nous avons icy de bien étranges nouvelles d'Angleterre. [...] Dieu veuille, par sa grâce, préserver notre France de ce qui la menace. Nous sommes icy, Dieu scait comment. Cependans c'est un grand plaisir de vivre en un siècle là où il se passe de si grande chose, pourveu que l'on

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<sup>36</sup>Of course, reason, inquiry, new discovery and individualism all characterize the Baroque era as well but they tended to be opposed by its cultural mainstream and they were very often repressed by its authorities. For a seminal study of the role of individualism in the Renaissance see Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (New York: Random House / The Modern Library, 2002), especially "Chapter 2: The Development of the Individual," 93-121. Burckhardt's thesis has sometimes been expanded to suggest that subjectivity itself, and certainly its cultural and political centrality as seen in the development of monocular linear perspective, portrait likenesses and the development of the written signature, is an early modern construction.

<sup>37</sup>Carrier, 215-216.

puisse mettre à couvert en quelque petit coin pour voir la Comédie à son aise.

[We have here some pretty strange news from England. God willing, by his grace, save our France from that which menaces her. God knows how we got here. And yet it's a great pleasure to live in a century where such great things are happening, provided one can hide away in a small corner to watch the Comedy at one's ease.]<sup>38</sup>

It is clear, therefore, not only that Poussin was aware of this instability, and affected by it, but even that he looked upon it as a proper object of intellectual contemplation, one that might well be related to his often intellectual and contemplative art. As both the central artist representing the survival of an older, more typically Renaissance, approach to painting and an observer content, in his quiet corner, to reflect upon the instabilities of his age, Poussin is especially well placed to be, within the seventeenth century, something queer.

A theatrical focus on differences between things often characterizes Baroque art as a whole: dark and light are often at their maximum contrast, spaces are ruptured, asymmetrical, and swirling movements organize space. In contrast, seventeenth century French classicism in painting internalizes difference itself and thereby makes its tensions apparent and intelligible. The order and balance found in this classicism is the lucidity that makes legible a focus and meditation on difference and the effects of change. Baroque painting's drama, contrastingly, releases all its tension and serves as a catharsis for the strains building up in an age facing major change and often trying to resist that

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<sup>38</sup>Nicolas Poussin to Paul Fréart de Chantelou, Jan. 17, 1649. Quoted in T.J. Clark, *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006) 182, and in Nicolas Poussin, *Lettres et propos sur l'art*, ed. Anthony Blunt (Paris, Herman, 1964) 135. Translation by author (first two sentences) and (thereafter) by T.J. Clark (Clark, *ibid.*). Curiously, in his 1967 *Nicolas Poussin*, Blunt mistakenly attributes Poussin's reference as being to the execution of Charles I. The King's trial did not occur until January 20, and his beheading not until January 30, events occurring after the date of Poussin's letter. See Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, 169.

change.<sup>39</sup> Difference is found in Poussin's paintings through the representation of troubled erotic relationships, through mythological transformations, and, later, through his spatial depictions – how, for instance, time and space are often collapsed in his history paintings' urban scenes or in his interpretation of the classical historical landscape genre.

Freccero looks beyond Renaissance texts, however. Despite her focus there, she also looks at the social world of seventeenth-century France, with which Poussin was in dialogue notwithstanding his self-imposed exile in Rome. In her fourth chapter, "Queer Nation: Early / Modern France," Freccero proposes that certain central reforms in France had a queer aspect. Nascent French nationalism, she argues, was characterized by the emergent class of the *noblesse de robe* (hereditary bureaucrats and magistrates who could secure their positions as a birthright for their heirs). This new nobility worked to redefine French marriage law as the law of the state (which ensured their rights) and diminish the role of church canon law within French social life. This class, under the rising absolutist state, idealized a cultivated subjectivity freed from church influence as a blissful state of homosocial love, she argues, where French men of letters with state posts exchanged power and shared belonging through a new social order that sidelined the women (their sisters and daughters), who were the currency of their exchanges. This new order rejected both the internationalism of traditional church structures and the authority of the great

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<sup>39</sup>This stylistic feature could provide an explanation for the oft-observed tendency of classical styles to be preferred by emergent political classes, in the Renaissance and in the late eighteenth century, whereas the Baroque style and styles derived from it are often preferred by authoritarian or established power elites (see the discussion of Blunt and Friedrich Antal in Chapter 2). Catharsis provides an outlet for political and social frustration, while drama provides a distraction from it.

nobility (in France, the traditional *noblesse de l'épée*).<sup>40</sup> In this new order race (that is, nationality), sex, and gender merge into an autoerotic fantasy of French self-sameness from which later manifestations, from the Napoleonic Code to outbreaks of official xenophobia, would derive.<sup>41</sup> It was from among just this emergent class that Poussin drew so many of his French patrons. (The Poussin scholar Todd Olson, for instance, links Poussin's intellectual world with that of these French patrons and argues that, despite Poussin's life spent abroad, his influence derives from how in tune his concerns were with those of the society from which he had separated himself.)<sup>42</sup> Poussin's French connection links him to Freccero's concept of a queer early modernity as surely as do his Renaissance stylistics and theories.

David Carrier, meanwhile, argues that Poussin's position at the margins of Baroque Rome and away from France's increasingly absolutist regime makes his art – which he suggests is organized by separation between spectator and artwork, the objecthood of his paintings, and his interest in problematizing representation – the “negation of the baroque.”<sup>43</sup> Poussin's special position within this context could then become another queering element. If the early modern period is characterized by a marginal, or liminal, position vis-à-vis modernity proper, Poussin's peculiar position at the margins (though he is hardly ‘marginal’) adds a further dimension to his queerness. Drawing upon these observations by Freccero, Olson and Carrier, it seems clear that even

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<sup>40</sup>That is, the ‘nobility of the sword’. The showdown between the two factions would come in the mid-seventeenth century Fronde (1648-1653), the civil war that saw the King and the new nobility allied against the landed traditional nobility.

<sup>41</sup>See Freccero, *ibid.*, 54-64.

<sup>42</sup>See Todd Olson, *Poussin and France: Painting, Humanism and the Politics of Style* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002).

<sup>43</sup>Carrier, 241. This is Carrier's view; there are key counterexamples that would suggest some Baroque painting, Velazques's *Las Meninas* perhaps most famously, set out specifically to problematize representation. See Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses: une archeology des sciences humaines* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1966), 19-31.

though Poussin is not, strictly speaking, from the era or in the countries Freccero most directly addresses, he may still be regarded as a peculiarly appropriate exemplar of these three scholars' concerns.

Before moving on to Poussin's painting, however, it is important to assert that, while homosexuality is certainly not the same as queerness for the purposes of this discussion, aspects of homoerotic desire are still relevant to some of Poussin's early engagements with queerness. Therefore, some overview of the state of how homoeroticism was understood in Poussin's time and place and how that understanding is, in turn, understood (and understood differently) today, is worthwhile. This is the cultural context for what I contend is Poussin's initial engagement with queerness. Homoerotic feelings, reversals of gender, and misplacements of love (when 'true' gender is disguised) are widely seen in Renaissance culture. The period's well-known love of masques would seem to disclose *prima facie* an enthusiasm for changeable performances of identity.<sup>44</sup> This has been a particularly fruitful area of research within Shakespeare studies, for example.<sup>45</sup> It is clear, however, that the context of France and Italy should be especially important for Poussin, being French and living for most of his working life in Italy except for a two-year return to France, from late 1640 to early 1643. Just as important, I think, is to consider in what ways he encountered a sense of cultural identity that transcended time and place and, in particular, that related the classical past to his classicist present of the seventeenth century.

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<sup>44</sup>See David Bevington and Peter Holbrook, introduction, in Bevington and Holbrook, eds., *The Politics of the Stuart Court Masque* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 4.

<sup>45</sup>A line similar to that of Freccero is taken, for example, in Madhavi Menon, *Unhistorical Shakespeare: Queer Theory in Shakespearean Literature and Film* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).

Classicism, as an imaginative act of existing culturally in reference back to classical antiquity, was a phenomenon throughout Western Europe. It was also understood that widespread homosexual practices were embedded in this classical inheritance. In the twentieth century it has been common for homosexuals to understand themselves as constituting a kind of transnational brotherhood,<sup>46</sup> which undermines frontiers and makes of its local manifestations a sign of continuity or connection with things and people elsewhere and in other times. There may be a ‘queer nation’ but there have not really been ‘national homosexualities.’<sup>47</sup> In Poussin’s age, however, the situation was less clear. Gary Ferguson writes:

In Renaissance France, sodomy was associated in particular with Italy. While it is a perennial strategy of heteronormative discourse to posit sexual ‘deviance’ as belonging to the past or coming from elsewhere, historical evidence might suggest that forms of homosexual activity were particularly prevalent in Italian cities in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. [...] The ambivalence of French attitudes towards Italian culture in the Renaissance, divided between admiration and scorn, [...] acknowledges the primordial role played by Italy in the development and dissemination of [...] humanist culture. As such, it is a privileged destination for young men seeking education. [...] At the same time, [it was considered] that trips to Italy are often made for the wrong reasons and that principally what is learned there is vice, especially that vice which is worst of all.<sup>48</sup>

Meanwhile, homosexual acts were certainly not unknown in France itself<sup>49</sup> and the emerging class of early modern officialdom can be seen to be organized on (at least) homosocial lines, privileging affectionate male friendships.<sup>50</sup> Such affectionate male

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<sup>46</sup>Cf. ‘The Homintern.’ See Chapter 1.

<sup>47</sup>In isolated circumstances, highly nationalist (and even racist) male communities, usually paramilitary, have established widespread homosexual subcultures. These may have been dominant – but never general – within the organization. The best-known case in the twentieth century is probably the leadership circle of the *Sturmabteilung* (Hitler’s SA) under the leadership of the Ernst Röhm. Nevertheless, such groups have tended to regard homosexuality as incidental – not fundamental – to their (homosocial) male communities.

<sup>48</sup>Ferguson, 88-89.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 89.

<sup>50</sup>See above. Freccero, *ibid.*

friendships were praised in the famous essay *De l'amité*, by Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), a French courtier and politician and, as an essayist, an author of especial importance for Nicolas Poussin.

In his essay often rendered in English as “On Affectionate Relationships” Montaigne strikes a careful balance, celebrating mutual male love of a passionate and exclusive (and potentially irreplaceable) kind while avoiding approbation for any sinful sexual dimension. The essay, which relates his friendship with the dead poet (and magistrate) Étienne de La Boétie (1530-1563), is recognizably the account of a kind of love affair. When responding to the imaginary question why de La Boétie and himself were drawn to each other, he confessed he could only explain “because it was him, because it was me.”<sup>51</sup> And while he notes that “that alternative license of the Greeks is rightly abhorrent to our manners,”<sup>52</sup> in mentioning that they abhorred this ‘license,’ he implicitly confirms that it was not unthinkable, just not done. The entire project of Montaigne’s *Essays* (that is, his “attempts”) has been read as a work of mourning, as Montaigne’s own attempt to overcome the loss of his conversation partner, where the reader is made the surrogate for the dead de La Boétie.<sup>53</sup> This passionate ideal of friendship is one that Poussin knew and it figured in how he understood his friendships with patrons, such as Jean Fréart de Chantelou. Indeed, Montaigne’s *De l'amité* was Poussin’s model for ideal friendship, as Elizabeth Cropper and Charles Dempsey have demonstrated.<sup>54</sup> He cited this ideal of friendship while writing to Chantelou in a well-

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<sup>51</sup>Michel de Montaigne, “On Affectionate Relationships” in *Michel de Montaigne: The Complete Essays*, trans. Michael Andrew Screech (London: Penguin, 1991) 212.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>53</sup>Donald Frame, Introduction, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958) v-xiv.

<sup>54</sup>Elizabeth Cropper, and Charles Dempsey, *Nicolas Poussin: Friendship and the Love of Painting*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 182.



known dispute over his gift of a self-portrait to another patron, Jean Pointel.<sup>55</sup> This kind of friendship could be characterized by jealousy but, ideally, should be free of it.

Significantly, the portrait of the artist Poussin (his self-portrait) becomes a token for the man – and for the friend – himself. And it will be significant for my argument shortly that an artwork can act as a surrogate, or perhaps as currency, in the giving of oneself. This affectionate (if not erotic) investment in a work of art is not itself a part of what I shall explore as the queerness of Poussin. But it is among its conditions, a part of its background, and a big part of its plausibility.

Before moving on, however, I think it useful to establish a contrast with homoeroticism in the work of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571-1610), whose work would have been encountered by Poussin on his arrival in Rome in 1624. This is an example of what queerness in Poussin will *not* be. How are the issues of homoeroticism and queerness bound together with Poussin's relationship to the work of Caravaggio? No early modern artist has been so regularly associated with homoeroticism in recent decades. Yet a debate remains as to how it should be understood. Starting with Donald Posner's 1971 article "Caravaggio's Early Homo-Erotic works," it has been usual to accept that Caravaggio was inclined towards homosexual feelings himself.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, it has contributed to the bad boy reputation that helped spark a renewed interest in Caravaggio in the 1980s.<sup>57</sup> Before Posner, Walter Friedländer proposed that Caravaggio's dirty, dark and sensualized street urchins, eroticized even in their menace, unhealthiness

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 183-194.

<sup>56</sup>Donald Posner, "Caravaggio's Early Homo-Erotic works," *Arts Quarterly* (1971): 301-323. Earlier, Michael Kitson had declared Caravaggio's early paintings were made "by an artist of homosexual inclinations for patrons of similar tastes." Kitson, *The Complete Paintings of Caravaggio (Classics of World Art)* (London, 1969) 7.

<sup>57</sup>This fascination was fully established with Derek Jarman's 1986 film *Caravaggio*.

and poverty, figures whom the critic Robert Hughes has likened to “bits of rough trade,”<sup>58</sup> were evidence of a “depraved” personality.<sup>59</sup> Yet, even from the first, this matter has been in dispute.<sup>60</sup> A challenge to this now dominant view in favour of Caravaggio’s homosexuality is posed by Maurizio Calvesi who proposes that Caravaggio perhaps just catered – like a procurer – to the pederastic and class-discordant sexual tastes of his patrons, such as Cardinal del Monte.<sup>61</sup> For instance, Caravaggio’s plainly pederastic *Amor Vincit Omnia* (1602-3), [Fig.3.1] does the most since its fellow feather-on-thigh stroking referent, the bronze *David* of Donatello, to celebrate boy-love.<sup>62</sup> The detailing of the boy’s genitals is lasciviously precise and, in an anatomically doubtful contortion, they are raised so as to be displayed simultaneously with the crease between the boy’s left buttock and thigh. Surely, it could only be blindness not to see (and for that reason to deny) the manifest eroticism, almost verging on pornography,<sup>63</sup> that is on display here?

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<sup>58</sup>Robert Hughes, *Nothing If Not Critical: Selected Essays on Art and Artists* (New York: Knopf, 1990).

<sup>59</sup>Walter Friedländer, *Caravaggio Studies*, (Princeton, 1955) 117.

<sup>60</sup>David Carrier, “Homosexuality,” *Principles of Art History Writing* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991) 64. Carrier remarks that when Bernard Berenson observed that Caravaggio was “perhaps a homosexual” it led to a fierce rebuke from the scholar Roberto Longhi.

<sup>61</sup>Maurizio Calvesi, *Caravaggio* (Milan: Giunti, 1999) 14. Calvesi writes: «In realtà la presunta omosessualità del Caravaggio, utile ad aggiungere un tocco al quadro del suo ‘maledettismo’, è probabilmente solo un abbaglio; e questo discende da una discutibile esegesi di alcuni dipinti del primo periodo romano, che presentano figure effeminate o ritenute provocanti. A lungo, del resto, ci si è rifiutati (e molti ancora si rifiutano) di applicare al Caravaggio quella lettura secondo i codici ‘iconologici’ dell’epoca [...] Senza intendere il contesto dei simboli ogni scelta di figure o di oggetti appare come il frutto di un impulso immediato, orientando verso interpretazioni soggettive e modernizzanti.» [“Actually, the alleged homosexuality of Caravaggio, useful to add a certain finishing touch to the portrait of his ‘badness’, is probably just a mistake; and it follows from a questionable exegesis of some of the paintings of his first Roman period, which present effeminate figures or ones considered provocative. Ultimately, here I refuse (and many still refuse) to apply to Caravaggio himself that interpretation according to the ‘iconological’ codes of the time [...] Without understanding [or possibly ‘intending’ or ‘meaning’, if the subject is presumed to be Caravaggio] the context of the symbols, each choice of figures or objects seems to be the result of some immediate impulse, moving towards a subjective interpretation, and a modernizing one.”] Translation by author.

<sup>62</sup>Of Donatello’s *David*, James Saslow writes: “The feathery wing of Goliath’s helmet caressing the boy’s thigh almost to the groin recalls Jupiter’s eagle, as the boy recalls *Ganymede*: metaphorically, Goliath, like Jupiter and *Donatello*, has ‘lost his head’ over a handsome youth.” See James M. Saslow, *Pictures and Passions: A History of Homosexuality in the Visual Arts* (New York: Viking, 2001).

<sup>63</sup>This term, which can be loaded very differently, is used here to signal a distinction between those works that depict or directly imply sexual acts (or, as with this image, seem frankly and actively solicitous of

Nonetheless, the eroticism of this picture is disputed,<sup>64</sup> perhaps because the image's sheer flagrancy makes it too uncomfortable (for some) to accept.

Whatever in Poussin may be construed as queer will not rival the manifest homoeroticism of Caravaggio's art. In fact, it could be understood as a radical alternative to it. Caravaggio's tenebrism and his gritty realism established an influential approach to painting that has been described as "diametrically opposed" to Poussin's own.<sup>65</sup> Poussin's biographer André Félibien records that he "could not bear Caravaggio and said he had come into the world in order to destroy painting."<sup>66</sup> May we not, therefore, suppose that Poussin developed a similarly antithetical approach to certain of Caravaggio's themes, particularly to what, in Caravaggio, is prurient homoeroticism? Poussin meticulously theorizes an art that will stand against what he considers the vulgar aesthetic program of Caravaggio. May Poussin's intellectual approach similarly be understood as a subtler, queer alternative to Caravaggio's bawdy and brash homoerotic drama, just as his style is a reserved stylistic alternative to that of Caravaggio?

### The Queer Body (The Singular Figure)

Poussin's emergence as an artist in the early 1620s coincides with his friendship with a leading Italian poet then living in Paris, Giambattista Marino (1569-1625). Marino's

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them) and those I call simply "erotic," which merely elicit desire and seemingly do so 'passively'. The term is used throughout with no intended perjorative connotation whatsoever.

<sup>64</sup>Carrier, *ibid.*, 65. Carrier acknowledges how homoerotic the paintings appear to be today but his conclusion here is baffling to me. He asserts at the outset, of Caravaggio's putative homosexuality, that "[O]nly modern commentators make this claim." (64.) Well, of course! The argument seems to rest on the absence of documentary evidence of Caravaggio's homosexuality, on the one hand, and a strong bias against trusting visual evidence, on the other. For a scholar so comfortable with strongly speculative interpretation elsewhere, (See Carrier, *Poussin's Paintings*, 242, for instance) it is puzzling Carrier is so skeptical of the (contemporary) homoerotic appeal of Carravaggio's boy pictures.

<sup>65</sup>André Félibien, "Entretien VI." Quoted from Louis Marin, *To Destroy Painting*, trans. Mette Hjort (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995) 3.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*

relationship to Poussin is well-documented and often-mentioned but poorly understood. Marino was sick and bedridden in Paris when Poussin stayed with him – by his bedside – and entertained him with mythological drawings for a projected illustrated edition of his poem *Adone* [Adonis] as well as an edition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* that Marino would publish as editor.<sup>67</sup> (Neither project was realized.) It is clear that he was very impressed by the young Poussin and encouraged the painter to accompany him to Italy after his convalescence. Interestingly, Poussin declined, although he did follow the poet to Rome a year later, arriving only as Marino was to leave for Naples, where he died within the year.

Marino's fondness for Poussin has surprised some art historians. Konrad

Oberhuber writes:

The group of drawings considered to be those once owned by Marino has been thoroughly studied. There seems to be no doubt that in style and treatment of subject matter much is consistent with what we would expect of Poussin in his early Parisian years [...]. But even their strongest defenders, including Blunt, did not hesitate to call their execution "heavy and clumsy," something strange for an artist whom Marino apparently described as "*un giovane che a una furia di diavolo*" (a young man of extraordinary verve), which obviously meant virtuosity of execution.<sup>68</sup>

I doubt the obviousness of that. Today it seems more plausible – or at least more acceptable to propose – that Marino's esteem need not have been entirely of Poussin's work and artistic talent. Timothy Standring has pondered their relationship in a recent article in *Apollo*.<sup>69</sup> He writes:

I am convinced that Poussin's series of highly eroticised visualisations of Ovidian themes, the so-called Marino drawings [...] resulted from their excited bantering. Many have commented on Poussin's

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<sup>67</sup>Gerald Ackerman "Gian Battista Marino's Contribution to Seicento Art Theory" *The Art Bulletin* 43. 4 (Dec., 1961): 326.

<sup>68</sup>Konrad Oberhuber, *Poussin, the Early Years in Rome: The Origin of French Classicism* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1988) 31. The word '*giovane*' is not usually applied to a man already thirty.

<sup>69</sup>Timothy Standring, "Poussin's Erotica," *Apollo* (March, 2009): 82.

association with the poet, but no one so far has suggested the plausibility that the two might actually have conspired to conjure up such erotic imagery. *I wonder if perhaps they were lovers?*<sup>70</sup>

This would be by no means impossible and there is some (scant) circumstantial evidence for it. Marino was accused by a rival poet of homosexuality with young men and some of his sensitive treatments of figures such as Narcissus and Adonis, tragically beautiful boys, seem to invite this supposition.<sup>71</sup> Such barbs, however, would have been common enough among rival poets in Italy in that period. Meanwhile, Poussin is also established to have depicted homosexual lust in his very early drawings for Marino.<sup>72</sup> A drawing, called either *Allegorical Scene* or else *Choice between Virtue and Vice*, [Fig.3.2] contrasts a group Roman citizens, on the right, with a male nude with an open mouth who is being fed grapes (or being teased with them) by a satyr with a fully-erect penis, which is pointed directly at the youth's open mouth. It may be that this picture makes a statement against homosexual lasciviousness, although this is open to dispute. Todd Olson observes that Poussin has replaced a female character seen in one source with this male nude.<sup>73</sup> It is unlikely, however, that the point made by this substitution is that homosexuality was the only form of lascivious to be considered vice. Rather, a certain naturalness may even be taken for granted here. Heterosexuality has simply been removed from the equation. Olson explains that the two groups represent a contrast between possibilities of male-to-male behaviour. He writes: "lasciviousness and wantonness of bestial male-male carnal desire provides a significant foil to the regulated

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid. Emphasis added.

<sup>71</sup>James Mirollo, *The Poet of the Marvelous: Giambattista Marino* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1963) 12, 25-26.

<sup>72</sup>Todd Olson, *Poussin and France: Humanism and the Politics of Style* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002.) 54-55.

<sup>73</sup>The source is Annibale Carracci's *Choice of Hercules* (1596). Olson suggests the group of Roman figures are not necessarily models of virtue either but may also be "open to the accusation of passivity." Olson, 55. See *ibid.*, 255n65, as well.

conduct of a group of men from antiquity.”<sup>74</sup> Regardless of whether Poussin and Marino were lovers, when he was working for Marino, on at least this occasion, Poussin had homosexual sex on his mind. While Poussin was married and was apparently a devoted husband in later life, this would in no way diminish the plausibility of his own youthful homosexuality, especially in a late Renaissance context. Poussin’s marriage, though apparently loving, was not a love-match but rather an expression of the painter’s social bond to a friend’s family.<sup>75</sup> It may well have been a dutiful and not a passionate love. In any case, a homosexual affair hardly needs to have happened for a homoerotically-tinged friendship to have incubated a homoerotic sensibility in Poussin’s early work.

Poussin has a forbidding reputation as an intellectual painter. This reputation has even encouraged the perception that he is dour. To some extent, Poussin has thus been misrepresented by academic art history. Malcolm Bull writes:

When Bernini saw Poussin’s *Landscape with the Gathering of the Ashes of Phocion*, he pointed to his forehead and said: “Poussin is a painter who works from up here.” Subsequent commentators have almost all endorsed this view, and the history of Poussin’s critical fortunes can be read as an elaboration of the sculptor’s telling gesture.<sup>76</sup>

Anthony Blunt, also, is rightly accused of diminishing, if not denying altogether, the eroticism in Poussin’s early work. Commentators on Blunt observe how little he engages, explicitly, with the eroticism in Poussin’s early art. In his foreword to the 1995 republication of Blunt’s *Nicolas Poussin* Michael Kitson suggests that Blunt merely

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<sup>74</sup>Olson, *ibid.*

<sup>75</sup>It was the Dughet family, who had nursed Poussin during an illness of his own. His marriage to Anne Marie (or Anna Maria), the Dughet daughter, was described by Bellori as an expression of his gratitude. (See Blunt, 55) If anything, Poussin’s apparent association of convalescence and affectionate relationships (or perhaps even sex) forces a complementary acceptance of some special attachment to Marino. The marriage was childless and Poussin would later adopt the Dughet son, Gaspard, whom he trained as a painter, and who, in turn, would dutifully change his name to Poussin. (Also, this put Gaspard Poussin in the odd position of being his own sister’s stepson and son-in-law.)

<sup>76</sup>Malcolm Bull, “How Smart was Poussin?” *London Review of Books* 13.7 (4 Apr., 1991): 12-13.

“underestimates the extent” of eroticism in early Poussin.<sup>77</sup> David Carrier, on the other hand, interprets Blunt’s lack of engagement with it – as he also does in the case of Roger Fry’s avoidance of it – as explained by their mutual Englishness.<sup>78</sup> Yet, as I asked in the first chapter, can we not see this dodge of the erotic as indicative of its importance for Blunt, an importance that is organized by danger? Standing notes, as I mentioned in the last chapter, that Blunt does not merely deny Poussin’s eroticism; in one case, he even worked to cover it up.<sup>79</sup> In fact, Poussin’s very early work is at times closer to pornography even than Caravaggio’s, as seen in the case of Poussin’s one manifestly homoerotic drawing. This tendency is found in his early ‘heterosexual’ scenes as well. In his painting *Sleeping Venus and Cupid* (c.1626), [Fig. 4.3] a nearly-transparent gossamer scarf purports to cover the goddess’s genitals but its folds actually suggest the labia it would disguise. Art history has tended to make of Poussin a painter much more proper than he is.

In his 2009 article “Poussin’s Erotica,” Standing sets out to redress this balance. Standing’s central idea is that a group of early erotic paintings by Poussin derive from his early drawings for Marino and that these, in turn, suggest “the plausibility that the two conspired to conjure up such erotic imagery.”<sup>80</sup> He goes on: “Whatever eroticised themes Poussin turned over in his mind while associating with the poet surely became the genesis of similarly eroticised works produced in Rome from 1624 to 1627.”<sup>81</sup> Exact chronology has always been difficult with Poussin but here it is important. The body of early Roman paintings to which Standing refers were made in the three years immediately after

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<sup>77</sup>Kitson in Blunt, *ibid.*, xi.

<sup>78</sup>Carrier, *Poussin’s Paintings*, 52.

<sup>79</sup>Standing, *ibid.*, 85. See Chapter 1.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*

Poussin's arrival in Rome and in the wake of Marino's death. The paintings, unlike the one aforementioned drawing, are not homoerotic in any clear way but, emphasizing voyeurism as they do, they depict a fetishistic or perverse sexuality and, arguably, are therefore also somewhat queer. This group of paintings immediately precedes important early mythological scenes such as *Echo and Narcissus*, *Aurora and Cephalus*, and *Dead Adonis*, which I shall discuss shortly. The Marino drawings, Poussin's first erotic paintings, and the later mythological subjects all concern themes of love (of one kind or another) and all set mythological figures in an Arcadian landscape derived, ultimately, from Ovid. It is reasonable, therefore, to understand them as constituting a progression.

The most important point presented in Standring's article is that these early erotic works have explicitly pornographic visual sources. They reveal a buried current of eroticism as central in Poussin's early development, even into his first truly important works, like *Echo and Narcissus*. Standring discusses the *Sleeping Venus and Cupid* mentioned above,<sup>82</sup> *Sleeping Nymph with Satyrs* (1626), [Fig.3.4] and *Satyr Carrying a Nymph on His Back with Putti and Faun in an Arcadian Landscape* (1627), [Fig.3.5] among others. (Confusingly, all these works have been copied somewhat later, by Poussin, for other interested clients.) *Sleeping Nymph with Satyrs* has a pen and wash study called *Venus Surprised by a Satyr* (1626), [Fig.3.6] in which the composition's derivation from its source image is especially plain. That source is an undated Marcantonio Raimondi engraving, *Satyr Disrobing a Sleeping Nymph*. [Fig.3.7] Behind the satyr, a herm sports an erect penis that, at once, identifies the satyr (coming from the same direction) with its lustful purpose while simultaneously suggesting that the bent-

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<sup>82</sup>Although he uses an alternate title, *Sleeping Venus Espied by Two Shepherds*. Ibid., 84.



over satyr may be about to be penetrated from behind himself.<sup>83</sup> Meanwhile, the source image for *Satyr Carrying a Nymph on his Back* is another undated Raimondi engraving, entitled *A Satyr Carrying a Nymph, and Another Satyr about to Slap Her*, [Fig.3.8] that depicts a group scene of erotic spanking (or, depending upon one's point of view, sadomasochistic abuse).<sup>84</sup> Standring sees all-but-explicit scenes of masturbation (both male and female) in *Sleeping Nymph with Satyrs*.<sup>85</sup> He writes that "Venus stimulating herself is spied on by a satyr masturbating behind a nearby tree."<sup>86</sup> In summary, Standring proposes that Poussin establishes himself in Rome in part by working up as popular paintings scenes originally conceived in an erotically-charged association with Marino. Manifest pornography was suppressed so that the paintings were plausible as conventional literary themes but an unmistakable erotic charge was maintained. My discussion draws on Standring's insights but I differ from him in that I locate Poussin's early erotica as foundational in a developing an increasingly complicated, and increasingly subtle, queer vision.

The imagined scene, conjured up in Standring's article, of the young artist and the older poet gloating over a shared project of erotica, one that envisions them as akin to Poussin's early satyr-voyeurs, naturally calls to mind the association that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls homosociality. Homosociality refers to the existence of all-male social worlds, yet it has been the particular work of Sedgwick to dismantle the conceptual barrier between the 'sexualities' and the 'socialities' that are 'homo'. She observes that even where men desire women sexually, in a heterosexist society, other vectors of sexual

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<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 85.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 86.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 85.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 84.

desire remain embedded in the social relations between men. In *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985), Sedgwick observes that when men are engaged in upholding patriarchal structures, such as the normative nuclear family, in order to dominate women, they are bonding in a way that could be understood as mutually-affirming, and even loving, towards each other. She even argues that such relationships would be understood as loving and mutually-affirming were it women so promoting their own interests in such shared social spaces.<sup>87</sup> The exchange of portraits in the Renaissance, whether of men or of women, has been interpreted in terms of homosociality between men and, as I observed in the foregoing section, Poussin's later sending of self-portraits to his patrons may be understood as the use of those portraits as tokens, or surrogates, representing himself.<sup>88</sup> Images and artworks, when exchanged in these ways, become a kind of currency transmitting and articulating complicated values and investments in social position and in identity, and these may express affectionate bonds. They may also communicate erotic meanings. The exchange, then, of erotic drawings (even in person) becomes a comparable means of communicating a homosocial bond between artist and poet. (And in at least one case these erotics are explicitly homoerotic.) When that exchange concerns the collaborative illustrating of Marino's poetry, an intertextual exchange is added to the habitual affective investment in the

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<sup>87</sup>Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) 3. Homophobia may characterize these male social structures but it may just as well be a reaction against the intimacy they thereby realize with each other, rather than being in any way a sign that such intimacy is not present.

<sup>88</sup>See Patricia Simons "Homosociality and Erotics in Italian Renaissance Portraiture," in *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, ed. Joanna Woodall (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) 29-51. There is a good example of the homosocial use (indeed the gift) of women (and not just their images) in communicating affection or regard between men in early modern Europe in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Lysander asks of his rival, who has been promised the marriage of Lysander's love Hermia by her father: "Your have her father's love, Demetrius, let me have Hermia's / Do you marry him?" (I.i.) In effect, that is just what Demetrius means to do.

exchange of drawings.<sup>89</sup> Artistic influence (and even rivalry) is already embedded within a homosocial structure. While early Poussin may be salacious I contend he is also audacious in how he turns this early eroticism into more sophisticated queer pictorial strategies to represent the nearly unrepresentable. This will evolve and become a sophisticated substructure in the work of his middle and later career.

It is critical, in my view, that the early encounters with the tragic, beautiful boys of Marino's poetry and their shared exploration of erotic imagery are absorbed into the desire to achieve his own version of 'marvel' or 'wonder' (*meraviglia*), the dazzling representational effect that was Marino's consistent aim in his own poetry.<sup>90</sup> Marino's pursuit of 'special effects' in poetry can be found in other contemporary poets, most especially in the so-called 'conceits' of the English school called the 'Metaphysical Poets', such as John Donne (1572-1631) and, especially, Richard Crashaw, who was strongly influenced by Marino.<sup>91</sup> Generally regarded among English critics as a mannerist approach in poetry, which Italian critics do not distinguish from the Baroque, the school of Marino (Marinism) and metaphysical poetry (its English equivalent) revel in complex and often abstruse metaphors, frequently based on nature and natural science, to convey ideas of transcendence or ones that destabilize the barriers between apparently discrete things.<sup>92</sup> I contend that it is an intertextual relationship that informs Poussin's earliest

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<sup>89</sup>This intertextuality will be explained at length below but, for the present, it is the state in which texts (visual, verbal, or of any kind) exist only in a stage of dialogue and exchange with other texts.

<sup>90</sup>Victoria Surliuga, «La *Galeria* di G.B. Marino tra Pittura e Poesia,» *Quaderni d'Italianistica* 23.1. (2002): 73. Marino's famous description of the poet's role declares: «È del poeta il fin la meraviglia,/ Parlo dell'eccellente e non del goffo./ Chi non sa far stupir, vada alla striglia!» ["The end, for the poet, is the marvellous – the marvel of excellence, not that of clumsiness – whosoever cannot stupefy: go take up horse-grooming!"] [(Very loose) translation by author] . From *La Murtoleide*, a satirical epic (on the model of the *Iliad* – i.e. the 'Murtoliad'), attacking the rival poet Gaspare Murtola.

<sup>91</sup>See Helen Gardner, *Metaphysical Poets* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957). It was Samuel Johnson who, in his 1781 book *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*, named this group the Metaphysical Poets.

<sup>92</sup>Mirollo, 339.

work, importing a potentially homoerotic tradition, via Marino, from antiquity; but I also consider that Marino's interest in marvellous effects served as a model for Poussin to emulate and, ultimately, to best, a tendency that emerged as a queering of representation in the work that immediately followed Poussin's earliest erotic works.

Given their earlier friendship, it is widely accepted that Marino had inspired a number of works by Poussin. Cropper and Dempsey discuss Poussin's *Venus and Adonis* (1628-29) and, especially, his *Massacre of the Innocents* (1629) in this light.<sup>93</sup> Poussin's *Echo and Narcissus* (1627) [Fig.0.1] may be added to this list. Walter Friedländer discusses the poetic background of this work and some then-recent attempts to identify its immediate sources. He writes: "Poussin was apparently the first to include Echo, when showing the death of Narcissus. It has recently been suggested that Poussin may have known François Habert's poem, 'Histoire du beau Narcisse,' of 1550, but nothing directly connects the two works."<sup>94</sup> More recently, this painting has been explicitly connected to a poem by Marino.<sup>95</sup> Giambattista Marino first published his *Galeria*, an ekphrastic sonnet and madrigal sequence, in Venice in 1619. This work both presents and withholds from presentation the works of art he purports to describe. Often the poem serves as a screen that reminds the reader pointedly of the absence of the visual work. This becomes clear from the opening in which the poet discusses the first work, "Venere assissa in una conca," [Venus seated in a shell] in a courtly dedication to the painter, his friend Bernardo Castello, and as an elaborate wordplay on the name of Marino's patron, the Principe di Conca. Marino's next poem, the sonnet "Il Narciso di Bernardo Castello,"

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<sup>93</sup>Cropper and Dempsey, 253-278.

<sup>94</sup>Walter Friedländer, *Poussin: A New Approach* (New York: Henry N. Abrams, 1964) 110.

<sup>95</sup>Jonathan Unglaub, *Poussin and the Poetics of Painting: Pictorial Narrative and the Legacy of Tasso* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 74.

which is the Marino poem recently connected to Poussin's painting, is just the first example of many poems that aim to show that, splendid art though painting may be, poetry is the superior art, better able to achieve the effect of *meraviglia*.

In the *Galeria* Marino confuses his readers by referring to real paintings, such as the famous Medusa head *scudo* by Caravaggio, totally imaginary works of art, and works of art which are imagined as paintings, based on drawings he requisitioned from painter friends.<sup>96</sup> In this later category is a drawing of Narcissus, dated to 1613, and attributed to Marino's friend Bernardo Castello. [Fig.3.9] As Marino and Poussin were friends, Poussin might well have seen this drawing (and I rather suspect that the prominent tree in the *Echo and Narcissus* might be adapted from its example). But it is really the poem and not the drawing that should be regarded as a source for Poussin.<sup>97</sup> The first quatrain of Marino's "Il Narciso di Bernardo Castello" reads:

Chi crederà da mortal mano espresso,  
Castello, il bel garzon ch'a l'ombra estiva,  
là, d'un liquido specchio in su la riva,  
idolo ed idolatra è di se stesso?<sup>98</sup>

[Who would believe, by a mortal hand was made, / Castello, this beautiful boy, who in the summer shade / There, in a fluid mirror by the shore (is both) / Idol and idolater, and they are one and the same?<sup>99</sup>

There is a deep problem in representing Narcissus: how may one visually portray reflexivity? Among the earliest surviving depictions is a wall painting from Pompeii (before 79 C.E.) where the separation is heightened to the point of being a decapitation.

[Fig.3.10] At the other end of the tradition, in the *Metamorphosis of Narcissus* (1937)

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<sup>96</sup>Ackerman, 334.

<sup>97</sup>This drawing has not been positively identified by anyone as the source for the Marino poem but, given its authorship and its date, and given the striking similarity of the tree to the one found in the Poussin, it must be connected to Marino's poem.

<sup>98</sup>Giambattista Marino, "Il Narciso di Bernardo Castello" in the *Galeria* (f.p. 1619): lines 1-4.

<sup>99</sup>Literally, the last line would translate: "is of himself the same." Translation by author.

Salvador Dali presents a doubled image that seems to have split or is to be imaginatively elided by the viewer, as if in a stereoscope. [Fig.3.11] Remarkable, however, is a circa 1597 representation, attributed to Caravaggio. [Fig.3.12] Here we see an attempt to overcome the pictorial problem of Narcissus's duality by giving in to it fully. This is a problem recognized by Oscar Bätschmann in a 1979 essay "Poussins Narziss und Echo im Louvre: Die Konstruktion von Thematik und Darstellung aus den Quellen." He writes:

In einem Bild wie dem Narziss [...] wird die Identität des Narziss phantastisch durch seine Verdoppelung im reflektierenden Wasser, durch seinen Entzweigung in den einen und den andern, der sein Abbild und der gleiche ist. Die aufhebung der Identität durch die Verdoppelung im Bild haben Philostrat und Marino sehr wohl bemerkt.<sup>100</sup>

[In a picture such as Narcissus the identity of Narcissus becomes fantastical through his doubling in reflecting water, through his splitting in two, into the one and the other, which is both his own likeness and the same. The repealing of (singular) identity in the picture has indeed been noticed by Philostratus and Marino.]<sup>101</sup>

The German word "Aufhebung" might mean 'abolition' or 'suspension' here but certainly suggests a lifting up. I have translated it<sup>102</sup> instead as 'repealing' – with a stress on 'peel' – as Bätschmann appears to have intended the suggestion that the mirror Narcissi are being pulled apart, like the symmetrical halves of an opened ink blot paper, or as though a symmetrical and bilateral extension into space were proceeding from the same point – or line – of origin. The mirror surface of the water disguises a depth which plays, ironically, with and against the illusion of depth behind the canvas's surface. A dialectical play of difference and otherness as it relates to a space that is at once the same and different is certainly the point of the Bätschmann passage. The literary description of

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<sup>100</sup>Oskar Bätschmann, "Poussins Narziß und Echo im Louvre: Die Konstruktion von Thematik und Darstellung aus den Quellen," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 42 (1979): 46-47.

<sup>101</sup>Translation by author.

<sup>102</sup>With the assistance of Dr. Thomas Krüger, my friend and a German scholar.

a Narcissus painting, by Philostratus the Elder, presents a work, perhaps like the Pompeiian one, that includes identical Narcissi.<sup>103</sup> Bächtmann's words "der sein Abbild und der gleiche ist" may even be intended to echo Marino's phrase "idolo ed idolatra è di se stesso," which would allude to another representational possibility: true reflexivity, a possibility presumably unavailable to a visual medium.

Marino's sonnet appears to resolve the artistic problem of any Narcissus picture, thereby demonstrating poetry's superiority. The experience of Narcissus is that of a unity between the subject who gazes and the object of the gaze. The face that is reflected in the pool is merely the means by which the erotic self-identification occurs. (Any separation would be nowhere in the lived experience). But in almost all visual depictions of the Narcissus scene we have two Narcissi: the youth and his reflection. Marino's poetic form eliminates this problem. He writes: "idolo ed idolatra è di se stesso." ["Idol and idolater and they are one and the same" – literally: "...is of himself the same."] The places of the subject and of the object are less stable in a poem and thus we can more easily collapse them, one into the other. In the picture, on the other hand, the two elements are separated and fixed.

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<sup>103</sup>Bächtmann is referring to an ekphrasis on a painting of Narcissus in Philostratus's *Imagines* (I.xxiii). This author is probably Philostratus III (born c. 160 C.E) who, though he was writing about works seen in the vicinity of Naples could not be referring to the Pompeiian fresco which had been buried for over a century by the time of his birth. His (slightly abridged) text reads: "The pool paints Narcissus, and the painting represents both the pool and the whole story of Narcissus. A youth just returned from the hunt stands over a pool, drawing from within himself a kind of yearning and falling in love with his own beauty; and, as you see, he sheds a radiance into the water. [...] As for you, however, Narcissus, it is no painting that has deceived you, nor are you engrossed in a thing of pigments or wax; but you do not realize that the water represents you exactly as you are when you gaze upon it, nor do you see through the artifice of the pool, though to do so you have only to nod your head or change your expression or slightly move your hand, instead of standing in the same attitude; but acting as though you had met a companion, you wait for some move on his part. Do you then expect the pool to enter into conversation with you? Nay, this youth does not hear anything we say, but he is immersed eyes and ears alike, in the water and we must interpret the painting for ourselves." See Arthur Fairbanks, trans. *Philostratus, Imagines; Callistratus, Descriptions*. Loeb Edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931).

Poussin's Narcissus picture shows no reflection, no doubling. Like Marino, Poussin does not locate Narcissus alone but near a despairing and ineffectual Echo (Echo makes a brief appearance at the end of Marino's sonnet.)<sup>104</sup> Echo occupies the depth of the scene. She leans languidly while Narcissus, centrally lying in the foreground, is absorbed within himself – narcotized – an entirely different kind of repose than Echo's longing flaccidness. It is self-absorption rather than absorption in another. Aside from a compositional strategy that allows its viewer, like Echo, to contemplate the “bel garzon” at their leisure, the work emphasizes the singular character of the Narcissus image – he is genuinely self-absorbed – as does Marino's verse. Echo (like the figure Eros, who is the third character appearing in the painting) is at best a supplement to the scene, just one part of the landscape that frames him. She belongs to the background, apart from the figure of Narcissus, who seems as if superimposed over or inserted into the scene. A picture may be erotic for the scene that it depicts. Such seems to be the case in the *Sleeping Venus*, where the spying satyrs are the stand-ins for or accomplices of a peeping-Tom spectator. But a painting, however sensual, may also be a meditation upon eroticism. The reflexive erotics of Narcissus permit no intruder. And yet it is precisely that paradoxical fusion of reflexive collapse and alienation that is the nature of narcissism.<sup>105</sup>

A queer body is not the body of a queer, it is a body that queers somehow. In a figurative painting, it is a figure that resists the role of simple figuration. Gavin Brown writes that “[q]ueer celebrates gender and consciously blurs boundaries,” adding “[it] is

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<sup>104</sup>Marino, lines 13-14.

<sup>105</sup>See Sigmund Freud, “On Narcissism: An Introduction” in *Penguin Freud Library Vol.11, On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, trans. James Strachey, (London, Penguin, 1991) 59-98.



more of a relational process than a simple identity category.”<sup>106</sup> Taken from the domain of gender performance *per se* and placed into that of figurative art, a queer figure, in this case a queer body, likewise is one that blurs boundaries and becomes, thereby, the agent of a relational process. Different kinds of queer bodies in different situations may do this. The blurring may be operative among a group of bodies or, as here, the work of a single body. But what is queer in each case is how the body serves to destabilize the notion of figure itself. This does not mean and must not mean that the body ceases to be a body or that the figure ceases to be a figure. Rather, it calls into question the autonomy, the integrity and the separateness of the figure and the body. Of queer activism, Brown goes on to write: “Queer revels in its otherness, difference, and distance from mainstream society (gay or straight), even as it recognizes that this distance is always incomplete.”<sup>107</sup> Queer things do not affect a complete separation but rather a partial one, they adulterate, they distance, and they disrupt. But they do not completely sever ties. A queer body, therefore, is one that is so disposed and so arranged as to undermine the idea of the integral body, of its being a figure as opposed to, say, a ground. It also remains a figure and a body all the time it does this. It deploys the body to resist the category body.

The body of Poussin’s Narcissus is composed in a long quadrilateral. He seems almost to be tumbling out of an invisible *cartouche*, or coffin. A rectangle is particularly strongly suggested by the boy’s torso. (The line between his left arm and his chest is almost perfectly straight.) Only his right arm breaks the order of his body’s quadrangular composition. The youth’s body is so rectangular that it becomes a kind of *mise-en-*

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<sup>106</sup>Brown, 197.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid.

*abyme*.<sup>108</sup> The linear edge of his body parallels the frame and its quadrangular form reflects that of the canvas. Poussin's penchant for using this kind of device has already been observed by David Carrier. He calls it an "internal tableau."<sup>109</sup> In this case, however, the body and the frame are homologous, that is, their rectangles reflect and echo each other and serve to identify them. And, for this to be properly seen, the painting really must be reproduced framed, as it would be, for display. I have so reproduced it in the appendix. [Fig.3.13] The background becomes enclosed or even, so to speak, sandwiched in this arrangement. The contained figure and the containing frame, in effect reverse the relationship of figure to ground. Stephen Bann has observed that Poussin's warm "rouge tonality" alludes to the ripeness of fruit metaphors in Ovid but contrasts strikingly with the waxy pallor of Narcissus's figure.<sup>110</sup> This effect further divides the painting into two zones of colouration: the background landscape and the quadrangular figure of Narcissus. It is not, in this case, that the background, which includes Echo and the figure of Eros, becomes a fully foregrounded element in this system but rather that the figure of Narcissus (or rather the figure *as* Narcissus) becomes destabilized and destabilizing, at once a figure and a suggestion of a ground. This ambiguity is queer. It undermines the categories that would define it in a new, relational process. The figure seems to reflect or deflect the attention that is given it, pushing that attention out where it comes to rest, however tentatively, on the background in an alternative spatial arrangement. The queerness of narcissism, the challenge it poses to the clean separation

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<sup>108</sup>An image within an image (usually of identical size and shape), originally a heraldic term described a shield set within a shield (or charge repeated in a canton). From Med. French "set into the abyss (depth) of the field."

<sup>109</sup>Carrier, *ibid.*, 136-37. Oddly, Carrier discusses this device in depictions of Narcissus generally when discussing this work but does not appear to notice that there is no depicted reflection in Poussin's *Echo and Narcissus*.

<sup>110</sup>Bann is cited in Unglaub, *ibid.*, but the exact reference has been omitted.

of subject and object in erotic desire, combines with this queerness of the body in Poussin's painting. The ambiguity established about what constitutes 'figure' and what 'ground' is exactly how Poussin goes about depicting the queer situation of Narcissus.

Jonathan Unglaub is a Poussin scholar interested in the artist's linkages with poetic ideas and his 2006 book *Poussin and the Poetics of Painting: Pictorial Narrative and the Legacy of Tasso* argues that, unlike Poussin's contemporaries, who were simply interested in illustrating scenes from the poet Torquato Tasso's great epic of 1581 *La Gerusalemme Liberata*, Poussin engages with his poetics, as well, and that these poetics came to influence Poussin's paintings generally, not just those related to Tasso.<sup>111</sup> This interest in poetics, naturally means that Unglaub investigates the relationship between Poussin and Marino, as well, which he maintains also had an important influence on Poussin. Unglaub writes that, "[f]ollowing Philostratus, Marino repeatedly explored [the] conceit whereby the beholder's vision of a painting is a phenomenological metaphor of Narcissus's own view of the pool."<sup>112</sup> Unglaub does not pursue this point further, however. Poussin's Narcissus image becomes half of a closed encounter, suggesting, in turn, an infinite recess into the pictorial space. This *mise-en-abyme*, with its suggestion of infinite depth and unending reflection, captures reflectivity and performs (or restages) the experience of Narcissus. In effect, we viewers are also cast by Poussin as Narcissus. Framed outside the picture, just as Narcissus is framed within, our gaze into its depth completes the reflexivity, just as our alienation outside the picture repeats Narcissus's

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<sup>111</sup>Unglaub opens his book with this claim: "Poussin's engagement with Tasso involved a crucial dimension that set him apart from those painters who simply supplied the vogue for pictures of Tancred and Erminia, Rinaldo and Armida [characters in Tasso]. Tasso's poem and, even more significantly, the literary principles that determined its form and structure were fundamental to Poussin's theory of art, his *poetics of painting*." Emphasis added. *Ibid.*, 1-2.

<sup>112</sup>*Ibid.*, 74. For Philostratus's conceit, see above.

frustration. This is an interesting solution to the dilemma of depicting the subject of Narcissus and one that seems to have been already encoded in Marino's phrase "idolo ed idolatra è di se stesso". Poussin's painting may thus be understood as a *riposte* to Marino. In Marino as in Poussin (but unlike Caravaggio), there is no externalized reflection, no outer other (not within the picture).

The positions of Narcissus's arms and the beautifully awkward arrangement of the legs may relate to a visual source, the *Dead Christ* of Paris Bordone (1495-1570) from Venice's Palazzo Ducale,<sup>113</sup> although this is in dispute. Oscar Bätschmann proposes another source, the *Dead Niobid* from Cavalieri's *Antiquarum statuarum urbis Romae* of 1593, which would mean Poussin has imaginatively rolled the dead figure over in turning him into his Narcissus.<sup>114</sup> This source would not account for the legs, however, one of the stranger aspects of the figure's composition. Although Poussin depicts a dying figure rather than a dead one, his boy is much more rigidly drawn than the Cavalieri Niobid. The figure, especially in the legs, seems to have a muscular force within it. He is at once moving and deathly still, itself something of a queer indeterminacy. This, I think, indicates the element of transition, as does the suggestion of green in his skin's tone. Poussin's fully dead boys, such as the contemporary *Venus Anointing the Dead Adonis* of 1626-27, [Fig.3.14] are much greener. In *Nicolas Poussin: Dialectics of Painting* Bätschmann proposes that, in depicting the end of the myth of Narcissus at his death, rather than the inciting event, his self-absorption in the watery mirror, Poussin moves beyond the tale and, in a sense, escapes the trap of the Narcissus subject. The painting is exceptional, according to Bätschmann, for the way in which it sidesteps the problems of

<sup>113</sup>See Dora Panofsky, "Narcissus and Echo: Notes on Poussin's *Birth of Bacchus* in the Fogg Museum of Art," *Art Bulletin* 31.2 (June, 1949): 114. See also Blunt, 79.

<sup>114</sup>Bätschmann, "Narziß" 33-35. See also Unglaub, 76.

the Narcissus subject.<sup>115</sup> I do not agree. Rather, I see Poussin has having recalled this trap but disarmed it, thereby distilling from two superimposed episodes what could be called the essence of the myth. Poussin has overcome the problem inherent in the depiction of Narcissus by approaching it, in the first place, through the subject of the boy's death but also by infusing this subject with a reflection – or echo – of the central theme of the Narcissus story, his reflexivity. It is planted in the spatial composition of the painting. Poussin also highlights the element of transformation, of turning into, of becoming. Narcissus is becoming dead but, ultimately, he will also turn into a flower; and his becoming is indicated in the flowers that he seems to wear as a triumphal wreath.<sup>116</sup>

The queer body becomes the embodiment of a set of disturbed or cancelled oppositions. The figure and the ground, the object of the spectator's gaze and the spectator himself (or herself), the living Narcissus and the dead Narcissus, each is undermined through the device of Narcissus's queer body. In plumbing these thematic depths, Poussin was also beginning to chart an alternative kind of space, which will go on to become a queer space. (This is followed up in the next chapter.) What Poussin took from Marino, then, was not only a narrative tradition and a refinement of an earlier erotic charge but also an approach to representation. 'Queer' is what Queer Theory calls things that transgress the boundaries established between conventional dichotomies or oppositions. Poussin's suppression (and sublimation) of the erotic legacy of his association with Marino metamorphoses into a destabilizing kind of image-making, not conventionally erotic, not explicitly homoerotic, but queer. There is no reason why the sexual (or gendered) model of queerness should not be extended to other such

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<sup>115</sup>Oskar Bätschmann, *Nicolas Poussin: Dialectics of Painting*, trans. Marko Daniel (London: Reaktion Books, 1990) 125.

<sup>116</sup>Unglaub, *ibid.*

oppositions. The queer body makes of its figure a thing that is undecidable,<sup>117</sup> figure but also partly ground. In Poussin's painting, Narcissus's body is laid out, sensualized and tragic, before the viewer's gaze. But gazing is itself the main theme of the Narcissus myth. Poussin has set a trap that captures an erotic (and homoerotic) impulse but then deploys it to a sophisticated thematic end. From homoeroticism, Poussin derives his approach to narcissistic reflexivity, which in turn transforms a body into a reflection of its pictorial ground, making it queer.

A queer individual could be understood as an 'othered' self, in the sense that the self comes packed with a gender identity, a presumed-heterosexual sexual destiny and a place given, even before birth, in the social order, which the queer identity undermines. The concept of queerness establishes a 'zone-between' that undoes the binarism of something and its opposite. Narcissism, of course, was in the last century considered by psychoanalysis as a primary constitutive dynamic of homosexuality.<sup>118</sup> We need not accept Sigmund Freud's idea that homosexuality's appearance in real individuals represents some frozen stage of development in order to embrace his insight that such

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<sup>117</sup>Queer things have some properties in common with what are called 'undecidables' in the context of deconstruction. These are things that straddle an opposition but cannot be resolved to settle at either pole. For more on 'undecidables', see Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) 63-171. The key example of an undecidable is 'φάρμακον' [*pharmakon*], which means both a poison and its remedy.

<sup>118</sup>According to Sigmund Freud, who coined the term, narcissism is fundamental to homosexuality, although it is fundamental to sexuality altogether. (Freud, 81.) In most male individuals, according to Freud, an initial state of autoerotic investment (in the self) in childhood is developed and attached to the bodily pleasures of feeding, defecating and so on. The entire sensory world is undivided into objects, as such, but rather enjoyed as a series of perimeters, boundaries and pressures felt upon those boundaries. The ego is not fully developed and the division of the world into a subject and innumerable objects has not been completed. In some cases, erotic investment becomes attached to she who provides these primary narcissistic needs, usually the mother. In other cases, eroticism becomes partially arrested at this narcissistic stage, which leads, in turn, to an erotic fixation upon non-normal objects, which Freud calls 'perversion', or into investments of libido in the self, outwardly reflected in other males, which Freud calls 'inversion.' This is one of two ways homosexuality may develop, according to him. Freud, 87-91. The other possible path is an over-investment of erotic interest in the mother which leads to an identification with her so intense that, to complete the identification, an erotic object similar to himself must be found. See Freud "Some Neurotic Mechanisms in Jealousy, Paranoia, and Homosexuality," in *Pelican Freud Library, Volume 10: On Psychopathology* (Harmondworth: Penguin Books, 1979).

unbounded and free-flowing eroticism is the key quality represented in the myth of Narcissus.<sup>119</sup> But long before there ever was homosexuality as a category, original narcissism – the narcissism of Narcissus – was queer. Narcissus’s captivity by his image is a construction put upon his situation by an object-oriented world. Narcissus’s own world, in his state of self-captivity, is one where subject and object flow into each other without barrier and without end (and, thus, without climax). In other circumstances in Western culture, such unboundedness is associated (as in the cases of spheres or the concept of eternity) with perfection. Original Narcissism represents an idealization of queer erotic possibilities.

The queerness seen in Poussin’s *Echo and Narcissus* extends from the erotic subjects of the preceding group of Arcadian paintings, ones modelled, as Standring has noted, on pornographic visual sources. But queerness is based in troublesome and problematical structures of identity and this property that emerges in Poussin’s work is based on the vexed relationship between Poussin’s paintings and their literary and visual sources. Already, I have described Poussin’s engagement with Marino as intertextual. Queer content implies a strong and encoded opposition to normative identity categories. But, after his very early drawings, Poussin is not interested in explicitly homoerotic picture making. He avoids what Caravaggio does. It is my argument that Poussin in fact rejects (or turns away from) the homoerotic potential of the poetic tradition latent in Marino and the erotic visual tradition of his early pornographic source images, such as those from Raimondi. Poussin creates only an incomplete rearticulation of this eroticism

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<sup>119</sup>Freud’s concept of narcissism, which has informed all others, recognizes an early state in which erotic attachment is not fixed upon the self, as such, because one’s sense of the self is still too limited, but still involves the self, fundamentally, because this early eroticism (called primary narcissism) is unbounded. All of our boundaries are blurred. In this conception, then, there is an early articulation of something akin to queerness. And it shares these properties with what today is called queer.

and this homoeroticism. And the two half-articulated formulations combine to make up what is Poussin's particularly *queer* approach. In semiotic terms, this undermining is a signifying process whereby both Poussin's eroticism and his homoeroticism are checked, covered up but not eradicated, rendered latent but persisting all the while in this latency. This troublesomeness is what makes it a genuinely queer approach. This will be further explored in two other contemporary examples of Poussin's young male figures. First, however, it is necessary to pin down the mechanism a bit more clearly and demonstrate how it may be understood in current theoretical terms.

To understand this better, then, this is how my contention would fit within the established concept of 'intertextuality'. Intertextuality, as it operates in contemporary philosophy and critical theory, has been refocused from a mere noting of influence, or of sourcing, to one that posits a dynamic penetration, something almost akin to a (living) contagion within textual signification. At the same time, it presupposes that a very precise account may be given of the rational and denotative effects of language. There is never anything vague about any particular instance of intertextuality. In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Julia Kristeva writes:

The term *inter-textuality* denotes this transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another; but since this term has often been understood in the banal sense of "study of sources," we prefer the term *transposition* because it specifies that the passage from one signifying system to another demands a new articulation of thethetic – of enunciative and denotative positionality. If one grants that every signifying practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an inter-textuality), one then understands that its "place" of enunciation and its denoted "object" are never single, complete, and identical to themselves, but always plural, shattered, capable of being tabulated.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>120</sup>Julia Kristeva, *Revolution and poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984) 59-60.



Kristeva explains that signification always passes on other transpositions so that any text always contains parts of other texts. But each transposition operates both in dialogue back to its sources and also with a new specificity; what is transposed is reanimated, its ‘thesis’ is re-articulated. Nothing can be taken out of context because, taken, it is a new original. Transposition, then, makes possible the same kind of distortion as translation does; a transposed piece of text, in its new environs, could activate new meanings or render other, old meanings latent, if it disguises them, or even inert, if it cancels them.<sup>121</sup> But its old environs resonate within it too, adding levels and inflections to its new meanings. These can all be tabulated. Kristeva further indicates that those other texts are reasserted by the enunciating subject who, wittingly or unwittingly, is repeating other, older enunciations. What she calls the *thetic* (or ‘thesis’, as a noun) is the assertion of the presence that positions each text as a new instance despite the transpositions it contains. This thesis is at once authentic and ‘plural,’ containing a vast recess of other theses. However, it is not the purpose of *this* text to assess the viability of transposing the semiological account of meaning and language into visual representations, nor even to assess its validity as a theory of language, as such. Rather, as intertextuality is now a dominant way of understanding what might otherwise be called borrowings or adaptations, it is my purpose to relate this theoretical and methodological stance, by analogy, to the effects that Poussin’s borrowings, sources, transpositions, or transplantations have upon the meaning of his pictures.

I do not claim Poussin wittingly rearticulates any homoerotic thesis; but in depicting a subject (Narcissus) that has been freighted with homoerotic meanings and in

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<sup>121</sup> David Koloszyc, “Religion, Atheism, and the Crisis of Meaning in Julia Kristeva’s Critique of Modernity,” unpublished doctoral diss. (McGill University, 2010) 78.

depicting them in ways that heightens that association (in an Arcadian glade), Poussin still engages these meanings even if he does not reassert them. By relocating Narcissus in a scene inclusive of Echo and the figure of Eros, it is certainly arguable that Poussin attempted precisely to defuse Narcissus's autoerotic and so, perforce, homoerotic, sensibility.<sup>122</sup> Poussin may have acted to disguise and thus not to reassert homoeroticism but in including a homoerotic motif that is so suppressed, through the process called transposition or intertextuality, it becomes a destabilizing piece of the picture's manifest meaning.

This activity, as evidenced in *Echo and Narcissus*, is neatly analogous to how Poussin defuses the pornography of the Raimondi prints to make these early erotic works passable as literary or mythological scenes only to the render them more subtly charged with this suppressed and unreleased erotic potential. In *Echo and Narcissus* Poussin cannot help but transpose homoeroticism to some extent but, in failing to embrace the import of

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<sup>122</sup>Abigail Solomon-Godeau selects Poussin's *Echo and Narcissus* as a prime example of a subject of its kind untroubled by problems of gender and gendered erotics. In *Male Trouble: A Crisis in Representation* (1997), Solomon-Godeau emphasizes the contrast between this and later scenes of similar subjects – but ones that exclude female figures – that she argues leave male figures that are “structurally closer to the female nude of the later nineteenth century than [...] to a classical prototype such as Poussin's *Echo and Narcissus* of c.1628.” Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Male Trouble: A Crisis in Representation* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997) 128. She continues, parenthetically: “Interestingly, Poussin's version of the myth includes the pining nymph Echo [...]; [...] it is notable that later versions, particularly from the neoclassical period, often eliminate her.” (Ibid.) Apparently, Solomon-Godeau sees no ‘male trouble’ in Poussin's prototype. Her larger argument is that a crisis in the representation of the male – he is distinctly feminized, according to her – marks the transition from the French Revolution to the mid nineteenth century and heralds the coming to the fore of the erotic female nude, thereafter. She does not understand these figures' feminization as an instance of homoeroticism, although this fascinating but idiosyncratic claim is subject to trenchant criticism by scholars who defend a queer art history. See James Smalls, “Making Trouble for Art History: The Queer Case of Girodet” *Art Journal* 55. 4 (1996): 20-27. See Chapter 1. Poussin's prototype is held up as the exemplar of the straight version, even if Solomon-Godeau only asserts drag and not queerness in the later models. Rather than being homoerotically rendered, Solomon-Godeau's contention is that these male figures are, in a sense, regendered, which has greater affinities with “drag” than with homosexuality or homoeroticism proper. I agree in so far as Poussin seems to return Echo to – at least – *marginality* within the mythical story but, in Narcissus's self-absorption, now depicted as extending to the point of death, we see the failure and not the success of this heterosexual idyll and ideal. The alienation inherent in the Narcissus subject becomes now an alienation from Echo and thus from normal heterosexuality, as much as the necessary self-alienation of Narcissus.

this tradition, he inscribes it only as potential, partial or cancelled. It has been defused but not quite rendered inert. Poussin may even have aimed to purge his Narcissus of its vestiges of homoeroticism – we cannot know that – but this picture still makes use of those vestiges, and the instability in signification thereby achieved helps make the rearticulation not directly homoerotic, but queer.

Intertextuality is also a reading practice and, by extension, a viewing practice, which returns us to the case of Anthony Blunt. Intertextuality supposes “a process of moving between texts. Meaning becomes something which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates [in] a network of textual relations.”<sup>123</sup> This is not a static state of affairs. Indeed, intertextuality supposes an “infinite and mutual engagement between texts.”<sup>124</sup> A change anywhere in the network of texts may have ramifications throughout the network. Thus, the intervening development of homoerotic imagery based on the Arcadian formula in large part developed by Poussin conditions how Poussin would be seen by Blunt.<sup>125</sup> The newer articulations, of a manifestly homoerotic Arcadia, are premised nevertheless upon suppressed transposed meanings, the homoerotic dimension of Arcadia descending from classical poetry that Poussin incompletely reiterates. Poussin fails to rearticulate the homoerotic thesis of the Narcissus motif, dodging the homoeroticism. He thereby ends up highlighting it, for a special few. Arcadia becomes not a direct expression of homoeroticism but rather the thematic field wherein a secret iteration of homoeroticism is to be found. This possibility was well developed by Blunt’s time but the potential for it was already encoded, long before, when Poussin acted to suppress some (but not all) of the homoeroticism of the Arcadian world.

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<sup>123</sup>Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000) 1.

<sup>124</sup>Koloszyc, 80.

<sup>125</sup>See the conclusion of Chapter 2.

The ironic plurality of meanings seen in this case is itself queer. Different meanings may be recoverable to different observers. I think we need to take Kristeva's analysis of transposition (or intertextuality) together with Linda Hutcheon's concept of irony as a mode of expression holding meanings receivable only by certain groups, what she calls "discursive communities."<sup>126</sup> Put together: Poussin repeats but only half asserts a homoerotic meaning in some early works that thereafter subsists as a double-meaning visible to a homoerotically-inclined discursive community. This deployment of enunciative irony is queer. Casting an illusion of non-self-sameness over an object that is not self-same – all enunciations are not – Poussin's enunciations parody the processes of meaning. Ultimately, I shall argue, Poussin comes to use this as a deliberate thematic device. Meanwhile, at least in the works that manifestly address love or sexuality, a figure such as Anthony Blunt would encounter a homoeroticism at once qualified, blocked, sublimated and needing to be redeemed through an interpretive leap. As Poussin would famously advise his client Chantelou: it is necessary to "read the story and the picture together."<sup>127</sup> In this case, it would be necessary to read Poussin's Arcadian visions together with the earlier poetic tradition and the later literary and visual traditions to uncover its homoerotic charge.

Poussin tends to depict manifestly heterosexual scenes in this period. And yet a number of works have the same theme, the failure of a heterosexual ideal, and use the same device, a languid youthful male body put on display. This body is frequently awkwardly set within its pictorial space. This 'beautiful boy' type is often portrayed as a victim or set in a tragic situation. Danger and sensual appeal seem to go hand-in-hand. Of

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<sup>126</sup>Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (New York: Routledge, 1995) 89-100.

<sup>127</sup>See Louis Marin, *Sublime Poussin*, trans. Catherine Porter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999) 8. Originally published as Louis Marin, *Sublime Poussin* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995).

course, this combination is found in the *Echo and Narcissus*. The boy is in mortal danger but at the same time he seems to be harmlessly asleep. His body is appealingly presented, with sensuous details given special attention: the flesh of his left armpit, the way his garments seem to be tightly pulled between his thighs. (Indeed, he seems almost, in a state of partial sleep, to be trying to keep himself covered, given the position of his right arm and the awkward, tense arrangement of his legs.) This gentle eroticization is seen in a few works that follow this painting. I shall briefly consider *Cephalus and Aurora* (c.1630), and *Venus Anointing the Dead Adonis* (1626-1627).

*Cephalus and Aurora* [Fig.3.15] would appear to be the most closely related work to the *Echo and Narcissus*. It depicts a comparable situation in a comparable way and it was painted at about the same time. It even contains, in a different form, the use of the *mise-en-abyme*, indisputably apparent in this case, to represent the beloved object, albeit non-reflexively. The story, in brief, is that the mortal hunter Cephalus refuses the advances of the goddess Aurora (after she abducts him) because of his love for Procris, his mortal wife. In Poussin's painting we see Cephalus beholding a painting of his wife, held by the same figure of Eros. This "internal tableau,"<sup>128</sup> as a painting-within-a-painting, is a pure *mise-en-abyme* and, like its rather more abstracted counterpart in the *Echo and Narcissus*, its status as such is emphasized by its strong horizontal orientation to the plane of the larger painting. (It is not a rectangle within a rectangle, this time, but a parallelogram within a rectangle.) Other similarities abound. This figure, too, is derived from the example of Titian's Bacchus in his *Bacchus and Ariadne*, a point observed by Blunt.<sup>129</sup> The turning away from a desiring female suitor is another common theme,

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<sup>128</sup>Carrier, *ibid.*, 137.

<sup>129</sup>Blunt, 124.

although in this case it is desire for a different female love-object that prompts this. The discrepancy, however, only serves to underscore what these two pictures have in common: a male rejection of a female advance. (The absence of a counterbalancing heterosexual love only clarifies how the failure in the *Echo and Narcissus* is of a total character.) The erotic relationships, moreover, are complicated by the peculiar touchings and entanglings of the feet of the characters, which seem to belie what the rest of their bodies are doing. In the lower right, Cephalus's left foot and that of Aurora are pressed together, the length of their shins touching, in a gesture that would be sweet if it were not the betrayal of Cephalus's main purpose of refusal and escape. Meanwhile, the toes of Aurora's right foot have made contact with the foot of the figure Eros and this gesture seems to imply some kind of unspoken compact between them. Taken together, these things suggest that a refusal has been made but the escape is hardly imminent, the three figures forming a complex of bodies and intentions that undermine what they intend and dissolve their diverse purposes into a mass of contradiction, but erotically charged contradiction. It is Procris – or rather her image – that is most alienated from this scene. Set on a plane that runs close to perpendicular to that of the main painting, she inhabits a kind of nowhere place within this picture. It is as if her banishment is mathematical; she has been factored out of the balanced equation existing among the three central figures.

By comparisons such as these, we may isolate what forces are at play in the *Echo and Narcissus*. *Cephalus and Aurora* illustrates the spatial arrangements that, more subtly, structure that painting. It also helps establish Poussin's handling of the theme of the failure of a heterosexual ideal, in this case, amusingly, by establishing a tug-of-war between two different heterosexual ideals. The figure of Cephalus, however, is less on

display than is Narcissus, despite the similarities of the visual sources and the fact that both female protagonists regard them as objects of desire. The eroticization of the male body, oddly, finds a clearer expression in *Venus Anointing the Dead Adonis*, mentioned previously. [Fig.3.14] It may seem strange that the depiction of a beautiful, *dead* boy could occasion a more sustained erotic presentation but, then again, if we accept that Poussin may be interested (up to a point) in dispelling a homoerotic meaning, such a move is apposite. (Alternatively, as with the apparent fetishization of morbidity in some of Caravaggio's works, especially the *Sick Bacchus* of 1593, this may also offer some dark queer appeal.) The figure used for Adonis is almost identical to that Poussin uses for Jesus in his contemporary painting *Lamentation over the Dead Christ* (c. 1628-29).<sup>130</sup> [Fig.3.16] Interestingly, while there is some difference as to the position of the arms and while the Adonis figure is flipped so as to be otherwise a mirror image of that of Jesus, the major difference is that the Adonis is more carefully covered up, or else Jesus may be more carefully uncovered. A smooth, light expanse of skin runs from the edge of Adonis's ribcage, where it is in shadow, down to edge of the blue garment at his waist. Jesus's abdomen, however, is fully exposed, down to the base of the pubis and a modulation of light and shadow draws attention to the plane of flesh between the upper thigh and lower abdomen in a distinctly erotic detail. It is clear that, for thematic reasons beyond my purpose here, Poussin intended the connection between the dead Adonis and the dead Jesus to be noticed.<sup>131</sup> The question then arises, why should it be more

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<sup>130</sup>Blunt, 114-115.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid., 115-116. Blunt observes that whereas the standard depiction of Venus and Adonis has the goddess discover her dead lover shortly after he has been killed by the boar, here Poussin, like Marino before him, syncretically identifies the resurrection of Christ (and thus of all Christian souls) with Venus's anointing of Adonis with nectar that makes a flower and preserves his memory. Poussin's clients, like Marino's audience, appreciated such meditations upon comparative religion.

acceptable or more desirable to eroticize the dead Christ than the dead lover of Venus? It seems that, to be answered, perhaps the question might be reversed: why would it be desirable to downplay the eroticism in the depiction of Adonis? Two devices do this: his greenness, which makes an unmistakable issue of his deadness, and his chastely covered groin. It is notable that other depictions of the couple, when Adonis is alive, display a flagrantly eroticized Venus, in a position vis-à-vis her lover which is the exact inverse of their positions in this picture.<sup>132</sup> I submit it may well be to remove the homoerotic, which would otherwise be powerfully enunciated by the helpless (and available) body rendered so sensually.

We may understand queer bodies as bodies in which there is something problematical about how they represent what they are supposed to be. This is an adaptation of how queers are understood by Queer Theory to enact gender but get it wrong, or imperfectly right, thereby illustrating how the order of gender is artificial. In a painting, a body that presents representational difficulties while still being represented is doing something similar. But the potential of queer bodies is far beyond what use can be made of them when they stand – or rather lie – alone. Already in the *Cephalus and Aurora* we observe how a grouping and overlapping of bodies and body parts can serve to undermine the identities and the singularity of purpose that individual figures in these compositions might hold. In the next section, I shall look at Poussin's use of multigure combinations that suggest how the early queer bodies of these still partly homoerotic paintings give way to more complex articulations of changing identities, of performative variability, and thus of a queer destabilization of identity that begins to suggest the possibility of what I call the group body. This is especially evident in Poussin's scenes of

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<sup>132</sup>Nicolas Poussin, *Venus and Adonis* (1628-29), Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth TX.



bacchanalian abandon but, as I shall observe, it also involves a queer slippage between the human and the animal. Ultimately, these destabilizations of the figure go on to develop into destabilizations of a painting's space.

### Queer Bodies: Becoming and The Group Body

Already, in some of Poussin's paintings organized around single, male figures, such as the *Cephalus and Aurora*, some deployment of thematic possibilities of groups of bodies is seen. Meanwhile, in other early works, a concern with slippages between a human order and an animal world is seen. The destabilizations of identity seen in later works by Poussin build on these early experiments and both expand them and refine them, constructing large and complex scenes of multiple figures. Sometimes these figures are exclusively human and sometimes they are part human and part animal. In either case they come to explore, in a more systematic fashion, a continuum of identity, multiple changing instances of identity, or else contradictions within identity. These cases, which may be amalgams or becomings (transformations), or, indeed, both at once, suggest a protean character for identity, entangled with sexuality, that ought to be understood, I want to argue, as queer. These cases, as I see them, are also an expansion and development of the earlier challenging of visual representation's limits, as seen in *Echo and Narcissus*; they become a standardized pattern (though never quite a stereotype) that would be used again and again in compositions throughout Poussin's middle work. Ultimately, this instability and variability will come to be found more in the spaces in his paintings and less in the figures in them, but that is discussed in the next and final

chapter. The transition<sup>133</sup> between individual queer bodies and this queer space is the subject that occupies us now. It is marked by queer groups of bodies. Poussin's use of such variability may be termed 'Poussinian multiplicity' and in the way I find it to be queer I see an affinity with the concept of multiplicity found in the thought of Gilles Deleuze. This affinity is discussed in what follows, as well.<sup>134</sup>

I shall look at two major types of works in this last section. To focus the discussion, I shall concentrate on one major, central work for each type. The first type are those scenes of revelry – Poussin's bacchanalias – that (paradoxically) present orderly, measured compositions and that derive, in subject and in spirit, from Poussin's early erotica and Arcadian works such as *Echo and Narcissus*. The first major development of this type comes soon after the preceding works centring on a single, male figure. It is *Bacchanal Before a Herm of Pan* (1631-32). [Fig.3.17] Poussin's explorations of these themes develop in a complex way, with many overlapping concerns, and many returns to earlier formats. But, if one is prepared to look at where approaches first arise, and when the preponderance of his work using each approach is found, a rough pattern of development is still observable: From an early concern primarily with the destabilization of single figures, often in Arcadian and mythological settings (seen in *Echo and Narcissus*), Poussin moves on to more complex groupings, where an unfolding process of

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<sup>133</sup>It should be remembered that this transition is not entirely temporal in character. Poussin's work and his concerns in his work tend to zig and zag between earlier and sometimes quite advanced formulations. As such, there are many overlaps; this zigzagging is found as much within each period of Poussin's work as it is found between earlier and later periods. Unlike Blunt I do not seek to impose on Poussin an excessively orderly development. See Chapter 3.

<sup>134</sup>This thought should be more properly characterized as the thought of Deleuze sometimes in collaboration with Felix Guattari since, below, I shall mostly be consulting two works, *Difference and Repetition* (1968) by Deleuze alone and, more extensively, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) by Deleuze and Guattari together.

transformation harnesses this instability for thematic purposes (as in its crystallization in *Bacchanal before a Herm of Pan*).

*Bacchanal before a Herm of Pan*, now in London's National Gallery, builds upon the earliest erotic work involving satyrs and nymphs<sup>135</sup> and yet it represents a considerable refinement of this work. These paintings and drawings featured homoeroticism, heterosexual voyeurism and the arguably queer practice of using, as a quasi-bestial intermediary for the viewer, satyrs. But the new work has combined the earlier subject matter with the thematic organization of groups of bodies developed in the *Cephalus and Aurora*. More than that, it has tamed that subject matter to a certain extent, but (crucially) not entirely. A riotous scene is now rendered in an orderly fashion, an approach which thereby achieves a paradoxical accommodation between order and disorder, undermining both poles of this opposition. Variations of sex, of body position, of skin tone and (one presumes) of sobriety define a group of revellers who exhibit both spiralling circular and teleological progression. The group on the left, consisting of two male human figures (joined almost as a couple) and one female, are at once clearly distinguished in sequence and, at the same time, complicatedly interlinked in a corkscrew-like arrangement of overlapping arms and legs. Their positions vis-à-vis each other, like in the earlier *Cephalus and Aurora*, could be described mathematically, it would seem. They are a kind of dancing function. Meanwhile, the group on the right (and, I am sure, we are meant to 'read' this picture from left to right) is having greater difficulty keeping things together. Three human girls surround a single satyr who, in the third position of four, is tumbling onto the last girl in a manner that both suggests sex and

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<sup>135</sup> Among these, *Sleeping Venus and Cupid*, *The Nurture of Bacchus* (two versions), *Venus (or a Nymph) Spied on by Satyrs* (1626), and *Nymph and Satyrs* (London) *Nymph, Satyr and Goat* and the painting *Nymph Riding a Goat* (c.1633)

suggests it can only be sex-play, for the satyr seems so inebriated that he could be no practical threat.

In a pattern reminiscent of his toning-down of explicit sexuality in moving from the early erotic drawings and pornographic source prints to the less risqué paintings based upon them, here too Poussin starts out with a more aggressively sexual plan for the painting. The realized painting lacks the frank eroticism found in one of its preparatory studies. In *The Drawings of Poussin*, a 1979 book, Anthony Blunt reproduces (but barely comments upon) an early study for *Bacchanal before a Herm of Pan*. The drawing is from the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle. Entitled by Blunt *Dance before a Herm of Pan* (also his name for the painting), [Fig.3.18] it presents a considerably different arrangement of figures. The only figure which is exactly the same is the one who, in the final painting, is the darker-toned male (the first male from the left), whose face is obscured by an arm but whose buttocks are carefully rendered. (Interestingly, this figure is identical in all versions of this subject.) The drawing has two sexually charged situations. The first, on the extreme left, has a satyr groping the exposed breast of a bacchante, while she pulls, pushes or strokes his right horn. On the extreme right, a dancing girl is pouring out a vase onto some plants at the base of the herm. The vessel is so positioned, however, as to be exactly at the level of the herm's penis. Whether she is covering it, touching it, or whether there is a suggestion of urination, is entirely unclear. Of this lascivious scene, Blunt merely notes that there are significant differences between it and the finished painting in the National Gallery and offers that it "was probably made some years before" the painting. That is, in fact, the period corresponding to Poussin's

more erotic works.<sup>136</sup> Given this preparatory material, the final work considerably understates its sexual situations.

In the painting, the girl upon whom the satyr is tumbling offers a resistance that, for her part, seems to be motivated more by a hint of annoyance crossing her face than by fear. The flaccidity and related frontality of this herm of Pan cancels its practical potential and deploys it instead as a *symbol* of phallic potency, a symbol that has been rendered entirely symbolic by the excessive drunkenness of the collapsing group on the right of the picture. Blunt notes that, together with a later painting, the *Triumph of Pan* (1636), this herm seems based on the manifestly phallic figure of the herm of Priapus in G.B. Marliani's engraving *The Worship of Priapus* published in 1588.<sup>137</sup> From Marliani's severe-looking priapic herm to that of Pan, which Walter Friedländer describes as "good-naturedly" presiding over this scene, a distinct diminishing of phallic potency is discernable.<sup>138</sup> And so, from left to right, we have depicted a procession that seems to progress from high spirits to incapacity. This progression is encapsulated in miniature by the three putti on the extreme left who, as in stop-motion photography, seem to record three stages on the path to collapse: the desire for wine, the obtaining of it, and its inevitable effect (on a putto anyway) of inducing face-down collapse.

The figures, as mentioned, are arranged to suggest both circular and linear progression: a 'downward spiral' in effect. This work may therefore be seen to revive the warning function of drunken or lascivious satyrs found on ancient Greek wine vessels and, especially, at the bottom of drinking cups. (Like modern government health warnings on packets of cigarettes, these erection-sporting demi-animals were intended as

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<sup>136</sup>Anthony Blunt, *The Drawings of Poussin* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979) 99.

<sup>137</sup>Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, 144.

<sup>138</sup>Friedländer, 136.

an example of the dangers of excess consumption, often appearing, amusingly, at the *bottom* of a cup of wine. Their symposia-attending Greek viewers might well appreciate the message: they disdained the animal in the human.)<sup>139</sup> In a similar fashion, therefore, and remembering his developing stoic philosophical orientation, we may read Poussin's painting as indeed a refinement of his early scenes of Arcadian eros. Not only has the implied sex act been now, implicitly, made to look unlikely; but a moral message, a message of temperance and sexual continence, has been raised up as the anagogical purpose of the bacchanalian scene.

This moral may be further elucidated if we compare this painting to a slightly later one and one which, it seems to me, is adapted, though a bit heavy-handedly, from its example. Blunt dated Poussin's famous *A Dance to the Music of Time* [Fig.3.19] to 1639.<sup>140</sup> The curators at the Wallace Collection, where it resides in London, now date it considerably earlier, to 1634-36, and thus considerably nearer to the *Bacchanal before a Herm of Pan*.<sup>141</sup> It is well-established, however, that this painting, which depicts a much more tightly closed circle of dancers, does so to make a moral point about the vicissitudes of fortune, a stoical moral, but also about how one state of fortune begets another in endless sequence. Four dancing women frame a circle, facing out. Each is an allegorical figure representing a different state of mankind: Poverty, Industry, Wealth and Luxury. (Luxury, on the far left of the painting, makes eye contact with the viewer.) On the extreme right, the allegorical figure of Time plays a tune and a putto next to him holds an hourglass, his attribute. On the extreme left, next to Luxury, another putto blows bubbles

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<sup>139</sup>Alistair Blanshard, keynote address, *Second Annual Meeting of the International Society for Cultural History*, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia, 21 Jul., 2009.

<sup>140</sup>Blunt, *ibid.*, 153.

<sup>141</sup>A preparatory drawing dated to 1635 is held in the National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh. [Fig.3.20]

through a tube, symbolizing how all wealth and happiness is transitory. The organizing motif is the popular late medieval ‘Wheel of Fortune’ and this entire theme is related by Bellori, Poussin’s biographer.<sup>142</sup> The program for this painting – its symbolism is neither subtle nor particularly complex – was apparently devised by its commissioning client, Cardinal Giulio Rospigliosi, later Pope Clement IX.<sup>143</sup> It nonetheless suggests a connection with Poussin’s earlier thematized progression of figures, to a moral end, in *Bacchanal before a Herm of Pan*. The later painting even includes a herm, in this case a two-headed boundary marker dedicated to Janus, strengthening their association. The two paintings’ putative close proximity in time strengthens this association still further and allows us to conceive of *A Dance to the Music of Time* as a simplified but clarified rearticulation of the use of the progress of figures, through various places on the canvas’s surface, to symbolize different stages or states in time through which the same imagined singular figure would occupy.

Returning to the *Bacchanal*, once again, the limits of painting – a still medium – are being pushed. And underlying these similar moral points, the revolving states of mankind or, due to excess, the decline into incapacity of revellers, there is one key theme that strongly links the two paintings: the exchange of one identity position for another, through change or through progress. In the latter canvas the double-headed figure of Janus even suggests the compound identity of the four women dancing in a circle. In both canvases the position of each figure is problematized in relation to each other by the over-arching idea of progressive substitution. Not only do these paintings suggest a change in time that they cannot represent but they suggest that, seen atemporally, through

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<sup>142</sup>Ibid.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid.

the ‘eye of painting’ one might say, all these different positions are a part of a variable group body that transcends, on the one hand, each individual (including sex, body position, and skin tone) but also, on the other, the individual as a category of identity. This is how Poussin’s depiction of the group body activates another deep affinity with a queer conceptualization. We may understand the position of each particular figure in a complex composition as performing a role in a manner entirely analogous to how Judith Butler observes that all gendered subject positions are themselves instances of performativity.<sup>144</sup> But, by taking a small detour from Queer Theory proper we may see how the destabilization inherent in the transformation of these figures (or their ‘becoming,’ as they imaginatively move from one position to another) is considerably queerer still. The significance of this becoming may be elucidated through a comparison of this process with what, in their book *A Thousand Plateaus*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari term ‘becoming-animal’.

The project of *A Thousand Plateaus* is not that of a treatise and its organization is deliberately non-hierarchical and, in a certain sense, non-linear.<sup>145</sup> With the exception of the conclusion, the reader is invited to read its “plateaus,” which are its alternative to chapters, in any order.<sup>146</sup> Reading in this way is likened to listening to a vinyl record.<sup>147</sup> One skips from track to track, at one’s pleasure. It is the manifestation of the book’s conceptual ordering, the replacement of what is termed the “arborescent” model with that of the “rhizome.”<sup>148</sup> The model of the tree is of a pattern of growth where trunk gives

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<sup>144</sup>Butler, *ibid.*

<sup>145</sup>Brian Massumi, “Translator’s Foreword: Pleasures of Philosophy,” in Deleuze and Guattari, xi-xii. The book establishes alternative, crossing, overlapping and intermingling lines of reading and so it is not linear in the sense of beginning at the beginning and proceeding, by ordered stages, to the end.

<sup>146</sup>Deleuze and Guattari, “Authors Note,” xxi.

<sup>147</sup>Massumi, , ix.

<sup>148</sup>*Ibid.*, xii.



way to branch and branch to stem. Every part is given its place according to the hierarchy of its genesis. The rhizome, on the other hand, is a pattern of plant growth and development that eschews the unity of hierarchy for multiplicity and open-endedness. One may break a rhizome at any part (like ginger-root, say) and the parts will continue to grow separately.

Deleuze and Guattari go on to enumerate certain properties of the rhizome: it is heterogeneous, with any part connecting with any other, potentially at any point,<sup>149</sup> it is characterized by “multiplicity,” that is, it has no centre, no “pivot” and, therefore, no radical unity,<sup>150</sup> it may be broken at any point, after which it may either continue as before, or in some new arrangement,<sup>151</sup> and it may not be mapped in terms of its pattern of development – it has no necessary self-similarity – and so it lacks what they term “deep structure.”<sup>152</sup> The rhizome may also grow back into itself and its reproduction is governed by no necessarily bi-sexual (that is, in this sense, no ‘heterosexual’) pattern dimorphism.<sup>153</sup> The rhizome, as Deleuze and Guattari construe it, is against any principle of genealogy.<sup>154</sup> Their project also likens it to a manifestly sexual phenomenon but one that opposes regular or routine sexuality. The authors note that the “plateaus” of their book’s title refer not just to its parts but also to its want of goal-directness, as in the pursuit of a sexual climax. They write:

A plateau is always in the middle, not at the beginning or the end. A rhizome is made of plateaus. Gregory Bateson uses the word “plateau” to designate something very special: a continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation toward a

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<sup>149</sup>Deleuze and Guattari, 7.

<sup>150</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>151</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>153</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>154</sup>They may be straying from the biological qualities of the plant-type, at this point. Rhizomes have, after all, evolved.

culmination point or external end[, where, quoting Bateson] “some sort of continuing plateau of intensity is substituted for [sexual] climax,” war, or a culmination point [...] We call a plateau any multiplicity connected to other multiplicities by superficial underground stems in such a way as to form or extend a rhizome. We are writing this book as a rhizome. It is composed of plateaus.<sup>155</sup>

As a model, the rhizomatic approach to being a plant serves to show that one type of creature (the tree form) has constantly been raised by normative Western thought to represent the organizing norm, while other possibilities were longstandingly available. By extension, the rhizomatic approach to being a book reveals that an alternative to the hierarchical organization of a linear argument was also always possible. This meditation on the rhizome becomes the overture, then, for a book which means to repeat its radical difference and reorder the common pattern of thought.

This reordering is meant to open up possibilities for thought and so, presumably, for scholarship. For scholars, however, it introduces just as many difficulties. While the implicit point in this reordering is that traditional ordering forecloses other possibilities, the mechanics of scholarly debate are so well-established that the failure to subordinate one point to another makes such a project almost impossible to apply, and certainly impossible to summarize. What we may do, however, is accept the invitation to use it and follow it idiosyncratically, making of what part of it what we may. What emerges already is a pattern of thought strikingly similar to Queer Theory, even though they have some fundamental philosophical variances. And this similarity has been noticed. An entire issue of the online journal *Rhizomes* was devoted to it.<sup>156</sup> Like Queer Theory and,

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<sup>155</sup>Ibid., 21-22.

<sup>156</sup>Michael O'Rourke, spec. ed., *Rhizomes 11/12, The Becoming-Deleuzoguattarian of Queer Studies*. Some points of tension or resistance have certainly been noted but, overall, there are many productive linkages to be made. In one article in this edition, Jeffrey J. Cohen and Todd Ramlow sum up the situation this way: “The evidence for the queerness of Gilles Deleuze is scant. He collaborated passionately with Félix

particularly, like its difficult interaction with and among academic discourses, the thought of Deleuze and Guattari has to exist in a paradoxical state vis-à-vis the objects of its application, at least by others. The very activity of applying theories derived in one context to objects usually studied in another involves an application by analogy, whether that analogy is directly acknowledged (as here) or not. Yet, analogy itself is what the rhizomatic alternative is meant to undermine. (Analogy is a comparison between parallel branches stemming from some common root concept. It is inherently ‘arborescent’.) Of this, Brian Massumi writes:

“State Philosophy” is another word for the representational thinking that has characterized Western metaphysics since Plato [...] As described by Deleuze [...] it reposes on a double identity: of the thinking subject, and the concepts it creates and to which it lends its own presumed attributes of sameness and constancy. The subject, its concepts, and also the objects in the world to which the concepts are applied have a shared, internal essence: the self-resemblance at the basis of identity. Representational thought is analogical; its concern is to establish a correspondence between these symmetrically structured domains. The faculty of judgment is the policeman of analogy, assuring that each of the three terms is honestly itself, and that the proper correspondence obtain.<sup>157</sup>

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Guattari, radical psychoanalyst and activist for the rights of gays and lesbians. He shared his work and interpenetrated ideas with Michel Foucault, the founding figure of contemporary queer theory. Yet the philosopher spent his life happily married to his wife, Fanny. They raised two children in what looks to us like the predictable structure of a bourgeois family. He was not even an especially spiffy dresser. Yet we find in Gilles Deleuze's work a provocative reconceptualization of subjecthood and desire, a becoming-queer lucidly evident when he refused the lonely authority of a single voice and hybridized with Guattari and Claire Parnet through writing.” Cohen and Ramlow, “Pink Vectors of Deleuze: Queer Theory and Inhumanism.” *Rhizomes 11/12* (Fall 2005/Winter 2006), n.p. Source Online. (Accessed 20 Feb. 2011.) <<http://www.rhizomes.net/issue11/cohenramlow.html>> See also Verena Andermatt Conley, “Thirty-Thousand Forms of Love: The Queering of Deleuze and Guattari,” in *Deleuze and Queer Theory*, ed. Chrysanthi Nigianni and Merl Storr (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009) 24. Conley view’s of Deleuzian queerness is, indeed, very close to that I have advanced in this dissertation: “‘Queering’ in the sense of Deleuze and Guattari goes beyond a simple insertion of gay subject in an existent society. The philosopher and the analyst champion queering as becoming so necessary for the continual invention of terms such as women and homoasexuals[, a] radical move that breaks down all oppositions[.]” (Ibid., 24.) Among the problems are that Queer Theorist – Judith Butler, in particular – maintain a concept of subjectivity incompatible with Deleuze. See Claire Colebrook, “On the Very possibility of Queer Theory,” in Nigianni and Storr, 11-23. Of course, I do not argue that they are *compatible*, merely that they are *similar*. Arranging a philosophical marriage of Deleuze and Queer Theory is far beyond the scope my project here.

<sup>157</sup>Massumi, xi.

To apply Deleuze and Guattari appropriately to some object of study would be the ordinary (and proper) scholarly manoeuvre; but do that – and it is done all the time – is automatically to repudiate the purpose of Deleuzian thought in the first place. By using it analogically, we are using it against itself. This is a paradox because our failure to do so, meanwhile, could mean being true to Deleuzian thought. This, however, might also leave whatever discourse is in place undisturbed. The only way out is to recognize that the activity is a trap: there can be no Deleuzian reading that is not itself rhizomatic. All representational uses of this thought, then, must perforce be betrayals of it; and yet that is in keeping with its spirit. The rhizomatic approach is one that avoids hierarchy but it also avoids closure. Just as queering is an activity and so ‘queer’ is not a stable identity, so too Deleuze’s approach is always open to other contradictory possibilities. (This is what happens when a thinker rejects self-similar identity as the basis of a philosophical system.) A betrayed Deleuze is what a *non-represented* Deleuze might look like. Similarly, an adulterated Queer Theory can well be seen as a particularly well-realized one. (This problem, however, only repeats the problem of this thesis project in miniature.) We may proceed using care but also using sensitivity to take advantage of the new possibilities that are open. There are uses of Deleuzo-Guattarian theory that might be inappropriate, to be sure, but there are no *ab initio* criteria for how to use this theory appropriately.

Deleuze and Guattari’s project is a collaboration based in part on Deleuze’s earlier work alone.<sup>158</sup> His first important contribution was *Difference and Repetition*, a book developed from his doctoral dissertation, but one (for my purposes) unburdened by

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<sup>158</sup>Ibid., x.

the inherent need to avoid hierarchical systematization and linearity. (It is easier to represent.) Its concern, nevertheless, is to demolish identity (self-sameness) as the basis of all philosophy (together with its attendant category of representation) and replace it with a philosophical system premised upon difference (and the alternative to representation therein, namely repetition).<sup>159</sup> In doing so, as has been recognized by Verena Andermatt Conley,<sup>160</sup> Deleuze established an early philosophical basis for Queer Theory. Deleuze writes:

[W]ith Plato, a philosophical decision of the utmost importance was taken: that of subordinating difference to the supposedly initial powers of the Same and the Similar, that of declaring difference unthinkable *in itself* and sending it, along with simulacra to the bottomless ocean [...]. The catechism, so influenced by the Platonic Fathers, has made us familiar with the idea of an image without likeness: man is in the image and likeness of God, but through sin we have lost the likeness while remaining the image ... simulacra are precisely demonic images, stripped of resemblance. Or rather, in contrast to [icons], they have externalised resemblance and live on difference instead. If they produce an external effect of resemblance, this takes the form of illusion, not an internal principle; it is itself constructed on the basis of disparity, having interiorised the dissimilitude of its constituent series and the divergence of its points of view to the point where it shows several things or tells several stories at once.<sup>161</sup>

What Deleuze characterizes as simulacra take over, from representation, the role governing all philosophy of appearances, just as difference replaces identity as the foundation of metaphysics. It is a radical reconstruction that replaces all solid identity, what Deleuze will go on to call “molar,”<sup>162</sup> with instantiated repetitions grounded only in difference. In the book this reconceptualization is painstakingly carried throughout the

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<sup>159</sup>See Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. ) Originally published as *Différence et Répétition* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968).

<sup>160</sup>Conley, *Ibid.*, 24-25.

<sup>161</sup>Deleuze, *Difference* 127-128. Emphasis added. I have replaced the rendered Greek word “*icônes*” [ἰκόνες] by its translation “icons.”

<sup>162</sup>Deleuze and Guattari, 303.

Western philosophical system, reimagining it almost in its entirety.<sup>163</sup> And this rethinking has much in common with what, on an entirely individual level, will come to be discussed as performativity in Butler 22 years later.<sup>164</sup> One could imagine Queer Theory existing as but one domain of a philosophical order reworked according to Deleuze's ideas in *Difference and Repetition*. As it is, however, Deleuze's ideas would be most influential through the work done in collaboration with Guattari and it is to but one facet of that work that I turn now. The limited analogy I draw between it and the art of Poussin must be understood as depending in part on a larger intellectual project.<sup>165</sup>

The concept of becoming-animal, which is but one in a series of becomings,<sup>166</sup> is an instance of identity transformation with especial affinities to queerness. It belongs to a "becoming-molecular," which "undermines the great molar powers of family, career, and conjugality."<sup>167</sup> 'Molar' refers to a threshold of concentration in chemistry and is used by Deleuze and Guattari to indicate things that are characterized by self-sameness and singular identity, among them Man, the State, and the apparatus of rationalized hierarchy in politics, the family, and similar institutions of power; but it also includes any fixed and oppositional categories of identity.<sup>168</sup> The 'molecular', its alternative, is characterized by

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<sup>163</sup>Dorothea Olkowski, *Gilles Deleuze and the Ruin of Representation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999) 15.

<sup>164</sup> Butler, *ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> In the introduction to *Deleuze and Queer Theory*, Chrysanthi Nigianni moves to refound the origins of Queer Theory by bringing Deleuzian ideas so far into the heart of the program that the problem – is this Queer Theory or Deleuze? – dissolves into a problem of translation. She points out that the role of French theory – indeed the mainstream of French theory after 1968 – is so embedded in queer approaches that any opposition between the two is, basically, a mistake. They make much of what they identify as a largely American myth of Queer Theory's distinct founding, a myth with gains unwarranted currency because the word 'Queer' is untranslatable. (The well-meaning attempt by community organizations in Quebec and even the Government of Quebec to render it as "allosexuel" is unconvincing.) The introduction argues, in effect, that Queer Theory is outcropping of French thought (post 1968) in the context of sexuality and gender studies, and feminism. See Nigianni, introduction, in Nigianni and Storr, 1-4.

<sup>166</sup>Deleuze and Guattari, 272.

<sup>167</sup>*Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>168</sup>See Massumi, xi-xii.

multiplicity, can only exist in a state of being internally diverse, and offers a path to non-oppositional identity, or a fluid succession of identities, perhaps. Massumi notes that this idea of Man, as a presumed-male, atomic individual, reflects and is a representation of the State, and in such an arrangement, he writes, “each mind [is] an analogously organized mini-State morally unified in the supermind of the State.”<sup>169</sup> Deleuze and Guattari affirm that it is not possible to become ‘Man’ at all, because the process of transformation they envision is a shedding of what they call “majoritarian” identities, of which Man is the example “par excellence.”<sup>170</sup> Becomings are conditioned by their distinction between the ‘majoritarian’ and the “minoritarian,” which are associated with molarity and molecularity, respectively. “[A]ll becoming is becoming-minoritarian,” they write.<sup>171</sup> It is not a question of relative proportions or populations, however: “When we say majority, we are referring not to a greater quantity but to the determination of a state or standard in relation to which larger quantities, as well as the smallest, can be said to be minoritarian: white-man, adult-male, etc., majority implies a state of domination.”<sup>172</sup>

The pursuit of the molecular alternative begins, for Deleuze and Guattari, with an identification (on the part of everyone) with the position of women.<sup>173</sup> Because womanhood is first used to build opposed identities, it is what, in escaping them, one must first become.<sup>174</sup> A rejection of the majoritarian category of Man, or else of the various minoritarian and molar identities this majority has been able to impose, is the course that becoming follows. The stage of becoming-animal is the one associated by

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<sup>169</sup>Ibid., xii.

<sup>170</sup>Deleuze and Guattari, 291.

<sup>171</sup>Ibid.

<sup>172</sup>Ibid.

<sup>173</sup>Ibid., 276.

<sup>174</sup>Ibid.

Deleuze and Guattari most closely with sexuality. Altogether, this schema proposes a challenge that is antihumanist. It rejects as inherently oppressive the conception of Man upon which humanism implicitly depends, that of Massumi's molar, well-governed mini-state. It would be a mistake, however, to understand the sequence as describing a development, let alone a hierarchy. No inhabitant of a civilization premised upon molar identities has any automatic access to molecular ones – not women, not homosexuals, no one. The sequence is one through which we must all pass to escape molar conceptions. “[A]ll becomings are molecular,” they write, but molecularity itself is rhizomatic.<sup>175</sup> The sequence, then, is one indirectly imposed by molarity, it reflects it, and only happens because of it. That is why ‘becoming-woman’ must be first; there is no becoming-man because manhood is the principle opposed to any possibility of becoming.<sup>176</sup> A becoming is a loss of identity and may involve a loss of power. It is not empowering but is, rather, a liberation from those identity cages that organize and transmit power.

It should be pointed out – and this, indeed, is yet another affinity with Queer Theory – that many feminists have resisted the implicit demolition of identity categories such as that of woman. They find this anti-molar option to offer no meaningful liberations at all. Laura Cull writes:

[F]eminist philosophers such as Luce Irigaray have rightly expressed anger and frustration at Deleuze and Guattari's controversial concept of ‘becoming-woman’ as well as their seeming desire to delegitimize the so-called ‘molar’ politics of feminism in favour of a universal, molecular revolution [... M]any feminists are unwilling to abandon the struggle for equality[...].<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>175</sup>Deleuze and Guattari, 275.

<sup>176</sup>Ibid., 291.

<sup>177</sup> Laura Cull, “The Politics of Becoming-Woman: Deleuze, Sex and Gender” (2009). Text online. [http://northumbria.academia.edu/LauraCull/papers/122411/The\\_politics\\_of\\_becoming\\_woman\\_Deleuze\\_sex\\_and\\_gender](http://northumbria.academia.edu/LauraCull/papers/122411/The_politics_of_becoming_woman_Deleuze_sex_and_gender). (Accessed 4 Feb., 2011.)



Cull specifically mentions the gap in pay between men and women in the United Kingdom.<sup>178</sup> (This is not the ‘plateau’ upon which Deleuze and Guattari are approaching this problem, to say the least.) A similar tension, of course, is found between some followers of Queer Theory and those who seek concrete political and legal equality for lesbians and homosexuals. (A Deleuzo-Guattarian perspective likely would not make much of the quest for same-sex marriage, for instance.) Gavin Brown explains that many queer activists “oppose and contest the complacent politics of mainstream gay politicians who actively work to win gay people’s compliance to a depoliticized culture based on domesticity and privatized consumption.”<sup>179</sup> Indeed, Brown characterizes avowedly queer politics in what are approaching Deleuzian terms. He writes: “Many of the most vibrant forms of contemporary radicalism are trying to move beyond purely oppositional politics and are attempting to reconstruct society around a different set of norms (for example, co-operation, consensus and non-hierarchical horizontal structures) [...]”<sup>180</sup> Whether the radical approach is Deleuzian or queer, its adoption threatens to undo the work of feminists and gay activists who are working in a modern, liberal and capitalist framework based upon Renaissance humanism and Enlightenment liberalism. What are the implications for the political aspirations of activists of adopting an anti-humanist critique of ‘Man’? This debate is proper to feminism, Gay and Lesbian Studies and other, comparable activist tendencies within academic discourses. Indeed, a still different framing of the problem is raised (and arguably resolved) by what Gayatri Spivak’s termed “strategic essentialism,” where what in Deleuze are molar identities are deployed only where and while they are useful, the strategic dimension being merely a temporary

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<sup>178</sup>Ibid.

<sup>179</sup>Brown, 196-97.

<sup>180</sup>Ibid., 195.

critical engagement, or “essentialism as a means to *resist* essentialism.”<sup>181</sup> This problem is entirely ‘academic’ in that practical political battlegrounds seldom involve coherent philosophies in the first place and, therefore, rarely expect them. But the academic debate is fiercely fought nonetheless. My purpose here is only to sketch out the correspondences between the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari and Queer Theory and demonstrate where and how both sets of ideas operate in the same way. To that end, it is useful to observe that the two approaches have similar problems in how they are received.

Becoming-animal is very closely tied to sexuality. The slippage into becoming may start with sex and gender identity but progresses directly into minoritarian sexuality quite generally and there it becomes-animal. Sex and sexuality are not explainable by sexual dimorphism alone. Deleuze and Guattari write:

The question is not, or not only, that of the organism, history, and the subject of enunciation that opposes masculine to feminine in the great dualism machines. The question is fundamentally of the body – the body that they steal from us in order to fabricate opposable organisms [...] The girl’s becoming is stolen first, in order to impose a history, or a prehistory, upon her.<sup>182</sup>

Masculinity, in turn, is constructed as opposite to the girl’s femininity. They continue: “The same applies for sexuality: it is badly explained by the binary organization of the sexes, and just as badly by a bisexual organization within each sex.”<sup>183</sup> The authors do refer to effeminate homosexuality directly, tending to conflate it, however, with drag or transvestitism; but, despite a bit of confusion on this subject, the key point is made, that it is a case of becoming-woman, not of imitating women, even though that also happens.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>181</sup>Martha Albertson Fineman, Jack E. Jackson, and Adam P. Romero, eds, *Feminist and Queer Legal Theory: Intimate Encounters, Uncomfortable Conversations* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2009) 378.

<sup>182</sup>Deleuze and Guattari, 278.

<sup>183</sup>*Ibid.*, 278-79.

<sup>184</sup>*Ibid.*, 275.

Sexuality, however, is not the same as sexual-orientation; it is not a framing of the subject, or its ‘personality,’ it is the (at-least partial) abandonment of this molar unity.

From the very beginning of their discussion, becoming-animal is associated with the pack organization of animal life.<sup>185</sup> Animality emerges as a way of being multiple. The experience of ‘losing oneself’ is fundamental in this. It is an ecstatic abandon not at all to be confused with resembling or playing at being an animal.<sup>186</sup> They explain:

There is no need for bestialism in this, although it may arise [...] It is not a question of “playing” the dog [...] Becomings-animal are basically of another power, since their reality resides not in an animal one imitates or to which one corresponds but in themselves, in that which suddenly sweeps us up and makes us become – a *proximity*, an *indiscernibility* that extracts a shared element from the animal far more effectively than any domestication, utilization or imitation could [...].<sup>187</sup>

Becoming-animal means starting to work how animals work, being how animals are.

Becoming-animal is a stage after becoming-woman and becoming continues by degrees, if practiced, towards becoming-imperceptible, which the authors characterize as the “immanent end of becoming, its cosmic formula.”<sup>188</sup> It is not a more complete stage, however, but just, if fully realized, a later one. It happens to come at the end.<sup>189</sup> As I mentioned before, these are not part of a hierarchical progression. Each becoming is sufficient and equivalent (or at least beyond valuation) in itself.

In Poussin’s *Bacchanal* we see the process of becoming-animal illustrated.

Moving from left to right the dancing figures are merging into a pack. The woman on the left of this group, looking behind her, is being pulled along. The figures suggest momentum, or even acceleration, until, as on the extreme right of the picture, they

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<sup>185</sup>Ibid., 233.

<sup>186</sup>Ibid., 279

<sup>187</sup>Ibid.

<sup>188</sup>Ibid.

<sup>189</sup>Ibid.

collapse into a heap. At the far right in the centre of the pack of bodies is the half-animal satyr, under the presiding effigy of Pan. Merging implies excitement and energy – and even discomfort – but it also implies a loss of individual identity. The man between the bacchante on the left and the central male figure has the other man’s arm crossing him, erasing his face, and reducing him to his place in the dance and to the rugged nakedness of his body. Becoming-animal, adopting a pack like way of being is entangled with sexuality because that is where multiplicities and becomings abound: “Sexuality brings into play too great a diversity of conjugated becomings [...] Sexuality is the production of a thousand sexes, which are so many uncontrollable becomings. *Sexuality proceeds by way of the becoming-woman of the man and the becoming-animal of the human* [...]”<sup>190</sup> Becomings themselves become pack like in this surrender of the self and its perimeters. As becomings are rhizomatic, there is no need to follow this sequence to the end, to become-imperceptible. We may join or depart whenever we please. Becoming-imperceptible is vanishing out of the order of molar identity altogether; but becoming-animal is as far as we need to go here.

This is where, in its concern with undermining molar identities, the thought of Deleuze and Guattari is most closely reflected in Poussin, illuminating another way in which both the thought and this reflection of it may be understood as queer. The connections among Poussin, Queer Theory, and Deleuze are creative, tentative and experimental, to be sure, which is exactly how Deleuze and Guattari invite readers to use their ideas.<sup>191</sup> In the introduction to *Deleuze and Queer Theory* Chrysanthi Nigianni notes that it the book’s project is unusual. She writes:

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<sup>190</sup>Ibid., 278-279.

<sup>191</sup>Ibid., 251.

[T]his project is primarily creative and not critical, and it is critical precisely by being creative. Rather than dismissing queer (theory), this collective work reaffirms the seductive power of the concept ‘queer’, and its continuing force to inspire thinking nowadays. Moving beyond, or along, lines of queer theory (in its institutionalised Anglo-American form) constitutes a living proof of the vital force of the concepts of queerness: the force to affect and effect changes in the way one theorises, its capacity to produce deviant lines along established thinking and disciplines, its ability to queer the queer, that is, to undermine the self, to resist any normalisation.<sup>192</sup>

Creativity does not have to happen at the cost of rigour but it may have to happen at the cost of ‘closure.’ I raise here a point that exceeds the scope of my project but that does offer a useful outlook on its approach. The special usefulness of Deleuzian thought for Queer Theory is attested by scholars working in these philosophical and critical approaches.<sup>193</sup> How it is attested shows that creative and unusual applications of these ideas are precisely the purpose of these ideas.

Becoming-animal and its queer correspondences may be seen in paintings by Poussin but these paintings do only merely illustrate it. Animals, or figures like satyrs that seem to have started to become animals, appear in Poussin’s paintings, to be sure. It is not these partly animal figures alone – queer though they may seem – that suggest an application of the Deleuzian category to certain works, however. It is, rather, the immanent question of multiplicity, which emerges within these works of art and these ideas alike, that most exemplifies the affinities among Poussin, Queer Theory and the thought of Deleuze and Guattari. In Poussin’s *Bacchanal before a Herm of Pan*, the interlocked knots of bodies and desires undermine the unitary identity of each figure.

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<sup>192</sup>Nigianni, 1.

<sup>193</sup>Conley begins, for instance: “It is [...] especially in the writings of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari that the question of homosexuality as queering, that is, as becoming and as an ongoing differing of difference, is raised.” Conley, *ibid.* See also Coley 34-35 for the similarity of this thought to some of the ideas of Judith Butler and of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.

Desire seems to flow through the group and, linked by that desire, this continuum becomes one group body. I have observed how the scenes of group revelry are based on an approach first developed for the painting of erotic scenes based on manifestly pornographic prints. These scenes are an extension, though also a partial cleansing (that is, a 'de-eroticization') of this early body of work. Poussin's most important correspondence with these Deleuzoguattarian ideas is still found on the level of the ideas in his art. Poussin's paintings do not merely depict becomings-animal, although they do that too. Rather, they *are* as becomings-animal are.

## CHAPTER 4: MAKING QUEER SPACE

The foregoing chapter charted the developments of queerness in Poussin's depictions of bodies. From an initial spark of erotic and homoerotic meaning, it grew and diversified to become a way of reconceiving deep conceptual problems for visual art and problematizing pictorial representation. From its first important articulation in *Echo and Narcissus*, this 'queer Poussin' has dealt with difficult thematic issues and problems of representation. By the mid 1630s, Poussin's queer multiplicities are evident to the point where they interact with, animate and illuminate the poetic themes and philosophical ideas that his subjects engage. This has become an approach with broad applicability, thematically and in terms of the subjects to which it can be applied. *Echo and Narcissus* was an early and precocious case of this, inspired, as I have argued, by the example of Giambattista Marino.

This last chapter will concern Poussin's construction of queer spaces (as opposed to bodies) in some of his paintings after 1630 that depict urban, political scenes, or conjure up an imagined Greece or an envisioned Egypt, or else are set in landscapes<sup>1</sup> derived from his earlier Arcadian scenes. My contention is that Poussin uses these places queerly, to destabilize them or his visual presentation of them. These places are constructed as realms of nostalgic meditation but also of magical transformation. I see

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<sup>1</sup>T.J. Clark cautions that the term 'landscape' can be misleading when applied unreflectively to Poussin's historiated scenes set in natural or semi-natural settings. He writes: "[Catherine] Soussloff did well to remind me [...] that even the title [...] *Landscape* [...] is falsely reassuring. We think we know what *Landscape* means, the kind of priority it established between an environment and a set of human actions. Poussin and his patrons had no such certainty. 'Landscape' was not, or was barely, a genre. That is, [...] sets of expectations had not settled down into patterns of practice." T.J. Clark, *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006) 190.

this as having evolved from his early erotic mythological landscape scenes and as underwritten throughout by a fundamentally Arcadian vision, in the case of the landscapes (a point often made and seldom doubted).<sup>2</sup> I mean to establish an account of this domain as built on the foundations of (and thus continuing) the queer approaches Poussin developed in works, discussed earlier, dealing primarily with bodies. Queer spaces are ones in which the depicted space has multiple overlapping possibilities and thus is unstable, opening, within itself, from one space into another or else they embody a paradoxical space. In increasingly subtle ways, over the course of his later career, Poussin's constructions of queer spaces challenge the order of pictorial representation without relying upon the dichotomy of figure and ground. ('Construction' as I mean it here may be understood as being, for instance, the structure of the painting that is revealed by its placement on a vertical canvas surface while depicting a primarily horizontal planar space. In any case, it is how the depicted space fits in to the space of depiction.) This development into a concern with queer spaces is a crucial transition in Poussin's work. The destabilizing element has changed from being bodies, a figure or a figure group, and it is now found in the organization of his paintings overall. And so a queer space is a space that destabilizes. At first, Poussin's queer spaces merely destabilize the spaces he represents. In later, more subtle and sophisticated depictions it

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<sup>2</sup>See, for instance, Claire Pace, "'Peace and Tranquility of Mind': The Theme of Retreat in Poussin's Landscapes," in Pierre Rosenberg and Keith Christiansen, eds., *Poussin and Nature: Arcadian Visions*. (New York, New Haven and London: The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2008) 73-89. Pace writes: "The topos of Arcadia was important for Poussin [...] Like the Golden Age, Arcadia was associated with the early history of Rome. The founders of Rome were inhabitants of a pastoral world: Romulus was a shepherd [...] Travellers often commented that the Palatine and Campo Vaccino [that is, the Roman forum] had now [in the 17<sup>th</sup> century] reverted to a pastoral state. The concept of Arcadia, which has been defined as the "landscape of an idea," is one of potential seriousness and complexity [...] We may discern an analogous variety [to that in Vergil's poetry] in Poussin's landscapes, and the diverse activity he shows [...] The elegiac Virgilian vision underlies many of Poussin's landscapes: inherent in the idyllic scene is hidden danger." (Pace, 79-81.)



will become the space of depiction rather than the place he purports to envision that is destabilized by his queering approach.

As in the last chapter I shall illustrate what I am calling ‘queer’ in the work by demonstrating the correspondences among Poussin’s work, recent Queer Theory and other critical and interpretive methodologies. Again, I bring in the thought of Gilles Deleuze when discussing an early case of queer space that is, really, still a transition from the approach based on queer bodies. I shall link but also contrast Poussin’s queer space-making with the dynamics of framing and perception found in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Later on, I shall compare Poussin’s paradoxical spaces to what Michel Foucault calls ‘heterotopias’, spaces that inhabit or happen within other spaces.<sup>3</sup> Finally, I shall articulate how a queer account of Poussin’s visual strategies and meanings relates to other accounts that incorporate recent critical ideas and how it differs from them. In particular, I shall engage with some observations of Oskar Bätschmann and the semiotic approach of Louis Marin. As in the last chapter I shall be selective, choosing from among Poussin’s oeuvre only those few works that I think best illuminate his queer pictorial tendencies. This discussion will be divided into one group of generally earlier works that deploy queerness to destabilize the depicted space and a second, generally later group that deploy it to destabilize the means of depiction itself. Chronology, however, is not my main interest: it is clear, now, that Poussin regularly developed ideas or approaches to subjects in one picture, left them alone for a while and then returned to them, sometimes years later, and that he picked up earlier formulae and reused them even after he had

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<sup>3</sup>See Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16.1 (Spring 1986): 22-27. Originally published as “Des Espaces Autres” in *Architecture-Mouvement-Continuité* (1984) and first given as a lecture in 1967.

developed later, different approaches.<sup>4</sup> And so, the progression I assume in the organization of this discussion does not establish any strict chronological order among the particular paintings I discuss – quite the opposite. The works I discuss are not all necessarily presented in a chronological order; rather, I contend that the two approaches they exemplify *tend* to be separated into an earlier and a later phase.

In the first section, I shall examine Poussin's use of space in his history paintings. Among these, my discussion will centre upon the earlier version of *The Rape of the Sabines* (1634) in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (a later version is in Paris), and *The Plague at Ashdod* (1630). These works lay bare the mechanics of Poussin's queering of the scenes of his history painting from the inception of this approach to its culmination in extreme subtlety and conceptual refinement at the end of his painting career. In the second section I shall concentrate on three examples of his late painting, including one Christian religious scene, and two others, where Poussin's queering of space moves beyond the depicted scene and serves to deconstruct its own manner of depicting space, in the rising genre of *paysage historique*, or, perhaps, 'historiated landscape'. These examples will be, first, the late painting *Holy Family in Egypt* (1655-57) and two somewhat earlier cases, *Landscape with Pyramus and Thisbe* (1651) and the later version (of two) of the *Arcadian Shepherds*, also called *Et in Arcadia Ego* (1640), from the Louvre. I have selected these last two paintings for especial

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<sup>4</sup>This question of the 'unsmoothness' of Poussin's development was the main subject of dispute between Anthony Blunt and Denis Mahon, Mahon arguing that the visual details of Poussin's paintings belied Blunt's contention that his intellectual concerns developed in an organized fashion. Blunt's view, meanwhile, assumes sudden "volte-faces" (as Mahon terms them) in Poussin's style and compositional approach. The real development of Poussin's work probably lies somewhere between these two positions, with the balance of correct dating going to Mahon. Certainly, every catalogue since seems to work on this assumption. In any case, we must accept that Poussin's chronological development is not smooth but fairly volatile, with many returns, relapses and self-anticipations. See Denis Mahon, "Poussin's Early Development: An Alternative Hypothesis," *The Burlington Magazine* 102.688 (July 1960) 288-301+. See also Anthony Blunt, *The Paintings of Nicolas Poussin: A Critical Catalogue* (London: Phaidon, 1966).

attention since they each encapsulate a number of tendencies dispersed throughout different paintings of their types and because they have been the subject of significant scholarly attention. I conclude with the earlier picture because it is widely (and rightly) seen to be among Poussin's most important works and because it achieves in relative simplicity the sophisticated effects that are more elaborately seen later on. It has come to be emblematic of his approach as a painter and it is, therefore, a fitting place to end.

### Early History Paintings: Staging Queer Scenes

In Poussin's paintings in the 1620s and 1630s a late-Renaissance or mannerist delight in monstrosities is sometimes seen.<sup>5</sup> This delight is typical of Poussin's era but also intersects, to a unique effect, with Poussin's depiction of queer bodies. In the 1634 version of *The Rape of the Sabines* [Fig.4.1] monstrosity replaces sensuality in a queer aspect of sexuality, and a part of what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have called "becoming-animal," which Deleuze and Guattari explicitly relate to war.<sup>6</sup> This painting shows a rape that initiates a war but, as is common with violence or horror in Poussin's work, the horror of the scene is meant to inspire sober and detached reflection. It is the transformations that are affecting Poussin's bodies that are important here. But this emphasis on bodies happens in a context where the queering is continuing to develop and is coming to concern space.

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<sup>5</sup>This is apparent in the satyr pictures but also in other early works such as *Hannibal Crossing the Alps* (1625-27), where the elephant is closely-observed and rendered with a seemingly prurient interest in its physical oddity, or the Dulwich version of the *Triumph of David* (1628-31), where Goliath's grotesque and superhuman head is paraded about as a trophy.

<sup>6</sup>Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) 278.

The Poussin scholar Todd Olson has noticed some continuity between Poussin's early bacchanals and erotic paintings and a few of his early history paintings. Olson's overall project addresses how it could be that the most influential French artist of the seventeenth century, Poussin, could have spent almost his entire working life in Rome. He connects Poussin's concerns with those of his French patrons and argues that, despite Poussin's life spent abroad, his influence derives from how in tune his concerns were with those of the society from which he had separated himself and, in particular, that his style and his subjects reflected Poussin's political sympathies for the educated group of the *noblesse de robe*.<sup>7</sup> Olson's thesis is first presented in his essay "Painting for the French: Poussin, the Fronde, and the Politics of Difficulty"<sup>8</sup> and then is later expanded in his book *Poussin and France: Painting, Humanism and the Politics of Style*.<sup>9</sup> My immediate interest in Olson's subject, however, is much narrower. It is found in how his subject of state politics is reflected in Poussin's subjects from Roman history. In *Poussin and France* Olson observes that among Poussin's first history paintings are several developed in just the same format and on the same scale as works such as his bacchanals. He writes:

The small paintings based on Roman History that found their way into French collections through the diplomatic exchange drew upon a similar conception of scale [as his mythological erotica] if not sensual attraction. *The Rape of the Sabines* [New York version] is a battle scene

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<sup>7</sup>This group, the new 'educated nobility', was opposed to the traditional landed aristocracy. In a mixed review of Olson's book, Charles Dempsey summarises Olson's account of this group: "Poussin's principal French patrons can for the most part be identified with an elastically defined *noblesse de robe*, which for Olson included not only *parlementaires* and lesser magistrates but also the higher levels of the civil service [...T]hese excellently educated men, although supporters of the king upon whose good graces they were entirely dependent, were united in their detestation of Mazarin [...]." Charles Dempsey, Review, *The Burlington Magazine* 144.1195 (Oct., 2002) 632-33.

<sup>8</sup>In *Commemorating Poussin: Reception and Interpretation of the Artist*, ed. Katie Scott and Genevieve Warwick (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 155-89.

<sup>9</sup>Todd Olson, *Poussin and France: Painting, Humanism and the Politics of Style* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002).

bursting with figures and incidents [...] In the foundation myth of a state predicated on sexual violence and patriarchal succession, familial drama is represented in a number of set pieces[...]<sup>10</sup>

‘Sensual attraction’ has turned into sexual violence. What I view as queerness now goes underground and is adapted to a new purpose, by means of the then-conventional metaphor of violent conquest.<sup>11</sup> This is, nonetheless, a further cleansing of the flagrancy of Poussin’s early eroticism. In the move from the earliest paintings to ones such as *Bacchanal before a Herm of Pan*, myth served to make his queer visions more respectable. History starts to replace myth within some paintings like the Metropolitan *The Rape of the Sabines*, paintings which (for history paintings) are at an unusually small scale. The scale alone is a clue that these paintings will have things in common with the Arcadian scenes in the same format. In Poussin’s age sexual violence directed towards a political purpose would have been far less questionable than sexual frolicking which had only pleasure as its aim. And so, it is not the violence that is the queer element but rather how the integrity of normal human bodies is undermined, a concern which links *The Rape of the Sabines* with the roughly contemporary bacchanals.

Among the various set-pieces that Olson describes is the group towards the left of the foreground is adapted from Giambologna’s 1579-1583 sculpture *The Rape of the Sabines*.<sup>12</sup> [Fig.4.2] It is well known that Poussin makes frequent and relatively undisguised use of classical and Renaissance statuary in his pictorial compositions and

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<sup>10</sup>Olson, *Poussin and France*, 8.

<sup>11</sup>See Margaret Carrol, “The Erotics of Absolutism: Rubens and the Mystification of Sexual Violence,” *Representations* 25 (Winter 1989): 3-30.

<sup>12</sup>The name was a later interpretation of the group’s subject and applied to it after its public display in Florence’s Loggia dei Lanzi. See Jane Costello, “*The Rape of The Sabine Women* by Nicolas Poussin,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* (Apr. 1947): 200.

this is a particularly well known instance of it.<sup>13</sup> Another important figure group is on the lower right of the painting. Here is a Roman warrior, fiercely trying to steal a Sabine girl, while her father struggles almost as fiercely to prevent him doing so; limbs crisscross, twist, contort. Altogether, they make up a monstrous, compound assemblage. Different identities (Roman, Sabine) and different intentions are set in opposition. They have lost individuation. The forced interaction is one in which the humanity of the contestants is being rendered into something else, into an amalgam and into something where their representative ‘molar,’ identities as Deleuze would describe them, have become something molecular and pack like. Becoming-animal, in this case, is becoming-monstrous. But this monster has a thematic purpose. In the Roman warrior’s desperate struggle to separate the father from the daughter, the figure group visually prefigures and comes to embody, in its composite unity, a future political unity: it becomes an anticipation of the ultimate amalgam of the Romans and the Sabines into one people that would conclude this episode in the story.

The story is related in Book I of the first-century historian Titus Livy’s history of Rome, *Ab Urbe Condita*.<sup>14</sup> The early city of Rome lacked a population and so its first King, Romulus, allowed any fugitive to become a citizen. A part of the Capitol, the *Asylum*, was turned over to claiming this privilege. The new population, however, was unruly and almost entirely male. Romulus hatched a scheme whereby – under cover of religious truce – the neighbouring Sabine people would be invited to a festival. He devised a trap and strung it so that, after a prearranged signal was given (the lifting up of

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<sup>13</sup>Costello, *Ibid.* Also, Jonathan Unglaub, *Poussin and the Poetics of Painting: Pictorial Narrative and the Legacy of Tasso* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 169.

<sup>14</sup>Rendered literally: “From the Founding of the City.” See T.J. Luce, trans., *Livy: The Rise of Rome: Books 1-5*. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 13-19.

his mantle), the Romans would seize for themselves Sabine daughters whom they would force to become their wives. This atrocity (which is also a seriously irreligious act) leads to a war between the Romans and the Sabines, which the stolen Sabine women end when, several years later, they intervene to stop the bloodshed between their new husbands, now the fathers of their children, and their brothers and their own fathers.<sup>15</sup>

The standard account given is that this group is derived from a Hellenistic sculpture, *The Ludovisi Gaul*.<sup>16</sup> [Fig.4.3] I find this inadequate and argue that it is more directly adapted from a different Hellenistic sculpture, *The Laocoön Group*.<sup>17</sup> An oblique view of Laocoön's torso is clearly presented. The Roman warrior's chest, seen through his golden cuirass, is manifestly adapted from the *Laocoön Group*'s muscular example. From the correct angle, this is unmistakable. [Fig.4.4] The warrior also struggles against the writhing limbs of his two opponents, the Sabine father and daughter, limbs which are reminiscent of Laocoön's snakes. There is good reason to believe the identification of the Laocoön group as a source is well-founded. (Elizabeth Cropper and Charles Dempsey propose Poussin's use of the same figure in his slightly earlier painting *The Plague at Ashdod*, of 1630).<sup>18</sup> [Fig.4.5] Also important, however, is how the appropriation of this

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<sup>15</sup>This later development is the subject of the famous 1799 painting by Jacques-Louis David, and may be understood as something of a bookend to Poussin's versions of the story.

<sup>16</sup>This sculpture is a Roman 2<sup>nd</sup> Century copy of a lost Hellenistic original, c. 230-20 BCE, also called *The Galatian Suicide* or *Gaul Killing Himself and His Wife*. See Friedlaender, 19. See also Costello, *ibid*. Jonathan Unglaub notes that the use of this sculpture, together with Giambologna's, shows Poussin adapting two "icons of pathos." (Unglaub, 169.) He cites Constello, 201-202.

<sup>17</sup>Also called *Laocoön and His Sons*, c. 25 BCE. The sculptural group is attributed to Agesander, Athenodoros and Polydorus of Rhodes. The group was discovered in Rome in 1506. This argument was first put forward by the author in a paper "Nicolas Poussin's *The Plague at Ashdod*: Narrating Unconventional Warfare" given at "War Stories: Violence and Narrative in Early Modern Europe," organized by Elizabeth Honig and Suzanne Walker, College Art Association Annual Meeting, Chicago, 12 February 2010. On other occasions I have been told of this association being made before, but no one has been able to suggest any particular reference. In any case, my own assertion of this connection is original.

<sup>18</sup>In responding to Cropper and Dempsey's identification of this source in *The Plague at Ashdod* as well, in all likelihood, to my use of it in connection with the *Sabines*, James Clifton observed that it was recognizable "albeit with a bent right arm rather than the outstretched arm the statue carried in the

sculpture and its use helps illuminate Poussin's themes. If we read the Laocoön sculpture into the figures represented in Poussin's painting (and vice-versa) an interesting slippage of identities is seen. The sculpture group has a father with one of his sons to either side. The Poussin painting has the Roman warrior in the centre. The Sabine father and daughter have been reduced to what, in the Hellenistic sculpture, would be the position of Laocoön's sons. Yet, when Livy's tale would be complete, that same Sabine father would be father to his daughter but also now father-in-law to the warrior who is presently trying to steal his daughter into forced marriage. This scrambling of identities is in keeping with what we have seen so far of Poussin's multiplicity. We can imagine these characters changing roles: son becomes father, warrior becomes son-in-law. The relative positions of Poussin's characters, through visual reference back to the Hellenistic sculpture group, would seem to have become alterable, just as positions could be imaginatively traded among the dancing figures in *Bacchanal before a Herm of Pan* or the allegorical states of fortune in *A Dance to The Music of Time*. Implied transformation evokes multiplicity and the fluidity of identities across different ages and genders.

Furthermore, if we read the story of Laocoön into the Poussin painting, significant new meanings are revealed. According to the best-known version, coming from Virgil, the Trojan priest Laocoön was punished for offending the gods by warning against the acceptance of the Trojan Horse.<sup>19</sup> (In Virgil's *Aeneid* he exclaims, "Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes," erroneously but famously translated as 'beware of Greeks bearing

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seventeenth century." (James Clifton, Response, "War Stories: Violence and Narrative in Early Modern Europe," 12 February 2010.) Given that the appearance of the arm is horizontal in both cases in Poussin, as it is in the accepted current reconstruction of the sculpture group, it is interesting to consider whether, far from making Poussin's use of it as a source in these cases seem less likely, this idiosyncratic use may not imply that the artist was taking a position on the debate around how the work should be assembled. For further discussion on *Laocoön* in *The Plague at Ashdod*, see below.

<sup>19</sup>Sources differ as to whether it is Apollo, Minerva or Neptune who sends the snakes. (It is not crystal clear in Virgil.)



gifts.’)<sup>20</sup> There exists another account as to why the Trojan Priest is so cruelly punished, however. The other explanation, coming in one instance from Gaius Julius Hyginus and in another from a commentator on the *Aeneid*, Servius, is that Laocoön violated a commandment of Apollo. According to Hyginus, he did this by having sons when he had been commanded not to; according to Servius, more luridly, he offended Apollo by having intercourse with his wife before the cult image of the god.<sup>21</sup> Regardless which interpretation is preferred (and we need not make a choice, as they might well all apply), the Laocoön story tells of religious transgression. Romulus’s violation of the religious truce he had declared, seen in *The Rape of The Sabines*, would therefore be mirrored and emphasized by this reference. If the last interpretation applies, a strong suggestion of sexual transgression is also added. Either way, a visual source is acting as something that invades or takes possession of the painting that results from it, on a thematic level, which is destabilizing though also partly affirmative of its meaning.

Monstrosity appears in another relevant way in the thought of Gilles Deleuze that has affinities with Queer Theory: Deleuze’s explanation of his own relationship to the history of philosophy. Deleuze’s remarks on this subject have been characterized as “notorious.”<sup>22</sup> He likens this relationship to immaculate conception or else to conception through anal sex (which he furthermore equates). Deleuze’s remarks were made in the book published (in English) as *Negotiations*. He writes:

I suppose the main way I coped with it [...] was to imagine the history of philosophy as a sort of buggery or (it comes to the same thing) immaculate conception. I saw myself as taking an author from behind and giving him a

<sup>20</sup>*Aeneid* II.49 The literal translation would be: “I fear the Greeks even when they bring gifts.”

<sup>21</sup>See S.V. Tracy “Laocoön’s Guilt,” in *American Journal of Philology* 108.3 (Autumn 1987): 451-54.

<sup>22</sup>Robert Sinnerbrink, “Nomadology or Ideology? Žižek’s Critique of Deleuze,” in *Parrhesia* 1 (2006): 62. Review of Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004).

child that would be his own offspring, yet monstrous. It was really important for it to be his own child, because the author had to actually say all I had him saying. But the child was bound to be monstrous too, because it resulted from all sorts of shifting, slipping, dislocations, and hidden emissions [...]<sup>23</sup>

The act Deleuze imagines is, in fact, since it would seem to be involuntary, one of anal rape.<sup>24</sup> (Deleuze describes this act using the French word *enculage*.)<sup>25</sup> By means of this image, sex and violence are brought into the heart of the usually polite realm of philosophical intertextuality. A brutal change of tone, this characterization has certainly engaged the attention of commentators on Deleuze. A sequence of critiques and critiques of critiques and of reviews and reviews of reviews all repeat or rework the idea in what Robert Sinnerbrink describes as a “homoerotic fantasy.”<sup>26</sup> It is certainly not a great leap to imagine turning the tables on Deleuze in this way. Slavoj Žižek asks, for instance, “why should we not risk the act of taking from behind Deleuze himself and engage in the practice of the *Hegelian buggery of Deleuze*? [...] What monster would have emerged if we were to stage the ghastly scene of the spectre of Hegel taking Deleuze from behind?”<sup>27</sup> Sinnerbrink goes on to observe: “It is interesting how Deleuze’s masculinist metaphor of conceptual buggery has proven a far more popular topic than what Deleuze describes as its equivalent, namely (feminine) “immaculate conception!”<sup>28</sup> Given the tone of all this, it is perhaps not surprising that the idea is often mentioned with certain

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<sup>23</sup>Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) 6. Originally published as *Pourparlers* (Paris: Les Éditions Minuit, 1990) . (Page 13 in this edition.)

<sup>24</sup>In another review of the 2004 Žižek book, Donald Callen also characterized Deleuze’s approach as violent: “The idea is that one reads the work thoroughly but then through a kind of intellectual buggery makes the borrowed concepts give birth to a new form of life, something that would no doubt be seen as something of a monster by the victim of the attack.” Donald Callen, “The Difficult Middle,” *Rhizomes* 10 (spring) 2005 (source online) <<http://www.rhizomes.net/issue10/callen.htm>>, accessed 20 Feb. 2011.

<sup>25</sup>Deleuze, *Pourparlers*, 13.

<sup>26</sup>Sinnerbrink, 63.

<sup>27</sup>Žižek, *ibid.*, 48.

<sup>28</sup>Sinnerbrink, 87.

suggestions of regret.<sup>29</sup> If we ignore, temporarily, the outpouring of regret, fascination, disgust, and occasional delight that seems to follow the details of Deleuze's image, it may be seen that the philosophical process itself is one that now seems adaptable to the erotics of becoming envisioned by Deleuze and Guattari. The language at the end of the Deleuze passage quoted above suggests an idea of monstrosity that is very close to that of becoming in *A Thousand Plateaus*. The core concept is one of possession, leading to conversion, which forces a thing to work against itself in order to open up new possibilities by undermining established categories, identities or purposes. The image of sexual violation may be telling but it is not essential to this purpose. Deleuze's rape fantasy is important because he sees this as at the heart of his philosophical method; the operation described is actually very close to queering, which also captures something and bends it so as to open up new zones of possibilities.

Returning to Poussin, then, I think we can adapt this idea without reiterating its uglier associations. The Laocoön sculpture group inhabits or comes into (or what you will) Poussin's painting *The Rape of Sabines*, which destabilizes its semiotic order. I certainly do not call this a case of pictorial *enculage* (as Deleuze meant it); but, while there are obvious differences, it works using similar ideas to a similar purpose. This case of 'possession' and 'conversion' is every bit as much inflected by sexual violence and violation; but these associations are external, in the subject matter, and not internal or implicit in this act of pictorial intertextual penetration. Poussin's audience could be

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<sup>29</sup>Daniel W. Smith, for instance, while elaborating on the concept for another review of the same book, describes it as "Deleuze's *all-too-well-known* image of philosophical 'buggery'." Emphasis added. Daniel W. Smith, "The Inverse Side of the Structure: Žižek on Deleuze on Lacan," *Criticism* 46.4 (Fall 2004): 636. Review. Brian Massumi, on the other hand, embraces the image's rawness (and rudeness), translating the original French word 'enculage' as "ass-fuck." Brian Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992) 2.

expected to recognize his intertextual references immediately.<sup>30</sup> But, as his use of visual sources moves from being inspiration he takes or models he uses and becomes, instead, the deliberate deployment of recognizable artworks within his own artworks, Poussin is finding a new and much more complex way of destabilizing pictorial space: he is destabilizing its semiotic space. Giambologna's *Rape of Sabines* is undisguised and only superficially adapted. As an 'internal tableau' in Carrier's sense<sup>31</sup> it has matured to the point of also being a recognizable signifier. In the case of the transformation of the *Laocoön* group, however, monstrosity and the instability of this visual signifier, which is seen in that complicated and self-resisting figure group, reflect and comment upon each other. The figure group, which (queerly) has half-become the *Laocoön Group*, becomes a zone of intensity where key themes of the painting are played out independently of the totality, a rupture of unity which is purposefully destabilizing.

Yet the painting is not entirely stable to begin with. Poussin's different figure groups are "set pieces," Olson has said. They are still very much tokens placed in a closed display space. One can easily imagine having these groups trade places within the picture. Indeed, Poussin used a model stage, a small box-like proscenium, in which he experimented with the positions the figures in his paintings might occupy.<sup>32</sup> While it is not known precisely when he began to use this device,<sup>33</sup> it could just as well follow from a pictorial practice already established as it could determine one. Either way, it is a reflection of Poussin's conception that figures and figure groups are transposable tokens, like the men on a chess board. This is a new way of defining a space or imagining one as

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<sup>30</sup>Clifton, *ibid.*.

<sup>31</sup>David Carrier, *Poussin's Paintings: A Study in Art Historical Methodology* (University Park: The State University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990) 278. See Chapter 3 for a full discussion of this term.

<sup>32</sup>See Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, 242-44. See also Carrier, 204.

<sup>33</sup>The use of the model stage is documented for the first time in 1635. Blunt, *The Drawings*, 97.

fluid and it leads to a certain lack of unity in the Metropolitan *Rape of the Sabines*.

Jonathan Unglaub observes that Poussin's aim in his early history paintings is to achieve a "plausible simultaneity" of a narrative.<sup>34</sup> He writes:

Various groups of figures, disposed artfully around a unified spatial envelope, embody different actions and emotions that anticipate or respond to a specific stimulus, usually an instance of climax or reversal. Poussin thereby captures in a synchronic space, different moments of the diachronic narrative. While this plot structure provides a comprehensive articulation of the subject, its implied temporality threatens to undermine the inherent unity of the pictorial field [...] To resolve this conflict, Poussin strives to maintain a plausible simultaneity of pictorial action. Even if the represented events are chronologically distinct in their textual formulation, the actions and responses that Poussin elects to depict could, in some probability, have transpired at the same moment in the same locale.<sup>35</sup>

In *The Rape of the Sabines*, however, Unglaub observes that the strain in this approach is showing. This painting, he writes, "exposes the limits of plausible simultaneity."<sup>36</sup> The initiating event (Romulus giving his signal), intermediate events (the Romans seizing Sabine women), and concluding events (a Roman showing a captured Sabine girl where her new home will be, seen in the background)<sup>37</sup> are all uncomfortably pressed together. But what Unglaub interprets as an unresolved tension and, he implies, something of a flaw, I see as the early articulation of multiplicity in space. The right-hand figure group, derived from the *Laocoön Group*, embodies in one area of intensity the motif of simultaneous stages of being that Unglaub rightly sees dispersed throughout the rest of the picture. The reflecting of Poussin's diffuse instability by an intensely destabilizing figure group set within the painting is an ambitious development of the queer stratagem

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<sup>34</sup>Unglaub, 165-170.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 166.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 169.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 170. See also Costello, 202.

of the internal tableau. It shows composition used to articulate very abstruse thematic issues.

Unglaub goes on to observe that in Poussin's later reiteration of *The Rape of the Sabines*, a 1637-38 painting now in the Louvre, [Fig.4.6] "relatively subtle compositional alterations totally reconceive the subject."<sup>38</sup> He notes that Poussin has isolated different stages of the abduction in distinct areas of the picture, that they are even colour-coded to that end, and that the architecture is no longer specific to an early Rome of the kings but now includes examples from later Roman styles and even suggestions of the Rome of Poussin's time.<sup>39</sup> Unglaub rightly assesses the meaning of this change in the architecture. He writes: "The architecture symbolizes the endurance and continuity of Rome as the eternal city, a destiny initially secured through the violence unfolding in the foreground."<sup>40</sup> Different points in time, both small and large, coexist in one spatial order yet, unlike the simultaneous narrative of early renaissance painting, these differences are marginal and destabilizing. They *queer* how the supposed primary scene has been constructed. Unglaub even notes that the slight alterations in the abduction figure group on the left now suggest a different sculptural source. Giambologna's *The Rape of the Sabines* has been exchanged for GianLorenzo Bernini's 1621-22 sculpture *The Rape of Proserpina*.<sup>41</sup> [Fig.4.7] What Unglaub does not observe in the development of Poussin's treatment of the Sabine subject is the vanishing of the figure group on the right.

Of course, Unglaub's argument is working to an entirely different end than mine and he does not suggest that this figure group is a disguised *Laocoön Group*.

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<sup>38</sup>Unglaub, *ibid.*

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 171,172.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 172.

Nevertheless, by proposing that past, present and future are all now present in the architectural setting, he has inadvertently identified the symbolic element that has replaced the right hand figure group in the earlier treatment. (It also lends unintentional support to my claim.) This change is especially poignant since the *Laocoön Group* was itself first buried in Rome, somewhere in the environs of the emperor Nero's Golden House, and then dug up anew in 1506. It has embodied the symbolic function Poussin gives its adaptation in the first version of *The Rape of the Sabines*. A time-traveller itself, linking one age of Rome to another, it becomes the perfect vehicle to embody this meaning. And yet we see here that Poussin's thematic concerns are outgrowing his capacity to achieve them using bodies as his devices. He has moved on to using architecture. By the time of the later version of *The Rape of the Sabines* Poussin's approach has become a conceptually sophisticated exploration of a painting and its representational limits that no longer relies primarily upon an engagement with the body. In the earlier version, queer bodies and a queer space coexist.

It is noteworthy that Poussin's sculptural source for the figures on the right has changed. Bernini's sculpture – and the subject it depicts – involve the capture of Proserpina (or Persephone) by the god of the underworld. This is the mythological origin of the change of seasons and the rebirth of spring. It represents ever-repeating renewal. This may well be the proper Stoical thought when contemplating a violent act of political expediency, to contemplate what necessary good comes from it and how it achieves the purposes of time and nature. The Proserpina theme reflects the one Unglaub has observed in Poussin's architectural setting in the later *Rape of the Sabines*. This is a further refinement, a still further cleansing, of the monstrous birth of political unity that Poussin

has depicted using the figure group derived from the *Laocoön Group* in his earlier treatment of the *Rape of the Sabines*. The queer instability Poussin uses to construct his paintings shows itself to be a highly adaptable way of visually depicting philosophical ideas.

Poussin would go on to make many other historico-political scenes, such as *The Capture of Jerusalem by Titus* (1638) in the Kunsthistorisches Museen in Vienna, [Fig.4.8] a mature example of Poussin's history painting. *The Capture of Jerusalem by Titus* exemplifies Poussin's intertwining of textual scholarship and complex visual construction. It illustrates events very precisely from the account of Flavius Josephus's history *The Jewish War*.<sup>42</sup> Poussin's use of visual sources is equally meticulous. The menorah being carried off in the background is taken from a relief in the triumphal arch of Titus. [Fig.4.9] But, beyond such antiquarianism, the architectural space becomes a meter for reading the historical events, the key to their intelligibility. The regular ordered columned front of the Temple allows us to measure the positions of the diverse figures and even to visualize their speed and momentum as two groups of Roman soldiers rush in to fill the space.

One of the most persistent elements in Poussin's visual compositions is his sustained working of the thematics of a picture through its spatial arrangements. While Poussin certainly deploys both conventional and unconventional iconography, and while he borrows or references classical art, especially sculpture, in the figures he includes in his compositions, he also uses the architectonic and perspectival structures of his scenes

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<sup>42</sup>The Romano-Jewish historian (37 C.E. – 100 C.E.) wrote *The Jewish War*, a history of the Jewish state from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.E. till the first century C.E. with special reference to the Roman-Jewish war that ended in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70. The text was written, probably first in Aramaic around 75 and shortly thereafter translated into Greek. Josephus's own political position is ambiguous. He fought with the Jewish side but later accepted the patronage of Rome.



themselves to emphasize his themes and pictorial messages. Oskar Bätschmann observes in *Nicolas Poussin: Dialectics of Painting* that, in *The Capture of Jerusalem by Titus*, this conveys the historical significance of the event, communicating “an understanding of the event in its deeper meaning.”<sup>43</sup> The foreshortened body of the dead Jewish rebel, the fragments of bodies strewn in the diagonal gap behind him draw a void that is the soon-to-be annihilated independence of Judaea just as the rush of Roman armies from either side, like a surge tide, represents the totality of Roman expansionism. Bätschmann describes architecture as natural backdrop for history painting, just as landscape is for mythological painting: its hollow spaces dramatize the flow of historical events through the space of the physical world.<sup>44</sup>

*The Capture of Jerusalem by Titus* is built around a central void that certainly dramatizes flow and historical import, as Bätschmann describes it. It also uses the emptiness to suggest sublimity and even hint at an experience of awe, appropriate to a epochal event taking place in the plaza of the Second Temple (at least for any religious Jew or Christian, certainly). Titus’s upward turned head, while he still slightly cringes his neck, and the gesture of his hand together with the slightly balking stance of his horse all suggest something of awe, even if it is but a passing expression. (It is locked in the ‘moment in time’ of the painting anyway.) Titus and his raid on the Temple is a subject about which a Roman Catholic society would be ambivalent.<sup>45</sup> The future emperor’s<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Oskar Bätschmann, *Nicolas Poussin: Dialectics of Painting*, trans. Marko Daniel (London: Reaktion Books, 1990) 70.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Olson observes how the ‘good’ emperor Trajan would serve as a proper model for the French monarchs (Olson, *ibid.*, 15-16.) whereas Titus – as conqueror of the Holy Land but also defiler and destroyer of the second Temple – stands as a complicated figure of both martial accomplishment and Pagan sacrilege. Moreover, for a Catholic audience, the sacking of the temple might itself be a case of what economists call ‘creative destruction,’ reducing old Judaism so that a universal religion, Christianity, could rise to take its place. Titus may also be seen as the unwitting instrument of religious destiny.

pose and indeed the whole construction of the scene record that ambivalence. Yet the full significance of that void needs to be understood in the context of Poussin's spatial compositions, where awkward or unusual arrangements of figures are deployed to detach figures from architecture in non-normative ways, a tendency that serves to distinguish these paintings from other history paintings. The Romans rushing in from both sides suggest movement, measured against the regular columniation of the Temple front behind (whose opened doors offer a view into the Holy of Holies, seen on fire). But the scene is also highly reminiscent of a stage set, with flat architectural backdrops which can easily be imagined as sliding horizontally, either as part of a theatrical scene or as seen by a moving spectator. Indeed, the colonnade seems to be slid off centre in the composition, a plainly destabilizing situation that gives the depiction an air of sublime unreality or even ecstatic collapse.<sup>47</sup> Order and chaos are held in tension and the momentous change in history that the scene represents, no less than the various small changes in the positions of figures in the scene that add up to effect this change, are made legible by Poussin's lucid, classicist differentiation. This almost cinematic effect makes use of a set of techniques Poussin had been developing over several years to destabilize and undermine normative pictorial representation. It is an impressive alternative to Baroque painting's melodrama.

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<sup>46</sup>Titus (39 C.E.–81), who would go on to become the second emperor of the Flavian dynasty, conquered Jerusalem and sacked the Second Temple (or Herod's Temple) in 70 C.E., shortly after the start of his imperial father Vespasian's reign. He succeeded him nine years later but died after two years.

<sup>47</sup>The special effects made possible by Poussin's mature construction of destabilized spaces can best be seen when this painting is compared to a much earlier version, *The Destruction and Sack of Temple of Jerusalem* (1625-6), [Fig.4.10] now in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. Some motifs, such as Titus's posture and gesture, are similar and the antiquarian interest seen in the adaptation of the relief carving from the Arch of Titus is there too. [See Fig. 4.11] But the construction of space is naïve, purposeless and does not have the disorienting and ecstatic effect of the later painting. The benefit of Poussin's queering experimentations can be well observed. (This earlier work was thought lost until rediscovered, as a Poussin, in the 1990s.)

But, as I shall go on to argue, the pictorial structures and strategies that make a vision like this possible are based upon Poussin's queer constructions of spaces.

An earlier example of Poussin's history painting provides a useful model to see how such scenes are constructed because its queer properties are much more obvious and not sublimated to such an extent, pictorially. *The Plague at Ashdod* [Fig. 4.5] is about eight years earlier but, otherwise, is a comparable picture in terms of subject, scale and setting. It is also among the first cases where the pictorial destabilization, developed originally in *Echo and Narcissus* (via indeterminacy) and linked with Poussin's thematics, becomes applied to a whole spatial order in one picture. The story of the plague at Ashdod is told in the *First Book of Samuel* (chapters 4 to 6). The Ark of the Covenant is brought into battle by the Israelites in the hope it will bring victory when they are at war with the Philistines. The Philistines capture the Ark and bring it to the city of Ashdod, blasphemously installing it in the sanctuary of their god, Dagon. The next morning the idol of Dagon is discovered lying face-down, apparently prostrating itself before the Ark. It is put upright again by the Philistines. The morning after that the idol is again found knocked down and this time its head and hand are broken off. This last event coincides with the outbreak of a terrible plague in the city. The Philistines end up returning the Ark to the Israelites, much shaken by its power.

*The Plague at Ashdod* is one of two paintings of comparable dimensions painted by Poussin in 1630-1631 for the Spanish adventurer, thief and art collector Fabritio Valguarnera. The other is the *Realm of Flora* in Dresden. [Fig.4.12] Valguarnera was eventually put on trial for the theft of diamonds from Naples, having put his proceeds of

his crime into art by Roman and Neapolitan painters.<sup>48</sup> The works are among Poussin's earlier grand format historical and mythological subjects and, because of their similarity of size and their common commissioner, it has tended to be accepted that they are to be regarded as pendants.<sup>49</sup> It has often been noted that the background on the *Plague at Ashdod* is adapted from Sebastiano Serlio's illustration of *la scena tragica*, [Fig.4.13] a set for tragic theatre proposed by Vitruvius. A similar set from Serlio for the satirical stage, *la scena satirica* has also been identified as a visual source for *The Realm of Flora*,<sup>50</sup> [Fig.4.14] although Poussin has, as the Poussin scholar Alain Mérot puts it, "replaced the leafy forest and rustic cabins with something much more refined."<sup>51</sup> Further, both paintings are also based in part on circa 1515 engravings by Marcantonio Raimondi after drawings by Raphael, respectively *Il Morbetto (The Plague)* [Fig.4.15] and *Il Giudizio di Paride (The Judgment of Paris)*. [Fig.4.16] Indeed, some cross-pollination may be seen in *Flora* (as it were), with the herm from *Il Morbetto* being turned and thrust out of the way. The *Realm of Flora* is a mythological landscape in which the various figures of lovers transformed into flowers are assembled. These two paintings are also close in time to his *Echo and Narcissus* (being just about three years later) and, in fact, the unhappy couple appear among the figures in *Realm of Flora*. It is reasonable to assume that Poussin would have had *Echo and Narcissus* very much in

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<sup>48</sup>See Anthony Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin* (Hong Kong: Pallas Athene, 1995) 63. See also Jane Costello, "The Twelve Pictures 'Ordered by Velasquez' and the Trial of Valguarnera" in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 13.3/4 (1950): 237-284.

<sup>49</sup>Unglaub, 158.

<sup>50</sup>Matthias Winner, «Flora, Mater Florum,» in *Poussin et Rome: Actes du colloque à l'Académie de France à Rome et à la Biblioteca Hertziana 16-18 novembre 1994* (Paris: Réunions des musées nationaux, 1995) 390.

<sup>51</sup>Alain Mérot "The Conquest of Space : Poussin's Early Attempts at Landscape," in *Poussin and Nature: Arcadian Visions*, ed. Pierre Rosenberg and Keith Christiansen (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008) 63.

mind when working on *The Plague at Ashdod*, as some of the earlier paintings themes are partially recapitulated in its pendant.

In a paper given at a 1994 conference at the Académie de France à Rome, presented in Italian with the Latin title “*Flora, Mater Florum*,” the German art historian Matthias Winner writes that “[i]n Poussin’s painting *Flora* strews petals of flowers on the head of Echo; this because Poussin wanted in this picture to express the voice of Echo by using the colours of *Flora*.”<sup>52</sup> He continues: “Ever since a famous epigram (number 32) by the Latin poet Ausonius, poets, Poussin’s poet friend [Giambattista] Marino among them, have been discussing the problem that the voice of Echo could not be represented by a painter because Echo may be perceived only through the auditory sense. One cannot see her and so she has neither form, nor body nor colour.”<sup>53</sup> A little later he goes on to conclude “and so Poussin wanted to depict her voice.”<sup>54</sup> Poussin’s approach reveals a visual strategy developing from the late 1620s into the early 1630s that concerns the visual representation of what cannot be represented visually: first reflexivity (in *Echo and Narcissus*), then voice (in *Flora*) and finally now contagion (in *Ashdod*).

Poussin continues to attempt to represent the unrepresentable. The air, he suggests is unbreathable, a terrible stench but also a deadly vector of contagion. The visible elements, the people, in their poses indicate the near impossibility of taking in the invisible element, the air. In the *Realm of Flora* Poussin represents the voice of Echo by a symbol; to represent the plague he represents only its effects, making (in the negative) a

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<sup>52</sup>Winner , 392 : «Nel quadro di Poussin *Flora* sparge dei petali di fiori sul capo di Eco; questo perchè Poussin aveva l’ambizione, con questo quadro, di esprimere la voce di Eco con l’aiuto dei colori di *Flora*.»

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 393 : « Sin da un famoso epigramma (XXXII) del poeta latino Ausonio, i poeti, e con loro anche Marino, l’amico poeta di Poussin, discutono infatti sul problema, che la voce di Echo [sic] non può essere percepita solo attraverso il senso dell’udito. Non la si può vedere, dato che essa non ha nè forma, nè corpo, nè colore.»

<sup>54</sup>Ibid. : «Dunque Poussin ha voluto dipingere la voce.» All translations by author.

protagonist out of the invisible. While in *The Realm of Flora* or *Echo and Narcissus* Poussin seeks to triumph over the limitations of painting in a display of *meraviglia* worthy of Giambattista Marino, in *The Plague at Ashdod* he surrenders so completely to them that their unrepresentability is forcefully – but tactfully – turned against itself. The plague cannot be seen by the unfortunate victims in Ashdod. In a perfectly analogous way, its effects, its smell – mercifully – cannot be experienced by the viewers of Poussin's painting. Cunningly, Poussin has emphasized the thematic importance of this irony in representation. It reminds the viewer of what else is invisible, the source or the medium of the plague itself.

In *The Plague at Ashdod* the scene has two centres of intensity: the fallen, dead mother who can no longer nurse her children and the Ark and Dagon group on the portico of Dagon's temple. The dead mother figure is taken from the painting's immediate visual source (the Raimondi engraving). But, as we have already seen, the story of Laocoön has also been suggested – first for this painting as later for the *Sabines*. In *The Plague at Ashdod* the nursing mother figure, according to Cropper and Dempsey, is a re-gendered Laocoön.<sup>55</sup> In *Nicolas Poussin: Friendship and the Love of Painting* they note Poussin's use of the figure, writing that the fallen female figure's "upraised right arm and lowered, clenched left, the spread of her legs, with right knee raised and the left more fully stretched out and down, as well as her complement of two sons, all identify her as a female Laocoön who has just lost her struggle with the serpents of plague."<sup>56</sup> This pathos of the Laocoön figure combines with the mother figure's perversion of a common

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<sup>55</sup>Cropper and Dempsey, 85.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 270.

iconographical figure of charity, *caritas Romana*.<sup>57</sup> The tale of Laocoön may be derived from Virgil, from Book II of the *Aeneid*. The Latin inscriptions in Raimondi's engraving come from an account of pestilence in Book III of that epic. The upper left hand scene, which, in the source engraving, corresponds to the platform of the fallen idol of Dagon in the Poussin painting, includes (from Virgil) the inscription "*effigies sacrae divum Phrygi*"<sup>58</sup> or "the sacred images of gods [of Troy]."<sup>59</sup> The lower inscription, meanwhile, describes the suffering of the people. In the passage in Virgil, Aeneas has a vision of these idols seen in the moonlight of an open window at night. Meanwhile, the pestilence is reported as descending from "some tainted corner of the sky."<sup>60</sup> It would seem Poussin has combined these two elements, the vision of the idols and the source of the plague, in his upper left-hand group in the *Plague at Ashdod*.

Three years later in his first (1634) version of the *Abduction of the Sabines*, Bätschmann observes that Romulus is depicted in the pose of the *mutus orator* – that is the silent speaker – a paradoxical figure, represented between two columns up on a high pedestal.<sup>61</sup> Poussin raises to a commanding position on the left this agent who instigates the scene depicted; but that same agent embodies a contradiction of functions, between action and iconography. The silent orator needs only to be visible. The Roman ruffians turn on their Sabine guests when their king gives a *visible* sign. Similarly, in *The Plague at Ashdod* the Ark of the Covenant is oriented not as an object of action but as an actor in the scene, according to this same visual language. It too is up on a pedestal and even

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<sup>57</sup>This is a motif Poussin would use again. Louis Marin, *Sublime Poussin*, trans. Catherine Porter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999) 22,

<sup>58</sup>*Aeneid* III. 148.

<sup>59</sup>Translation Fairclough (1934).

<sup>60</sup>*Aeneid* III.137-138. Translation Fairclough (1934).

<sup>61</sup>Bätschmann, 122.

more obviously set between two columns. Can its similar orientation to the later figure of Romulus be another connection between these two paintings? I believe it must. Poussin routinely develops comparable motifs in paintings over longer separations than three or four years. The Ark is not merely a stolen prize, calling for vengeance from Jehovah; Poussin characterizes it as something akin to a shell or canister, somehow emitting the deadly contagion that has devastated the Philistine city. It presides over this atrocious scene in exactly the same way that Romulus does over Sabine atrocity and it has a comparable relationship to a figure group derived from the Laocoön group. In both cases this positional actor is ‘cause’ to the others’ ‘effect’.

In the Ark we see another instance and a further adaptation of one of Poussin’s most preferred motifs. Formally, as a rectangle within the rectangular space of the painting, the Ark of the Covenant suggests another *mise-en-abyme*. Certainly, as a work of art within a work of art, it is something of an internal tableau. Indeed, it is one of a cluster of such tableaux, with the broken statue of Dagon beside it and the relief nearby below it. But beyond that, while the Ark is contained within the painting, it is itself a container: it contains (but hides from sight) the tables of the Ten Commandments, (including the all-important second one about not making any carved idols). But beyond even this, the Ark is topped by two Cherubim which face and enclose the so-called ‘Mercy Seat,’<sup>62</sup> that is the spot above which the real presence of Jehovah was believed to reside. In this scene, located in the position of the instigator of the drama, is – or *would be* – the unrepresented, invisible figure of Jehovah himself, who is not directly represented but still included, as a consequence of the unnatural effects that surround his position. Poussin observes the letter of the Law, tactfully, but thereby problematizes the

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<sup>62</sup>See *Hebrews* 9:5.



issue of representation and foregrounds, by dangerously approaching this holy ground, the theme of religious transgression.

Taken together, the painting's two centres of intensity may imply the deploring of this divine destruction. If we read the tale of Laocoön into the *Plague at Ashdod* we arrive at a rich tangle of associations that may suggest that such a position is being taken. Certainly the figure of the dead mother suggests this possibility in how she combines and condenses the associations of Laocoön and of Charity. (In fact, she seems to be Charity-annihilated, embodying the Old Testament Jehovah's want of mercy.) As I mentioned in regards to the earlier discussion of the *Rape of the Sabines*, according to certain sources, Laocoön committed a religious transgression either by having sons or by having intercourse with his wife before the cult image of Apollo.<sup>63</sup> As Cropper and Dempsey observe, on the other hand, the figure of Laocoön is the foremost *exemplum doloris* in art, that is, the exemplar of the 'type' of noble suffering. Of course, the full articulation of this view would come over a century later, with Winckelmann. Laocoön may be seen – in the first place – as enduring the cruel and possibly unjust punishments by Pagan gods. Cropper and Dempsey even echo Winckelmann's language calling his struggle one of "heroic grandeur."<sup>64</sup> Meanwhile, the transgression that is implied would seem to be that of the Philistines here, regardless of what position the artists may seem to be taking on the cruelty of their fate. Poussin's conclusion, if we may call it that, is artfully indeterminate. And, as noted in Chapter 3, Poussin and his friends and clients were interested in questions of comparative religion.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>See above. Tracy, *ibid.*.

<sup>64</sup>Cropper and Dempsey, 277.

<sup>65</sup>Blunt, 115. See Chapter 3.

All of this, however, sets up the role of ambivalence, uncertainty and indeterminacy on a thematic level in *The Plague at Ashdod*. Where these concerns intersect with the question of queer space, however, is my principal object here. The use of the device of the Ark encapsulates this, in one respect. It is the agency that presides over and causes the scene depicted in the painting. It also embodies, in this painting, the challenge to representation since it withholds from visibility as much as it makes visible. Formally, this function is represented by its position and its shape. It perforates the space of depiction, appearing to hover between two columns, without a strong sense of three-dimensional space between them. It is, in effect, tangled up in the painting's visual field. And it does represent (or repeat), something like a *mise-en-abyme*, the field of the painting in miniature. (It is, in fact, almost exactly one tenth the scale of the painting as a whole, with identical dimensions.) Yet, all the while, it is an object passing through the space of depiction – horizontally – on a level very near that of the horizon. The object is strongly set in place by the one-point perspective organizing the painting's space. Floating, possibly towards the middle of the scene, the Ark is an instigator but also something of a trap for the attention of the viewer. It is somewhat paradoxical, being flattened and still having extension, being represented and yet representing the visually unrepresentable or what may not be represented.

The Ark performs in this painting a function somewhat analogous to the anamorphically distorted skull in Hans Holbein's the Younger's famous painting of 1533, *The French Ambassadors*.<sup>66</sup> [Fig.4.17] The distorted skull is, of course, an anomaly in

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<sup>66</sup>Also known simply as *The Ambassadors* or *Jean de Dinteville and Georges de Selve*, in the National Gallery, London. Indeed, the architectural splendour now coming into ruins in Poussin's picture is described by Louis Marin as enticing the gaze in manner entirely analogous to what the splendid objects do in the Holbein. Marin writes: "the city struck by divine misfortune, with its buildings as decor, offers to the

that painting's visual order but it is also an uncanny element. It punctures the smooth field that is laid out before the viewers' eyes, the pleasant object-world of their gaze, at first resisting recognition and then delivering it as an unwelcome reminder of viewers' fundamental nothingness.<sup>67</sup> A subject of discussion in two well-known seminars by the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, Holbein's painting is presented as making directly experiencable the effect of the 'gaze', which at first appears to be the eye, moving over the objects of the world, but then returns as a stubbornly resistant challenge to the integrity of subjectivity. Of this painting, Lacan writes:

All this shows that at the very heart of the period in which the subject emerged and geometrical optics was an object of research, Holbein makes visible for us here something that is simply the subject as annihilated [...] We [...] see emerging on the basis of vision, not the phallic symbol, the anamorphic ghost, but the gaze as such, in its pulsatile, dazzling spread out function[...] This picture is simply what any picture is, a trap for the gaze. In any picture, it is precisely in seeking the gaze in each of its points that you will see it disappear.<sup>68</sup>

The blot that is the skull (or that turns out to be the skull) sees the viewer set in place and incorporated into the spatial order of the picture when that viewer had thought to be incorporating the diverse objects of his or her gaze into an integrated subjective order. This reveals, in a *vanitas* moment that anticipates not only death but the ongoing, immanent annihilation of subjective non-existence, the viewer's own *real* lack. This, when it is apprehended but not yet fully understood is, in Lacanian terms, uncanny.

The anamorphic skull, in its state of anamorphosis, is, in Lacanian terms, a

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gaze its own monumental, religious, political, and civic history in which the history of ancient and modern architecture is summarized. But in this petrified history another history is staged, the event of punishment and death and its 'marvellous effect,' extreme, severe, violent terror." Marin, 146-7. The cause of all this, of course, is akin to the effect of the Ark, the analog to Holbein's anamorphic skull, and it would function roughly analogously to it in the Lacanian schema explained below.

<sup>67</sup>Jacques Lacan, *Book IX: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, from *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan*, Jacques-Alain Miller, ed. (New York and London: W.W.Norton and Co., 1988) 92.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, 88-89.

‘phallic’ signifier. When it is seen in its aspect of a skull, the illusory world to which the elongated blot appeared to belong is gone, it collapses. The illusion cannot exist unless it is marred and the thing that mars it cannot be seen unless the larger order is made to vanish. This dynamic is by no means fully operative in Poussin’s painting; but, in Poussin’s pictorial terms, something comparable is happening. In describing devices similar to Holbein’s skull in Alfred Hitchcock films, Slavoj Žižek sums up the ‘phallic’ category very nicely: “‘Phallic’ is precisely the detail that ‘does not fit,’ that ‘sticks out’ from the idyllic surface scene and denatures it, renders it uncanny.”<sup>69</sup> In Poussin’s painting the Ark has started to do something like this but it still remains an integral part of the scene. It is not quite uncanny, but it is unsettling. This is what I have been calling destabilizing and, as I maintain, a destabilized space may be a queer space. Neither Holbein’s painting nor the Hitchcockian devices Žižek discusses are queer, in this sense. The normative order has been shattered in those cases (and has, therefore, been entirely replaced with something else.) Queering involves the undermining of norms, turning them against themselves and destabilizing the orders they purport to make. It does not involve destroying them outright.

One further contrast with the Lacanian psychoanalytic concept may be helpful here. Žižek goes on to quote a commentary by Jacques-Alain Miller on Lacan’s concept of the *objet petit a*, which is simply the permanently unobtainable object of desire. Miller’s text provides a diagram in which a small rectangle has been cut out of a much larger one and moved to the side (marked *a* for the unobtainable object of integral

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<sup>69</sup>Slavoj Žižek, “The Hitchcockian Blot,” in *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992) 90.

subjectivity). [Fig.4.18] The gap it has left is then shaded. The larger rectangle represents reality. His text reads:

We understand that the covert setting aside of the object as real conditions the stabilization of reality as “a bit of reality.” But if the object *a* is absent how can it still frame reality? It is precisely *because* the object *a* is removed from the field of reality that it frames it. If I withdraw from the surface of this picture the piece I represent by a shaded square, I get what we might call a frame: a frame for a hole, but also a frame for the rest of the surface. Such a frame could be created by any window. So object *a* is such a surface fragment, and it is its subtraction from reality that frames it. The subject, as barred subject – as want-of-being – is this hole. As being, it is nothing but the subtracted bit. Whence the equivalency of subject and object *a*.<sup>70</sup>

This little exercise provides the visual (and psychological) basis for what Poussin has been doing when exploring themes like reflexivity, narcissism and the undermining of the distinction of figure and of ground. His earlier device of the *mise-en-abyme*, however, sought not to resolve these questions of subjectivity and framing but rather to establish through indeterminacy and oscillation between figure and ground a representation of dynamic reflexivity. I have described this earlier indeterminacy as queer.

My hypothesis has been that this began as an attempt at once to ‘fix’<sup>71</sup> the problem of homoeroticism as well as to expand the representational possibilities of painting. Poussin may have stumbled upon a problem in representation related to the one Jacques Lacan discovers and described in his seminars on the gaze. In any case, once encountered, these dilemmas in representation became ideal tools for approaching certain themes, especially ones related to ultimate questions, about God and death. We see in *The Plague at Ashdod* how diverse thematic elements can be identified, one with another, and

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 94-95.

<sup>71</sup>By ‘fix’ I mean at once an attempt to set the phenomenon in place, to regularize it, and to exploit its representational possibilities. No doubt I also suggest that this desire encloses another one, the desire to ‘fix’ it by repairing (to a certain extent) something that may be broken in representation and even to emasculate, as it were, a (homo)erotic potential that is too loose in this subject matter.

worked through the compositional structure of the painting itself. We see in this painting for the first time how an entire spatial order can be bent to this effect. And the concerns that are revealed by it will go on to develop considerably and, eventually, become a means of undermining the pictorial order of Poussin's own depictions.

Beyond the element of the Ark, which resists the larger pictorial order, a difficult space has been constructed. First of all, it is organized by what is in effect a deep trough cut into the centre of the painting. The street that opens behind the scene is adapted, as was already noted, from Sebastiano Serlio's proposal for a theatrical backdrop for a tragic scene in his *Architettura* of 1551. The presence of the large obelisk just to the right of the vanishing point makes this source unmistakable. A consciousness of this source achieves two ends, which are mildly in tension. First, it establishes that the scene is tragic, that it is an antithesis to the theme of its pendant *The Realm of Flora*.<sup>72</sup> At the same time it suggests the scene is staged. It reminds knowledgeable viewers that this is a generic backdrop for a tragic *performance*. Two further tensions are established by means of this latter feat: theatricality is opposed to reality – this tension is thematic and does not so much concern space – and, more importantly for my aim, depth and surface are set up in tension.

There is something wrong with the perspective of *The Plague at Ashdod*, deeper into the pictorial field. It appears exaggerated, like the background is being stretched, pulled away by an unseen hand. This distortion does not derive from the Raimondi. It is subtle, to be sure, but the projection breaks down a little in the middle distance. While the perspective lines do terminate at a single vanishing point, halfway down the colonnade on the right the columns stop decreasing in size mid-way through. The first four diminish in

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<sup>72</sup>Unglaub, 158.

width. The further four do not. The distance between the further building's two windows seems to be too great. [See Fig.4.19] Poussin achieves an effect that is again almost cinematic and that is found in Žižek's example of Lacanian themes, Alfred Hitchcock. In the 1958 film *Vertigo*, Hitchcock develops what is called either the "vertigo effect" or the "dolly zoom" whereby a camera zooms in on an object at the very same time as its dolly is quickly moved away causing a strongly unsettling distortion in the viewers' perspectival field. In this effect the background is apparently pulled far backwards while the foreground appears to remain stable. [See Fig.4.20] This is exactly what effect Poussin achieves, although in a far less exaggerated fashion, in *The Plague at Ashdod*.

This pulling of the visual field backwards coincides with an apparent sense of pushing inward, where the figures seem to be forced into the middle of the picture, away from the edges. On the extreme left and right there are two figure groups that appear to dramatize this situation. Jonathan Unglaub observes that "the youth striding forward at left echoes the pose of the figure immediately behind him, fleeing in horror from the portentous spectacle within the temple."<sup>73</sup> Yet he is set well into the scene and separated from the edge of it by all the things immediately under the effect of the Ark (as he himself is). He is, in effect, trapped inside the scene. And his echo in the female figure behind him becomes a way of imagining him pulled further back in the scene, trapped in stages of recession deeper into the painting's trough. On the right, meanwhile, a man tries to hold a child back, which only serves to draw attention to this inward motion. And, in doing this, his diagonal limbs also illustrate the effect of something pulling him in, almost as if he were falling forward. Even though it is clear that the centre is unpleasant, because of the invisible smell, and dangerous, because of the invisible source of contagion, the

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 162.

picture's spatial order seems to pull its people in, even as it pulls them back. The painting becomes a kind of backward drain, unsettling the viewer with a mildly vertigo-inducing effect, while seemingly evacuating the town of Ashdod by pulling its people into a representational abyss.

The space of the scene at Ashdod is at once shallow and unnervingly deep. Flatness is implied beyond the middle distance by the adaptation of the theatrical backdrop. And, at the same time, the depicted urban backdrop is the site of a kind of pictorial suction that suggests a void or vacuum. Ashdod comes to the edge of being an impossible space, consisting of a shallow stage, extending about as far as the end of the long flight of steps on the right, and a second screen rising vertically from that point up. Poussin's urban scenes routinely include these box-like confines, perhaps deriving from his use of models.<sup>74</sup> But here the box-like space is juxtaposed with the space of overwhelming retrocession pulling all the space into the trough at the centre of that second screen. The boundary line between these two orders is about four tenths of the way up from the bottom. (It is just above where the ground meets the first step at the end of the long staircase on the right, and two men appear to be carrying a corpse *offstage* right.) Unglaub notes that the eye line of the youth on the left (which is also the eyeline of an average viewer when the painting is properly hung) is exactly level with the broken off head of the Dagon statue.<sup>75</sup> This line, a highly charged horizontal in Poussin's picture, falls exactly where the receding horizontal plane on the stage meets the apparently vertical plane of the *Serlionesque* backdrop. Poussin has absolutely identified the destabilizing effect of the Ark with the destabilized space of the scene he depicts.

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<sup>74</sup>Blunt, 242-44. See above.

<sup>75</sup>Unglaub, *ibid.*



### Later Paintings: Towards a Queer Sublime

Right from the beginning, Poussin used recognizable visual sources as one of his tools to construct paradoxical or self-resisting spaces. The destabilization this permits is a key component of his queer space making. But as his techniques developed and became more polished the destabilized spaces could become much more serene. If we look at one very late painting where the depicted space is queer as well, the final form of Poussin's earlier strategy can be seen. At this late stage it is remarkable how smooth and resolved the queer terrain is. It is put together without agony or dramatic self-resisting. And, through the study of its sources, it can be easily 'mapped'. That is, the kind of queer spaces he depicts can be represented in a straightforward and even 'global' fashion, as if seen from a removed and unimplicated point of view.

Poussin's *Holy Family in Egypt* (1655 to 1657) [Fig.4.21] in the Hermitage is discussed by Charles Dempsey in his 1963 *Art Bulletin* article "Poussin and Egypt." Poussin depicts certain Roman landmarks within an Egyptian setting. By representing a Rome that is in Egypt in the reordered visual language of an antique mosaic that had depicted Egypt, literally and physically, in the vicinity of Rome,<sup>76</sup> Poussin thereby creates an unstable (and destabilizing) network of imaginary spaces. This case illustrates how a formal compositional element, albeit with thematic overtones, stemming from Poussin's earlier depiction of Narcissus, and building upon his queering work in history paintings such as *The Plague at Ashdod*, has within itself the potential to develop into a sublime vision with eschatological overtones. Dempsey's article describes how the background and setting of Poussin's painting is adapted from the so-called 'Nile mosaic' from Palestrina, about thirty kilometers from Rome. At least three different scenes from

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<sup>76</sup>See Charles Dempsey, "Poussin and Egypt," *The Art Bulletin* 45.2 (1963): 109-119.

the mosaic find their way into Poussin's painting. Most importantly, a religious procession seen in the background of Poussin's scene is taken from it, [Fig.4.22] although Poussin has reoriented it to be happening parallel to his picture plane. Also prominent is Poussin's borrowing of an obelisk and temple pairing, [Fig.4.23] and a highly idiosyncratic combination of a slant-walled tomb and a tower with a concave parapet. [Fig.4.24] The mosaic, like Palestrina itself, would be important for a number of Poussin's late compositions, although these borrowings are especially recognizable.

Palestrina was, in ancient times, Praeneste, the site of a massive temple complex to the goddess Fortuna (Fortune). The site had become a Barberini palazzo during the sixteenth century and the mosaics depicting Egyptian scenes were discovered there around 1600 but subsequently moved to Rome.<sup>77</sup> The mosaics were important for Poussin as just about the only available visual source for Egyptian matters other than those obelisks which had been removed from Egypt during Roman times and were, in the seventeenth century, being moved and re-erected around Rome and the Pyramid of Cestius, an early imperial mausoleum built in Rome in the steep-sided fashion of Nubian pyramids.<sup>78</sup> In his later years, Poussin was enthralled by Egyptian subjects, likely both for their antiquarian interest and because an interest in what was supposed to be Egyptian esoteric wisdom was of interest to many in Poussin's circle. The Poussin scholar Sheila McTighe devotes a long section to the importance of egyptiana for Poussin and, in

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<sup>77</sup>Blunt, 310.

<sup>78</sup>Blunt writes: "The fact that the mosaic shows Egypt seen through Roman eyes, and would not stand up to the criticism of a modern archeologist, is not relevant; the point is that Poussin used with care the best source available to him." (Ibid., 312.) Nubian pyramids were fashionable among the late Ptolemies in Alexandria and among their Roman contemporaries. The shallow-walled Egyptian pyramids became forgotten by Westerners during the middle ages and the exclusive influence of the Nubian type may be seen in all Egyptian imagery in the West before Napoleon's conquest of Egypt, caused by the misapprehension that the Nubian type was also the Egyptian way of building pyramids.

particular, to hieroglyphics in her 1996 book *Nicolas Poussin's Landscape Allegories*.<sup>79</sup> I shall return to her arguments in the next section but, for the moment, it is important to note that the Palestrina mosaic is important for Poussin's sustained interest in Egypt in his later years and that this importance was first raised in print in Dempsey's 1963 article, although Blunt was certainly on top of this subject as well, had lectured on it, and discussed it in his *Nicolas Poussin* published four years later.

Using different textual sources, including Saint Augustine, Dempsey shows how the procession in Poussin's painting is a Serapic Pagan ceremony associated with rebirth, even while the Holy Family in the foreground presents a complementary scene of refreshment.<sup>80</sup> The cult of Serapis was a syncretic combination of Hellenistic and Egyptian elements but was also, in some ways, similar to Christianity. Serapis was thought to be a sort of avatar of Osiris, the resurrected god. It may therefore be understood as an imperfect forerunner of the Christian resurrection. This relates to Dempsey's overall claim that the message of Poussin's painting is of a Christianity that has succeeded and replaced not only the first covenant, made with the people of Israel, but also the forerunning religions of the pagan world. This is that sublime vision, of a universal church that dissolves but also incorporates all local differences. Here is the significance of Jesus and Mary reaching for the dates to refresh themselves whereas a somewhat dullard Joseph – like the ass – is aware only of the water. (It was an ancient story that in Egypt dates were thought better than water to be a cure for thirst.)<sup>81</sup> In Egypt, Jesus and Mary are right at home. But here I am more interested in pointing out

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<sup>79</sup>Sheila McTighe, *Nicolas Poussin's Landscape Allegories* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>80</sup>Dempsey, 110.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, 112

the means rather than the artistic ends of Poussin's universalizing vision. Dempsey writes:

Christian and pagan myths dissolve the barriers separating them, and emerge as unity. Poussin has devised a perfect historical setting. [...] The same kind of transformation occurs in the more formal aspects of Poussin's archeological construction of the setting. A direct comparison of the painting with the Palestrina mosaic reveals substantial differences [...] If we were to take the painting and like an onion, peel away the foreground and middleground, nothing at all would remain of Egypt. The background consists entirely of a splendid *veduta* of Rome. Castel Sant'Angelo is clearly visible behind the porch, and there appears to be a reconstructed Roman bath and a circular building that is doubtless based on the Pantheon [...] It is obvious why it took Poussin two years to paint the *Holy Family in Egypt*. This is no mere archeological 'aspect' of ancient Egypt, gleaned from the rubble of ancient Rome; it is a deeply considered synthesis, in which the existing face of the past is observed, dissected and recombined in a new way.<sup>82</sup>

The depiction of certain Roman landmarks within an Egyptian setting creates a topography that is hybrid. Indeed, by representing a Rome that is in Egypt while also using the reordered visual language of an antique mosaic that had depicted Egypt, literally and physically, in the vicinity of Rome, I want to argue that Poussin creates, not a "unity," as Dempsey states, but rather an unstable (and destabilizing) network of imaginary spaces. Dempsey goes on to conclude:

Although the architectural elements are real and particular, the whole of the landscape in which they are combined transcends the archeological particularity of Poussin's earlier settings, melting into timeless unity. In fact [...] he has found in the face of Rome itself the symbol of that timelessness.<sup>83</sup>

Poussin's spatial hybridity and making of a multiple space within one vision is easily mistaken for being universal, and for being timeless. Of course, the religious themes

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 112-119

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 118-119

underwrite such an interpretation. It is an understandable misinterpretation to make. But this painting is anything but timeless.

The time of the *Holy Family in Egypt*, rather, is extremely particular. It exhibits an emphasis on instantaneity that is important, generally, in Poussin's later work, as I discuss in the following section. In this painting, it is seen in two places and, thus, in the synchronic connection they share. The religious procession is carrying a rectangular casket through the rectangular canopy. At the moment of the picture, it is ever so slightly uncentred in the canopy's enclosure. [Fig.4.25] This slight imperfection – the time is slightly 'out of joint' – heightens both the sense of movement and the sense of moment. This canopy and casket, like the columnar order of the Temple in Poussin's *The Capture of Jerusalem by Titus* is a meter whereby the viewer may measure the time. And, in this case, these measurements are extremely accurate. The second place is with the Holy Family in the foreground. Joseph is reaching out for the water just as the Christ Child and, especially, Mary are reaching out for the dates. Their instant of appetite dramatizes temporality and links the foreground and background. These two events are beautifully unrelated by anything in the scene, per se, and the rising land between these two pictorial zones makes their physical relationship in the scene ambiguous and consequently establishes that their association is entirely about time and, in the sense that they are both in Egypt-cum-Rome, about place. The incorporation of Egypt with, in the further background, Rome constructs a space that is totally confounded when the question of visual sources is accounted for. (It incorporates a mosaic scene of Egypt that is physically in Rome that is now, by Poussin, transposed back to Egypt). The resulting scene very plainly occurs 'right now' but it happens in homotopia that is Rome in Egypt

in Rome in Egypt (ad infinitum). This scene is queered by the very stuff that makes it up, its recognizable visual source material. It also queers itself, not least by the smoothness and serenity with which it inhabits its own referential cycle.

A queer space is an extension of concept queer and may, as with its earliest inchoate appearance in Poussin's *Echo and Narcissus*, mean that there is an implied slippage between spaces gendered as figure, or spaces gendered as ground. In the case of the *Echo and Narcissus*, body and space are still just different ways of conceiving of the same pictorial elements, of figure and ground. Later on, space and bodies become differentiated establishing what I have called queer scenes. Here, spaces seem collapsed with other spaces, or to overlap them, or to pervade them. In Poussin these are usually self-resisting spaces or spaces that are discernible in the tensions they establish. *The Plague at Ashdod* is an example of this type. We can understand fully developed queer scenes, which seem to work on a level beyond tension such as the *Holy Family in Egypt*, however, by analogy with and in contradistinction to a concept proposed by Michel Foucault.

Foucault's 1967 essay "Of Other Spaces" presents the concept of what he calls 'heterotopias'. According to Foucault:

There are [...] in every culture, in every civilization, real places – places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society – which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality.<sup>84</sup>

These realized utopias may be found in cemeteries, in libraries, in museums, he suggests, even in modes of transport, ships or trains: they are in any space which has as its

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<sup>84</sup>Foucault, 24.

character a concern with continuity, outward or transcendental movement, with universality.<sup>85</sup> Foucault provides the illustration of the mirror.

The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place that I am since I see myself over there.<sup>86</sup>

A heterotopia, then, however much it may be oriented towards other spaces, is still one space inside another or towards another, like a cut made into the canvas of the world through which we may perceive another world. Foucault characterizes this as a key principle of heterotopias; “The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are themselves incompatible.”<sup>87</sup> A heterotopia may be an alternative space but it is not yet a queer space. It is a space as it fits into another space, even while it transcends it. In this sense, a heterotopia happens when what we could call two (or more) ‘straight’ spaces intersect such that one inhabits a place within another. A queer space, by contrast, is not divided between nor defined by how separate spaces relate or fail to be compatible. It would be a kind of spatial practice that destabilizes the binary between any two component spaces, such as figure and ground. It would be, therefore, what could be called a ‘homotopia’, in contrast to Foucault’s concept, a genuinely queer space that is at once the same and different within itself, and therefore

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 25. They can also involve highly charged spaces or places pertaining to taboos. Until recently, he points out, most sexual initiations have taken place – or, more precisely, are *presumed by society* to take place – in spaces he characterises as heterotopias, places that need to be “nowhere” places. (He provides the example of the destination of the honeymoon trip: Niagara Falls would be a perfect North American example.) Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 25.

not self-same, but self-referential, both shattered and held in place, as in *Holy Family in Egypt*, in one moment of autodifferentiation and reflexive multiplicity.

It is worth returning again, for an illustration, to the subject of Narcissus. The duality imported into conventional representations of Narcissus led artists to make heterotopias. These are the depictions of (realized) *outer* reflection and of duality. A queer pictorial practice, on the other hand, is the *actual* space of Narcissus, as it would seem to Narcissus himself: a homotopia, when it is a place, having reflexive collapse but haunted by a lack of self-sameness. This approach, I have argued, was first developed by Poussin as a way of presenting a queer body – that of his Narcissus – to evade the trap that makes reflexivity all but impossible to portray visually. From there, it developed as an approach ideally suited to tackling subjects involving multiplicity, monstrosity and subjects that dealt with ultimate questions, such as God and death, that troubled the limits of representation. These involved the use of a queer pictorial practice to construct queer scenes that are destabilized or that undermine themselves. By the end of Poussin's painting career, such an approach could create near seamless scenes of queer multiplicity, of which the *Holy Family in Egypt* has been my principal example. The scene it contains, and which it has destabilized, is so *seemingly* stable that it shares much in common with another type of queer space that Poussin constructs, those spaces which mostly destabilize the means of representation rather than destabilize what they set out to depict.

Immediately before the easy depiction of queer space seen in the *Holy Family in Egypt* is another group of paintings which are more difficult. Among Nicolas Poussin's later paintings, about five to seven years earlier, there is a group of interrelated landscape



allegories that deal with sublime themes.<sup>88</sup> Though these works are not set in an Arcadian landscape *per se* and usually have presumptive locations, such as Athens or Babylon (which were for Poussin so remote as to be almost mythic, anyway),<sup>89</sup> they are built on his Arcadian landscape type and, as such, may be regarded as implicitly Arcadian. These paintings have a number of properties in common. They are all relatively large in scale and painted a few years after Poussin's return to Rome from his sojourn in France. Among these are the pendants *Landscape with the Funeral of Phocion* and *Landscape with the Gathering of the Ashes of Phocion* (both of 1648), discussed in Anthony Blunt's seminal 1944 essay,<sup>90</sup> *Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake* (1648),<sup>91</sup> and *Landscape with Diogenes* (1648), among several others.<sup>92</sup> These allegorical landscapes have been seen to be motivated, to a greater extent than before, by Poussin's philosophical ideas. For example, Anthony Blunt sees this group, which he calls Poussin's "late mythological landscapes," as demonstrating an intensification of his concern with stoicism.<sup>93</sup> This increased concern with Stoicism has been explained as having to do with the disappointments of Poussin's two-year return to France. Richard Verdi writes:

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<sup>88</sup>The term 'Landscape Allegories' is used by Sheila McTighe to refer to this interrelated group of paintings, which she sees as encoding *Libertin* ideas and political sensibilities in their abstruse references. McTighe, 2.

<sup>89</sup>There is also, of course, a real Arcadia too, located in the central Peloponnese in Greece. But the mythic home of Pan bears as little connection with this actual place as the real Athens or the ruins of Babylon do with the settings of Poussin's late landscape allegories.

<sup>90</sup>Anthony Blunt, "The Heroic and Ideal Landscape in the Work of Nicolas Poussin," *Journal of the Courtauld and Warburg Institutes* 7 (1944): 154-168. For a discussion of this article, see Chapter 1.

<sup>91</sup>This work is related to a number of earlier treatments of the theme. Among these related works is *Landscape with a Man Pursued by a Snake* (late 1630s) in the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. For a discussion of the interrelation of these paintings, see T.J. Clark. *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006) 229-235.

<sup>92</sup>A slightly later landscape allegory, *Landscape with the Blind Orion* (c.1658) was the subject of a crucial article by E.H. Gombrich, "The Subject of Poussin's *Orion*," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 84.491 (1944): 37. This article, appearing in the same year as Blunt's on the Phocion landscapes, was among the first interpretations of Poussin to stress his interests in obscure philosophical ideas. See McTighe, 79-80.

<sup>93</sup>Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, 296.

In his maturity, Poussin followed many of the precepts of the Stoic philosophers and acknowledged that reason was the surest means of attaining virtue, of living in harmony with nature and even correctly judging works of art [...] From what we know of Poussin's personal life it is clear that he also resorted to other means of protection against the inconstancy of fortune – namely, isolation and independence from those forces that might seize control of his destiny. Particularly after his unhappy years in Paris working for Louis XIII, Poussin adopted the contemplative life.<sup>94</sup>

This cycle of paintings, these landscape allegories made in or after 1648, are often taken to be the fruit of this intensified concern with stoical themes. Sheila McTighe, meanwhile, suggests that Poussin's interest in *libertinage*, seen in these works in particular, and his ongoing interest in neostoicism are complementary.<sup>95</sup> In the following pages, I shall be primarily concerned with one painting from this group, *Landscape with Pyramus and Thisbe* (1651), [Fig.4.26] which is particularly closely connected with a pair of pendants made in the same year, *Landscape with a Storm* and *Landscape with a Calm*.<sup>96</sup> My aim is to interpret this painting to show that it presents an outstanding example of Poussin's destabilization of space. (Its meaning, meanwhile, is conditioned by the division among several contemporary canvases of its concerns.) This painting brings together many aspects of Poussin's approach that have hitherto been described as making queer spaces. It is a complicated case but it further reveals how subtle and sophisticated his pictorial strategies have become in his late works. In fact, I shall propose that this

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<sup>94</sup>Richard Verdi, *Nicolas Poussin 1594-1665* (London: Royal Academy of Arts in Association with Zwemmer, 1995) 28.

<sup>95</sup>McTighe, 27-28.

<sup>96</sup>Despite their acute interconnectedness, however, there is one major difference between these later two and the *Pyramus and Thisbe* picture. Whereas the pendants were made for Poussin's patron Jean Pointel in France, *Pyramus and Thisbe* was made for his longtime Italian patron Cassiano del Pozzo. See Willibald Sauerländer, "'Nature through the Glass of Time': Reflections on the Meaning of Poussin's Landscapes." in *Poussin and Nature: Arcadian Visions*, ed. Pierre Rosenberg and Keith Christiansen (New York, New Haven and London: The Metropolitan Museum and Yale University Press, 2008) 106.

particular painting reflects upon the queer properties in Poussin's art. It may record his theory of queerness.

Poussin described the painting in a letter to his friend, the painter Jacques Stella. The original letter is lost but a section of its text has been preserved by Poussin's biographer Félibien. The painting has often been seen through the prism of this letter and attempts to interpret it have depended, to varying degrees, upon Poussin's remarks.

Poussin writes:

J'ay essayé de représenter une tempeste sur terre, imitant le mieux que j'ay pû l'effet d'un vent impétueux, d'un air rempli d'obscurité, de pluye, d'éclairs et de foudres qui tombes en plusieurs endroits, non sans y faire désordre. Toutes les figures qu'on y voit jouënt leur personnage selon le temps qu'il fait: les unes fuyent au travers de la poussière, et suivent le vent qui les emportes; d'autres au contraire vont contre le vent, et marchent avec peine, mettant leurs mains devant leurs yeux. D'un costé, un Berger court, et abandonne son troupeau, voyant un lion qui, après avoir mis par terre certains Bouviers, en attaque d'autres, dont les uns se défendent, et les autres piquent leurs boeufs, et taschent de se sauver. Dans ce désordre la poussière s'élève par gros tourbillons. Un chien assez éloigné aboye, et se hérissé le poil, sans oser approcher. Sur le devant du Tableau l'on voit Pyrame mort et étendu par terre, et auprès de luy Tysbé qui s'abandonne à la douleur.

[I have tried to represent a storm on the ground, imitating as best I could the effects of a sudden and violent wind, an air filled with darkness and rain, with lightning and thunderbolts that fall in several places, not without causing disorder. Every figure seen there acts in accordance with the weather: some flee through the dust, following the wind that carries them; others, on the contrary, go against the wind and walk with difficulty, putting their hands in front of their eyes. At one side a shepherd runs and abandons his flock, seeing a lion that had brought down some herdsmen and attacked others who defended them, and others goad their cattle trying to save them. Amid this disorder the dust rises in large vortexes. A dog, quite far away, barks and raises his hackles, without daring to approach. In the foreground of the painting Pyramus can be seen, dead and stretched out on the ground, and close to him Thisbe abandons herself to her sadness.]<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup>Nicolas Poussin to Jacques Stella (sometime in 1651) as quoted by André Félibien, *Entretiens*, Vol.IV, 160-1. Translation by Marko Daniel quoted from Bächtmann, *ibid.*, 95. See also Nicolas Poussin, *Lettres et propos sur l'art*, ed. Anthony Blunt (Paris: Merman, 1964), 149.

It has usually been noticed that Poussin only mentions the supposed protagonists of his scene at the end of this passage. It has even been observed that central figures were painted in only after the background had been painted.<sup>98</sup> This is often taken to mean that the Pyramus and Thisbe story is not the crucial fact in this painting but rather that the storm and its effects are most important, a view which has often served to intensify its relationship to other paintings in this group. Blunt reads the painting in this way. He writes: “The important fact in this description is that Poussin only mentions the story of Pyramus and Thisbe in the last sentence. His first intention, as he says, has been to paint a storm and its effects on man, and the story of the lovers only comes in as a sort of focusing point.”<sup>99</sup> While the connection to the other works is indisputable – and important for the painting’s interpretation – I find these conclusions strange. First of all, mentioning the figures only at the end would be consistent with rhetorical emphasis but, more to the point, this is only the passage that the biographer quoted. We can have no idea what, if anything, Poussin may have gone on to say that has been left out.

Nevertheless, Poussin clearly deviates from the traditional story, whatever the importance of the lovers for his picture’s meaning. Briefly, the story of Pyramus and Thisbe is as follows. The two lovers are neighbours in the city of Babylon but have only been able to communicate through a small crack in the wall dividing their fathers’ properties. Their fathers’ are rivals and forbid the young lovers to marry. Pyramus and Thisbe resolve to run away and meet outside the city near a tomb, that of Ninus (a

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<sup>98</sup>Pierre Rosenberg, Catalogue entry in *Poussin and Nature: Arcadian Visions*, ed. Pierre Rosenberg and Keith Christiansen (New York, New Haven and London: The Metropolitan Museum and Yale University Press, 2008) 264.

<sup>99</sup>Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, 297.

legendary king),<sup>100</sup> at a precise spot marked by a mulberry tree. Thisbe arrives first, whereupon she encounters a lioness that has recently killed a meal. Frightened, Thisbe hides but drops a garment, her veil, that the lion then picks up and stains with blood and gore from her jaws. Pyramus, arriving, sees the bloodied cloth, which he recognizes as Thisbe's, and assumes she has been killed by the lion. In despair he kills himself with a sword. Thisbe, returning to find her lover dying, then kills herself as well. The tale was best known from the Roman poet Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and, being very popular in the Renaissance, it was much imitated and adapted. It is likely best known as a source for William Shakespeare's tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* and as the explicit subject of the play-within-the-play in his contemporary comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (both plays c.1594). Indeed, despite the tragic subject matter the story was often adapted as a comic theme.<sup>101</sup> An important discrepancy is that, in Ovid, the lovers' meeting and deaths happen on a calm, moonlit night, and certainly not in a raging storm.<sup>102</sup>

Another literary source, however, is possible. Oskar Bätschmann points out that Poussin may have been inspired or informed in part by a tragedy based on this story by the *libertin* playwright Théophile de Viau.<sup>103</sup> Viau's play includes a thunderstorm as an omen of disaster, although it is not certain that Poussin knew of the play at the time the painting was made and, in any case, other changes introduced by Viau are not reflected in Poussin's treatment. The painting's precise sources have been controversial and vexing and, perhaps for this reason, it has attracted a good deal of scholarly attention as well as a

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<sup>100</sup>The Assyrian King – the legendary founder of Nineveh – was famous for greatness as a warrior and as the second husband of Semiramis, whom he finds married to one of his generals, a man whom he forces to commit suicide so that he may marry her. The tomb, therefore, reflects in miniature some of the themes, love and cruelty, that are in Ovid's tale.

<sup>101</sup>Bätschmann, 102.

<sup>102</sup>Sauerländer, 107.

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*, 100-101. Bätschmann's suggestion of a *libertin* connection in this one painting occurred independently of McTighe's work on *libertin* meanings seen throughout the larger group. (McTighe, 16.)

reputation for being a ‘problem painting’. In a recent article, published in French, Willibald Sauerländer sums up the situation this way: “There is much – probably too much – written on this fascinating and irritating painting, and one has not hesitated to advance all manner of speculations to explain its details or apparent contradictions.”<sup>104</sup> Despite this complaint, however, I shall venture to add a few more observations, justified, I hope, by my sense that many of the contradictions and incongruities of this work are a part of the point of the work and that its presentation of such a complicated thematic and visual structure, tying together so many of Poussin’s concerns seen elsewhere, derives from a queerness that is found in various aspects of the picture but is expressed most forcefully in its articulation of queer space. As the picture is complicated, however, we must undertake its analysis step by step. The picture combines three generally incompatible elements, although each has resonances with others. They are, respectively: the storm, the illustrated story of the lovers in the foreground and finally, in the middle distance, the inexplicably placid lake.

The storm is linked to the figure of Fortune. In a famous letter to his patron Chantelou in June 1648, Poussin describes his desire “to paint seven further stories where are vividly represented the strange turns that Fortune plays on men” and to show that one must acquire virtue and wisdom “to hold firm and unmoved in the face of this blind madwoman.”<sup>105</sup> It is commonly suggested that *Pyramus and Thisbe* is one of the scenes

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<sup>104</sup>Willibald Sauerländer, “Paysages de Poussin: les limites de l’interprétation iconologique,” *Studiolo: Revue d’histoire de l’art de l’Académie de France à Rome* 6 (2008): 205-6. The original reads: «Il y a beaucoup – probablement trop – d’écrits sur ce tableau fascinant et irritant, et l’on n’a pas hésité à avancer toutes sortes de speculations pour en expliquer des details ou des contradictions apparentes.» Translation by author.

<sup>105</sup>Nicolas Poussin to Chantelou, June 1648. Cited from Richard Verdi, “Poussin and the ‘Tricks of Fortune’,” *The Burlington Magazine* 124.956 (1982): 681. The original quoted text reads: « de peindre sept autres histoires, où fussent représentées vivement les plus étranges tours que la Fortune ait jamais joués aux

Poussin had in mind and thus that this letter expresses a theory of the painting at hand while expounding “Poussin’s prevailing Stoical attitude towards life.”<sup>106</sup> The matter of the storm is thereby problematized. Is it a sublime experience that the viewers are expected to share or a dispassionate appraisal of the vices of passion? This question appears to turn on how the storm over the land and the tempestuous emotions of the Thisbe figure are – or are not – to be related. The thesis in favour of their connectedness corresponds to what, in literary studies, is typically called the ‘pathetic fallacy’, wherein the external world reflects the emotions of a character. (It rains in a film, play or work of literature to reflect a character’s sadness.) In his recent article, published in *Studiolo*, the art historical review of the French Academy in Rome, Sauerländer expresses this view.

He writes:

Poussin et ses mécènes ont dû être fascinés par l’idée de transformer des paysages en métaphores des émotions humains. *Pyrame et Thisbé* [...] constitue probablement la plus capricieuse de ces expériences mettant en parallèle la tempête dans la nature avec le tourbillon dans l’âme, l’orage dans le ciel et en écho le cri de la douleur sur terre.

[Poussin and his patrons became fascinated by the idea of turning landscapes into metaphors for human emotions. *Pyramus and Thisbe* [...] is probably the most capricious of these cases, setting parallels between the storm in nature and the swirling passions, and between the thunder in the sky and its echo in the cry of pain on earth.<sup>107</sup>

McTighe agrees, writing that the subject’s *libertin* associations – via Viau – explain “the oddest part of Poussin’s representation of the story, his choice to depict the two lovers’ deaths in the midst of a raging storm,” adding that “[b]y doing so, he linked the protagonists’ disastrous passions in the foreground with the blast of the storm behind

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hommes /demeurer ferme et immobile aux effort de cette folle aveugle.» Translation by author. Poussin means seven stories in addition to his treatments of the Seven Sacraments.

<sup>106</sup>Verdi, *ibid.*

<sup>107</sup>Sauerländer, 205. Translation by author.

them, equating their loss of ‘firmness and immobility’.”<sup>108</sup> Of this same painting, on the other hand, Margaretha Lagerlöf writes:

Sometimes nature is shown as the cause of a human reaction, so that nature and man seem to accord: storm and fear, lightning and death [...] The spectator may be tempted to see the landscape as a symbol of the emotional mood that the figures convey: our fear is visibly expressed in the raging storm. But we soon have to abandon such a reading. The figures are too objective, too apart; the emotion which they express strikes no chord in us strong enough to spread to the rest of the scene.<sup>109</sup>

I tend to agree with Lagerlöf, although the question really is a matter of degree.

(Elsewhere, for instance, McTighe proposes that the “‘passions’ of nature” might just as well be Poussin’s theme, linking Thisbe’s individual ‘blindness’ in her grief in this work with the theme of blindness as it appears in the painter’s late depictions of storms, generally.)<sup>110</sup> But in the wake of romanticism and its characteristic means of representation, the rationalism of Poussin can be all too easily disregarded in scenes such as this and there seems an all but irresistible pull to think of the link between the storm and Thisbe’s passions as direct, rather than mediated. The storm and the plight of the lovers are linked, but only intellectually, through the mediation of the question of blind fortune and the need to be resolved before it. The landscape may be a metaphor, but it is no simple reflection of Thisbe’s passions. The storm represents the ‘tricks of fortune’; Thisbe’s reaction to her misfortune is a consequence of what the storm represents, not its ‘echo’, as Sauerländer would have it.

The larger matter of Fortune is intrinsically connected to what could be called the *theory* of this painting. Thisbe dies because she surrenders to passion but such surrender

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<sup>108</sup>McTighe, 38.

<sup>109</sup>Margareta Rossholm Lagerlöf, *Ideal Landscape: Annibale Caracci, Nicolas Poussin and Claude Lorrain* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990): 158.

<sup>110</sup>Sheila McTighe, “Nicolas Poussin’s representations of storms and *Libertinage* in the mid-seventeenth century,” *Word & Image* 5.4 (1989): 346.



is not the only mistake represented here. In the generation after Blunt, the French art historian and theorist Louis Marin has been the scholar perhaps most interested in presenting a general account of Poussin. *Sublime Poussin* (1999) is a posthumously published selection of essays that would have been the basis of Marin's projected book on Poussin.<sup>111</sup> Marin's is a semiologically informed account of the artist. His writings organize a cooperative interplay of text and image that requires us to understand Poussin not just as a *peintre-philosophe* but as a thinker as well as an artist, a theorist of the interaction between the textual and the visual, where visual meaning is made. In one essay, "Description of a Painting and the Sublime in Painting: Concerning a Poussin Landscape and Its Subject," Marin makes a key observation as to how the traditional story is profoundly relevant to scene. In killing himself after seeing the bloodied garment, Marin observes that Pyramus dies because of a misreading: "[W]e have an erroneous inference of the part of Pyramus [...] Pyramus misreads because the passion of love carries him away and blinds him to the prudence of all reasoning about and on the basis of the effects, traces, marks and signs perceived at a given moment."<sup>112</sup> Marin's point is that the central event of the story, the event seen in the foreground of the painting, is a warning about the dangers of misinterpretation. This question, moreover, is bound up with the painting's strange sense of time. Its instantaneity is even greater than that of the later *Holy Family in Egypt*. It happens in a lightning stroke. This detail (there are, in fact, two bolts of lightning) is of especial importance for Marin. He observes that the crack of this lightning, and its jagged line, symbolizes what first brought Pyramus and Thisbe

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<sup>111</sup>Louis Marin, *Sublime Poussin*, trans. Catherine Porter, *Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

<sup>112</sup>Marin, 88.

together: the crack in the wall between their fathers' properties.<sup>113</sup> Oppositions are collapsed by means of this device: the separation, the wall, joins; and the connection, the narrow crack, separates. This observation has a wider meaning in the picture. The scene, depicted as happening at the time of the lightning strike, divides Pyramus and Thisbe by death and also joins them in death: "Far from being a definitive separation, death reunited the two lovers in a nocturnal marriage."<sup>114</sup> Time is further collapsed as the backstory, the attack of the lioness, is seen happening at a level further behind the scene.<sup>115</sup> The picture, far from treating the story as incidental, has written it and rewritten it into its own themes at each level of the picture, from the foreground to the most distant lightning.

The story of Pyramus and Thisbe is related in the literary tradition to the figure of Fortune, as McTighe has noted, and Poussin was probably aware of that.<sup>116</sup> But, in this painting, the link is even more forcefully articulated. A reconstruction of the Temple of Fortune at Praeneste, then the site of the Barberini palazzo at Palestrina, has been used with apparently intentional ambiguity to serve as the model for the Tower of Babel in this imaginary Babylon, seen in the very far distance (just above the centre of the pictorial field, in fact), as well as to stand for itself as a reminder of the presence of Fortune.<sup>117</sup> Further, Poussin appears to have used as his source for the building to the right of the lake – probably the tomb of Ninus from the story – a triumphal arch structure seen in the lower right of Baldassare Peruzzi's engraved frontispiece for Sigismondo Fanti's book *The Triumph of Fortune* (1526).<sup>118</sup> [Fig.4.27] Poussin's *Landscape with Pyramus and*

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<sup>113</sup>Ibid., 86.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., 91.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., 99.

<sup>116</sup>McTighe, *ibid.*, 351-2.

<sup>117</sup>See Bättschmann, 103-104.

<sup>118</sup>The popular handbook was printed in Ferrara. The website of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where a copy resides, explains the curious publication: "The *Triumpho di Fortuna* was the second illustrated

*Thisbe* presents its viewer (or its student) with a work of art that works theme through the picture, then changes them and works them through again, and again. On many registers, including that of his architectural models, Poussin avails himself of sources that reinforce the painting's tightly compressed bundle of themes. It is a highly overdetermined picture. Central among these themes, however, is the theme of Fortune, her blind, senseless ravages, and the need to respond correctly to them, with insight and with calm. But, as Louis Marin has shown, this need is allied with the need to read, that is, to interpret correctly. And Poussin has incorporated one more key element, one more incompatible part of the painting that resists unity and seamlessness. That element is the impossibly calm lake and, by means of it, we can see not only that the spatial logic of the scene is queered but that among this painting's intellectual themes is a reflection upon queerness itself, or at least upon how it may have been understood in Poussin's time.

The lake is an element that cannot be readily accommodated in any total concept of when and where this scene could occur, negating the scene it anchors. It is impossibly still, a shining, mirror-like rectangle inserted into a painting that, otherwise, depicts a raging storm. The lake's stillness links *Pyramus and Thisbe* to another work, painted at exactly the same time: *Landscape with a Calm*. [Fig.4.29] In *Calm*, a similar still surface of water centres and confounds the viewer's relationship to the depicted space. The perspectival projection that organizes the scene – or that orients its architectural elements to the depicted space, at least – is so beautifully understated that the position of the

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fortune-telling book to appear, after the popular *Libro della ventura* of Lorenzo Spirito, first published in 1482, had gone through several editions. Fanti's book functions as a game in which the seeker follows cues that lead from figures of Fortune to houses and then to wheels, spheres, and astrologers, the path determined by either a throw of the dice or the time of day at which the book is consulted.”

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Source Online. Accessed 15 June, 2011.

<<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/25.7>> Oskar Bätschmann has observed that the building opposite, the round temple, is taken from Andrea Palladio's illustration of the *Temple of Bacchus*. [Fig.4.28] Bätschmann, 105. These two structures, then, stand as bookends, framing the the central lake.

spectator (ordinarily implied through perspective) is called into doubt. This question, moreover, is emphasized by the representative of the viewer (or his or her stand-in), the goatherd minding his flock while taking in the view. T.J. Clark describes the structure of this picture, which is problematized by the uncertainty of the viewer's position, as organized by a series of horizontal levels, or strata: the superimposition of topographical and built elements in the architectural complex in the middle of the picture. Clark writes:

[T]his picture's construction is as un-coercive as they come. If it really is "one point legitimate" – which maybe it is, given Poussin's habit of mind – what it offers *of* that overall logic is so laconic and dispersed that the logic never impresses, never asserts itself. But the question of how high we are in regard to the city – I think that question does arise. The mirror-image in the lake raises it; and the whole feeling of the picture's middle area being built layer on layer, level on level, from lake surface to escarpment to terrace to battlemented roof. Where on these levels are *we*? [...P]recisely it is a matter of intuition, of finding an appropriate place in a fictional, almost narrative, structure [...]<sup>119</sup>

The centrality of this 'city' is spatial, formal and thematic. It is found in the very centre of the painting but it also lies in the perfect middle distance. And, lastly, it is the key (or the cypher) that allows and scrambles the viewer's attempt to find his or her place. Its structure and apparent stability is set in contrast to contingency, a contrast that Clark argues is fundamental to Poussin's work throughout this period, and in this painting in particular. He asks: "So one main 'theme' or concern of the scene immediately presents itself, in a way that the picture's traditional title points up: Is what we are looking at in *Calm* a transitory state of affairs, or enduring? Is it Nature or Art here that has brought the world to a standstill?"<sup>120</sup> The stillness is at once secure and, seemingly, fragile. The goats indicate this fragility. If this were not a painting, any one of them might wander in

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<sup>119</sup>T.J. Clark. *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006) 90-91.

<sup>120</sup>*Ibid.*, 15.

any direction at any time. It would seem that their animality, contrasted with the calm and stable humanity of the goatherd, articulates a difference between self-possessed reason and a pack-like abandonment to the momentary and the fleeting. (We have seen elsewhere that Poussin explores this difference, between what Deleuze and Guattari characterize as the ‘molecular’ and the ‘molar’.) In problematizing the position of the viewer, I believe Poussin is being more equivocal on which state is to be identified with than Clark supposes.<sup>121</sup>

Levels are used to indicate a destabilized and problematized position in *Calm*. These levels are horizontal, they are strata seen from the side. In *Pyramus and Thisbe* there are levels too but they are ‘vertical’, that is, they are separations between the viewer’s position and the lake in the centre. Our access to the lake, as viewers, is blocked or interrupted by a sequence of rises and falls in the landscape that are almost like trenches cut horizontally across the scene. This has the effect of turning the strata here from overlaying parts of the topography to a regular series of removes, leaving frames within frames, leading all the way back to the strikingly rectangular lake. It is as if we are looking into a well of space and the water in its abyss cancels the logic of the rest of the scene. We have here a very late adaptation (or extension) of the device of the *mise-en-abyme*. But this lake is not a *mise-en-abyme*, it is rather something like its ghost. Its function is to reflect but, uncannily, it does not reflect what is in the scene: it defies its logic and cancels it. It is akin to looking into the mirror and seeing another’s face. Who or what might this other be? I contend that it may well be what we may call queerness itself.

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<sup>121</sup>See the discussion of ‘disturbance’ and the contrast Clark draws with Louis Marin’s reading. (Ibid.,84-85.)

Bätschmann observes that an important visual source for this painting is an engraving depicting *Semele's Death and the Birth of Bacchus* (1629). [Fig.4.30] This source ties Pyramus and Thisbe to an obscure philosophical concept, the 'Mirror of Bacchus', which resolves within itself several of the themes and concerns that have been noticed in Poussin's paintings of this period. According to Bätschmann, this connection helps determine the meaning of Poussin's painting. Moreover, he claims, this is the only connection that makes the mis-fit of the calm lake comprehensible. He writes:

Only the Neoplatonic theory of the mirror of Bacchus allows one to combine the anomalously calm lake with the [...] mythological dimension of the painting. [...] As in the *Landscape with Pyramus and Thisbe*, the water in [a Poussin] picture of Bacchus from 1657<sup>122</sup> also violates the laws of verisimilitude: [...] According to the Neoplatonist Plotinus the mirror of Bacchus shows the whole world in its infinite diversity – in other words the multifarious god Bacchus himself. Narcissus proves that it is dangerous for a man to look into a mirror, because he forgets his divine origin and abandons himself to the turmoil of matter [...] Obviously, this lake which is calm contrary to all probability amidst the chaos of the landscape with Pyramus and Thisbe can only be regarded as the mirror of Bacchus because the temple of this god stands on its shore and because the two strokes of lightning are further evidence of him or of his father Jupiter.<sup>123</sup>

Actually, Bätschmann might have gone a bit further. He does not note that the running figure of the baby Bacchus in the engraving of 1629 appears to serve as a model for (or is, at least, referred to by) Poussin's figure of Thisbe. The multiplicity represented by Bacchus links this work with queerness as a referent: the unresolved and self-contradicting character of Bacchic consciousness is as close to an explicit concept of queerness as one is liable to encounter in the seventeenth century. Its own multiplicity also ties together several of the articulations of queerness that we have seen before in

<sup>122</sup>It is the *Birth of Bacchus* in the Fogg Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge.

<sup>123</sup>Bätschmann, 107. For the temple he discusses, see above. [See Fig.4.28]

Poussin. In particular, this quality connects it with the figure of Pan and Arcadia and with the question of representation.

Of the lake in *Landscape with Pyramus and Thisbe*, Louis Marin asks:

The lake, a pure unchanged mirror in repose: does it constitute a breakdown of the intention to represent the unrepresentable? An inconsistency in exact mimesis, manifested everywhere in its propriety except in the central place of the represented “landscape”? A flaw in the sublime tableau of cosmic sublimity, which envelops with its dynamic and the characters embodied in the figures, except the one that is presented on the middle stage by the figure of the peaceful body of water? Or does the lake, as a figure of the painting, play in the painting a character other than those who cooperate with destiny or resist it, a different character, one that is no longer a character belonging to the painting but is rather the great eye of the viewer, of the sage who has been brought back to himself by the representation of the unrepresentability of the tempest and the human passions?<sup>124</sup>

Marin goes on to claim that the mirror of this lake can be, for the right viewer, an escape from the trap of Narcissus, where through the action of the mind, he or she may recognize not his or her body so much as his or her understanding.<sup>125</sup> But, if we put Marin’s reading together with Bättschmann’s we have a mirror that does not reflect us back at us but, escaping the limitations of this painting’s frame, it reflects the entire world – undifferentiated and yet un-unified: a queer cosmos, not quite a continuum and not quite a totality. The encounter is sublime – a queer sublime; and yet it escapes and transcends the presumed sublime situation depicted in the painting. What are we to make of this?

The world of which Bättschmann writes, the “whole world in its infinite diversity,” is associated with Bacchus but also with Pan. Blunt writes: “Pan was an Arcadian god, and all [Poussin’s earlier mythological] paintings [...] suggest the atmosphere of Arcadia as it was depicted by Poussin in his [original] Arcadian

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<sup>124</sup>Marin, 102.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid.,103.

Shepherds.”<sup>126</sup> Pan also is the central figure representing the World in Cesare Ripa’s *Iconologia*, first published in 1593. Edward Maser characterizes his symbolism this way: “In this case, the World is to be understood as the universe, as everything (the Greek word *pan*, meaning everything, or all), and is represented by the bearded and goat-footed god Pan.”<sup>127</sup> Behind the figure of Pan, in Ripa’s visual formula, there is a labyrinth representing the human life with the allegorical figure of Death at its centre.<sup>128</sup> Although Pan does not appear in Poussin’s painting he is the common element linking so many of its themes; the world, death, contingency, the question of ‘molar’ humanity versus ‘molecular’ animality, and, of course, queerness. Bättschmann sets out to resolve the problem of *Landscape with Pyramus and Thisbe* but his resolution is that the painting is about a concept of multifarious infinity that, ironically, resists all resolution. It goes on forever. This permanence is, paradoxically, what Death may represent here too.

Poussin is generally understood to encode particular meanings in his use of imagery, turning painting into a kind of semiotic hieroglyphics, as the Poussin scholar Sheila McTighe calls it in her account.<sup>129</sup> One such case she identifies is in Poussin’s roughly contemporary *Landscape with Man Killed by a Snake* (1648). [Fig.4.31] The human-snake figure – among other things a queer becoming – symbolizes not the man’s end but an endless cycle of death and regeneration. McTighe writes:

One of the most frequent interpretations of the serpent within the Renaissance tradition of hieroglyphics [...] to their seventeenth century imitators, was as a reference to putrescence and rebirth. [The Jesuit scholar Athanasius] Kircher notes that the snake biting its tail is an apt

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<sup>126</sup>Blunt, *ibid.*,134-35.

<sup>127</sup>Edward A. Maser, ed., *Cesare Ripa: Baroque and Rococo Pictorial Imagery* (New York: Dover, 1971) n.p. [s.v. “The World.”]

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup>Sheila McTighe, *Nicolas Poussin’s Landscape Alegories* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 128.



image for eternity, since it is an animal that not only rejuvenates itself by shedding its skin, but is actually born from the death of other creatures – alluding to the concept of spontaneous generation of serpents from putrefaction. [...] In this context, Kirchner stresses the snake's eternally renewing nature, in which corruption is the matrix for regenerated life. In which case, it may be that Poussin's dead man was not killed by the snake, but rather that the serpent has been born from the rotting corpse in its watery grave.<sup>130</sup>

Or, of course, the two meanings could coexist. The dead body of Pyramus works in much the same way as that in *Landscape with Man Killed by a Snake*, suggesting, rather, in its 'statuesque' state a regeneration not into a snake but into art. Overall, however, this work suggests that in all human plans there is the potential for disaster and that this may happen through misinterpretation. While I think this work does have this stoical message, counseling detachment and careful reflection, it also proposes that there is a 'snake in the grass' in all representation. Every attempt to evade the tricks of fortune will fail and, anyway, these processes belong to greater totality, that of 'all the World'. Human contingency is experienced as arbitrary because we resist the all-embracing queer multiplicity that destabilizes every space and nullifies all confined and circumscribed identities. Poussin's *Landscape with Pyramus and Thisbe* explores the tragic dimension of this point of view; but it descends, nevertheless, from Poussin's Arcadian subject matter. To complete this account of Poussin's queerness, we now return to that terrain.

### A Final Look

*The Arcadian Shepherds* or *Et in Arcadia Ego* of 1640<sup>131</sup> [Fig.2.8] has been read and reread by different art historians. These readings have tended to find its meaning

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<sup>130</sup>Ibid., 130. Snakes were then thought to be bred in the spinal columns of dead animals.

<sup>131</sup>These two titles are used interchangeably, including within particular texts that I cite, and so, for ease, I shall use them interchangeably according to which title is best at each given point.

primarily in relation to the larger theme of Arcadia, in the visual development of which the 1640 painting is often seen to be a milestone.<sup>132</sup> The 1640 painting's monumental composition is as deceptively simple as its embeddedness in art historical discourse is genuinely complicated. However, my present interest in the work will deal with its thematic and formal relationship to Poussin's queering of pictorial space, so the engagement with other aspects of the dilated art historical discourse will be kept to a minimum.<sup>133</sup>

In Poussin's first version of this subject (1627), an ironic contrast is set up by casting the shadow of death over the usual idle merriment that the nymphs and swains of ancient Arcadia were thought to embody.<sup>134</sup> In the later version this contrast of death and eroticism is thought to have given way to a meditation entirely upon death. Scholars have often noticed such variances between the Arcadian pastoral tradition and this 1640 painting, even while accepting that the work helps to crystallize that tradition's visual expression.<sup>135</sup> Of this discrepancy, for instance, Margaretha Lagerlöf writes:

Poussin's [1640] *Et in Arcadia Ego* [...] is the antithesis of the pastoral tradition in the theatre. Bittersweet eroticism, disguises and illusionistic effects give way here to a sublime sense of mortality, to tranquillity and dignity. Poussin approaches the theme in a serious mood, seeing Arcadia as a symbol of the remote past emphasizing death as a condition of life; and the figures around the grave perhaps suggest how reflection and art can endow the dead with ideal life.<sup>136</sup>

I disagree with aspects of this view but I think of particular value is her suggestion that the work has a special meaning for Poussin's ideas about painting. Lagerlöf concludes

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<sup>132</sup>Poussin's 1640 painting is itself a reworking of an earlier treatment of the theme. The earlier version, in turn, was modeled on another version by Francesco Guercino. See Chapter 2.

<sup>133</sup>See discussion of Arcadian and Guercino in Chapter 2.

<sup>134</sup>Erwin Panofsky, "Et in Arcadia Ego: Poussin and The Elegiac Tradition," in *Meaning In The Visual Arts* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955), 295-296.

<sup>135</sup>See Richard Verdi, "On the Critical Fortunes – and Misfortunes – of Poussin's Arcadia" *The Burlington Magazine* 121.991 (1979). 94-104+107. See also Chapter 2.

<sup>136</sup>Lagerlöf, 10.

that the *Arcadian Shepherds* “may well represent a personal declaration of faith.”<sup>137</sup> My reading of this painting – a queer reading – brings eroticism back in and it connects this eroticism with the meaning of the theme of death in works such as this. The development of Poussin’s approach to painting, towards increasingly sophisticated destabilizations of space, and how this development relates to Poussin’s ideas about painting can be demonstrated through a final look at this great work from a queer perspective, I believe. And so, for this last work to be considered, we turn back more than ten years, to the central period in Poussin’s art that links his first mature Arcadian and mythological scenes, such as *Bacchanal before a Herm of Pan*, with his late landscape allegories, such as *Landscape with Pyramus and Thisbe*. Thematically, as well as chronologically, the 1640 *Arcadian Shepherds* turns out to be pivotal. I argue that it combines – but does not resolve – eroticism (including homoeroticism), a meditation upon limitation, and a bold statement about the power of art to overcome such limitation.

The central fact of the painting, however, is its most unusual and remarkable feature: the audacious bold rectangle of the tomb, set inside and mirroring the painting’s own pictorial field. This element connects the painting’s diverse themes, death, representation, and poetry. Erwin Panofsky notes that the tomb in this latter painting has been moved out to the centre of the scene, “parallel to the picture plane.”<sup>138</sup> It is so central and rectangular as to reiterate the frame of the painting as a whole, which suggests that these figures may themselves be located within a tomb-in-the-becoming, the rectangle of the picture frame. They are becoming monuments, that is, works of art, themselves. The figures are grouped around it so statically that they almost seem like

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<sup>137</sup>Ibid., 66.

<sup>138</sup>Panofsky, 313.

sculptures. The upright female figure, in particular, looks as if she were a caryatid. She seems to float upon the canvas surface, being somewhat unintegrated spatially. This figure *stands out*. And we shall return to her. But, beyond question, this painting foregrounds the theme of death. In case we should miss this implication, Poussin has even included one chilling hint – and one Panofsky does not mention at all, interestingly: the shepherd reading the inscription has cast a shadow over the tomb. It is as if by touching, or, perhaps, by *understanding* the inscription that he is absorbed into the tomb or has been imprinted upon it. In Poussin's earlier version of the scene the figure of the river god in the lower right personifies a movement from the human form into landscape. Queerness, or indeterminacy, or becoming could not be more completely embodied. In the later painting, the figures embody a transformation as well, but one in which space has been appropriated and destabilized. Now the transition enacted by the human figures is into death, which is also a transformation into art.

What is queer in these semantic and modal aspects of the picture is how opposition and reconciliation are both suggested – pressed into simultaneous copresence by paradox. The clearer (and queerer) expression of this comes in the painting's spatial constructions. But, as we saw in Chapter 2, the interpretation of this painting is linked even more to arguments around the interpretation of the Latin phrase *et in Arcadia ego*. Louis Marin contends that the Latin phrase is not a complete grammatical unit but a fragment or one in which parts have been erased (much like the painting, he seems to suggest, it is something of a palimpsest). Therefore the phrase is open-ended and may have diverse verb forms attached to it to inflect its meaning this way or that.<sup>139</sup> Marin writes: “My hypothesis would be to leave the inscription to its indiscernible meaning, an

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<sup>139</sup>Marin, *Art of Art History*, 273.

indeterminability which may be the sense of Poussin's painting."<sup>140</sup> While Panofsky never doubted that the phrase must have a singular, true meaning, Marin seems to need it not to. The incompleteness of textual representation is likened to death: "a certain representation of death refers to this process of representation as death, which writing (and painting as a writing process) tames and neutralizes."<sup>141</sup> Death in this painting, like Fortune in *Landscape with Pyramus and Thisbe*, is a theme reflected even in the formal, spatial structure of the painting, not just found in its iconography and its references. The Latin phrase is truly inseparable from the striking rectangular surface upon which it is inscribed.

In "Towards a Theory of Reading in the Visual Arts: Poussin's 'The Arcadian Shepherds'" (1980), Marin explores how semiotic structures explain the relationship between 'text' and 'image' and how these constitute the viewer/reader in relation to a picture. *The Arcadian Shepherds* relates to the viewer's subject position much as *The Plague at Ashdod* does: it sets up a trap for the gaze in the structure of the tomb. Using portraiture as an example, Marin writes that paintings often seem to be speaking while 'looking' at the viewer. They seem to say: "Looking at me, you look at me looking at you. Here and now from the painting's locus, I posit you as the viewer of the painting."<sup>142</sup> The application of this idea to *The Arcadian Shepherds* departs from normal expectations. Here it brings into close proximity two ways of reading a picture, through identification via the gaze and, quite literally in this case, by reading the text of the phrase inscribed on the tomb. As we observe the figures, unobserved by them, Marin notes that one shepherd on the extreme left stands in the same relation to the scene within

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<sup>140</sup>Ibid.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., 274.

<sup>142</sup>Marin, *ibid.*, 266.

the picture as we stand in relation to the picture generally,<sup>143</sup> a kind of stand-in for the viewer who encourages us to read the picture, as we would read the inscribed text, from left to right. But, Marin maintains, the gaze is then set ricocheting back and forth within the scene so that this scene is, as he puts it, ‘closed’ to the viewer: the shepherdess who looks back at the kneeling figure locks the gaze within the scene and gives some “enigmatic answer in the dialogue that the figures are involved in.”<sup>144</sup> The viewer is excluded by this enigma. This halting of the gaze finds a counterpart in the forward-oriented, frontal structure of the tomb. As Panofsky did before, Marin notes that the tomb has been moved out to the centre of the scene, parallel to the picture plane. It blocks our access further into the scene, literally – we cannot see behind it – and figuratively: it stands for the opacity met in the picture by the viewer’s gaze. Of this tomb Marin writes, “somebody has carved its opaque and continuous surface, somebody whose name is *ego*.”<sup>145</sup> The identity of the speaker, locked up in the phrase, is an enigma that resonates with the blocked visual progress into the painting. While the viewer’s function is captured in the figure on the left, Marin is careful to point out that no figure indicates the viewer in the structure of the painting. These two conventions – so present in portraiture – are absent in this work.<sup>146</sup> The viewer’s gaze finds no (human) reciprocation.

Blocking access to the scene behind the tomb, displaces its vanishing point, that famous indicator of subjective integrity that has been used since Alberti’s time to identify the viewer’s eye with that of the painter and thus with the ordering eye of God.<sup>147</sup> Far from being presented in the infinite distance, the ‘vanishing point’ is displaced onto the

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<sup>143</sup>Ibid., 269.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid., 270.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid., 267.

surface of the inscribed text. Recession has been exchanged for a two-dimensional surface, which even presses up against the viewer's space, like a pin, effectively, sticking out, affixing the picture to the viewer's gaze. This is less a reflection than an inverting of the penetration the gaze is habituated to expect.<sup>148</sup> This is a spectacular refinement of what, earlier in Poussin's work, was the 'phallic' significance – in Lacanian terms – of the Ark in the *Plague at Ashdod*. This occlusion of the subject of the viewer is undermined, however, or, rather, it is ironically indicated, by the inscription which so flagrantly emphasizes the subjective 'I' in its Latin 'ego'.

Erwin Panofsky mentions that the commissioner of Francesco Guercino's original *Et in Arcadia Ego* – as well as Poussin's 1640 version, apparently – was Cardinal Giulio Rospigliosi (later to be pope Clement IX). Rospigliosi had been a humanist and a poet and it may even have been Rospigliosi himself who coined the Latin phrase '*et in Arcadia ego*'.<sup>149</sup> Marin conjectures that the shepherd pointing at the inscription and touching the tomb has his finger on the letter 'r' to indicate this patron, and thereby make a personalized *memento mori*, as if to tell the Cardinal 'the bell tolls for thee.' [Fig.4.32] But Marin goes further: he notes that the line dividing the stones of the tomb bisects the word 'ego' and that this "pun" connects the viewer and painter – that is Rospigliosi and

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<sup>148</sup>Marin argues that this gap or absence in the structure of the picture likens it to representation *per se*, of which the scene dutifully becomes a representation. He writes: "What is at stake in the 'transformation' is to make representation escape its own process of constitution, which it nevertheless requires; to posit representation in its 'objective' autonomy and independence, which it gets only from a subject who constitutes it in constituting himself through it [...] But the story set on stage by Poussin in this painting – the 'event' – is not a historical event. The event here is the story of enunciation, or of representation. What is represented is the very process of representation." (Ibid., 271-272.)

<sup>149</sup>Whether by accident or design, Marin skips from Panofsky's "may even be the inventor of the famous phrase" (Panofsky, Ibid., 305) straight to his own "who invented the phrase," (Marin, *Art of Art History*, 274) without apparent support or explanation. Marin simply identifies Rospigliosi as the author of the phrase without question, perhaps to exaggerate the plausibility of his conjecture.

Poussin – in a grand allegory.<sup>150</sup> Marin’s reading serves to reverse Panofsky’s. He see the latter version of *Et in Arcadia Ego* or *The Arcadian Shepherds* as a *memento mori* still, just one that is theoretically sophisticated and concerned as much with the limitations of representation as with the limitations of human life.

There is other hidden death imagery here. The shepherd trying to decipher the inscription has cast his shadow over the tomb. His image casts a double or shadowy reflection of the figures in painting itself, establishing a fragment from an alternative tableau, and this sets up one chilling discovery: the shepherd’s pointing arm has ceased to be an arm in the reflection and has become instead a scythe, coming, perhaps, to reap him too. The *memento mori* that Marin presents is not just a convention. The viewer is expected to notice the shadow only late in his or her inspection. The discovery is uncanny. The shepherdess also has been seen as an embodiment of death and/or questions of representation. Lagerlöf writes:

I agree with those critics who see the female figure as a personification with whom the mortals are in communication. It could well be Death [as Judith Bernstock has suggested] – but if so, it is the kind of death upon

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<sup>150</sup>Marin, *ibid.* Details such as this and Marin’s account of the bisected ‘ego’ may be disquietingly post-Freudian. How can we square such a contemporary account of the tomb with so time-bound an observation as the significance for the painting of the letter ‘r’? One element would be completely obscure to a contemporary of Rospigliosi’s and the other utterly obscure to a contemporary of Marin’s. Marin himself suggests a way. *Sublime Poussin* includes the chapter “Panofsky and Poussin in Arcadia,” in part a reworking of the 1980 essay. In this essay Marin writes: “Once described, the painting loses its status as an object and becomes a text on which successive readings are deposited. These readings displace the painting’s elements, modify their relationships, create zones of intense visibility and also blind spots, blanks [...] In another sense, paintings are constituted in the reading process: through readings, a painting is defined as a place where meanings begin, though for these beginning’s there is no ultimate end point that would be called the painting’s *meaning*.” (Marin, *Sublime Poussin*, 30.) Marin considers that the painting does not exist absent of its reading. Thus Marin’s own reading, informed as it may be both by Freud and by an obscure piece of knowledge about the painting’s commissioner, whether true or not, constitute the particular painting that he is reading. In this study, I have argued for the applicability of new methodological approaches, such as Queer Theory, but more for the abiding character of the conceptual intuitions found in them, than on the basis of a strong theory of interpretive subjectivism. But anyone less certain than is Marin of the truth of a hard semiological approach should still accept that the shepherd in question is pointing to the Latin word ‘ego’, even if the division of it between two pieces of stone has a poetical rather than a solidly theorized basis.



which Plato lets Socrates philosophize in the *Phaedo*, the death which gives freedom to the soul and whose final stage is that blessed state in which ideas have their being.<sup>151</sup>

She goes on to add that “the beautiful female figure, possibly a reminder of death, certainly resembles the figure of Painting in Poussin’s 1650 self-portrait.”<sup>152</sup> The 1650 self-portrait [Fig.4.33] was made for Poussin’s patron Paul Fréart de Chantelou and includes among a scene of several overlapping canvases within the painting’s background a woman in profile wearing a monocular crown.<sup>153</sup> This is an intriguing connection and Lagerlöf is certainly correct about the resemblance. Indeed, Cropper and Dempsey advance the connection in their 1996 book, suggesting that the two have a common source in a *Juno* by Federigo Cesi.<sup>154</sup> Poussin is wont to tie together figures from his different paintings intertextually in a way that connects and enhances their meanings. The question is: what limits must be set when drawing such inferences? Given that the self-portrait and the Arcadian Shepherds are separated by ten years and given that the secure identification of allegorical figure is the later of the two, are we justified in supposing that, in addition to this creative kind of death, that she may also represent Painting in the earlier Arcadian picture too? Cropper and Dempsey seem to think so, and they note that Oskar Bätschmann accepts this possibility, as well.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>151</sup>Lagerlöf, 66. She cites Judith Bernstock, “Death in Poussin’s Second *Et in Arcadia Ego*,” *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift* 2 (1986): 54-66. (This journal is based in Stockholm.)

<sup>152</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup>Cropper and Dempsey, 17. The painting is also linked to the Arcadian Shepherds as a masterpiece of visual economy: the several canvases, three, four or five in all (depending on the status of two uncertain rectangular fragments in the back, becomes kaleidoscopically displaced alternatives for the principal canvas, that is, the painting itself. Poussin establishes with a minimum of means a destabilized representation that proposes within itself alternatives to itself (one of which is an allegorical woman in profile – a *queer* picture, in every sense.

<sup>154</sup>*Ibid.*, 46. They do not, however, cite Lagerlöf’s 1990 text.

<sup>155</sup>*Ibid.*, 204-205. They propose she presents “*Juno as Pittura*” (205).

The meaning of death in Poussin's work may be tied directly to the subject of representation. Both involve unfathomable mysteries and both are linked to Poussin's neo-stoical and, possibly, *libertin* ideas that hold death and representation to be two sides of a coin. They both disclose human contingency and limitation and call for reason to govern error-prone emotional reactions. We have seen, further, that this philosophical orientation leads to conclusions that propose to take the sting out of death, that show it to be fundamentally embedded in a cycle of regeneration. Such was the significance of McTighe's account of the principal, 'hieroglyphic' figure in *Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake*, which symbolizes regeneration even in the midst of death. This same meaning has been found in *The Arcadian Shepherds*. Lagerlöf writes:

Two of the shepherds are wearing wreaths that symbolize eternal values[,] the laurel wreath of Art and Reason and the ivy of Regeneration. Interest in the picture focuses on the shepherds' fingers pointing at the inscription on the tomb: they are indicating the text and the tomb itself but they also draw attention to the shadow cast on the stone. This dark form has often been seen as a reminder of death, but we should also remember that according to the theories of antiquity, the shadow was the origin of all pictorial creation.<sup>156</sup>

The question of whether the female figure combines Death and Painting belongs to a larger question. Lagerlöf writes: "Poussin has [...] formulated an original and innovative idea here, proclaim Death [...] as the driving impulse behind artistic creation: image, idea, and message envelop the fragmentary and perishable in intimations of mortality."<sup>157</sup> Of course, pictorially, *exactly the opposite* could be said to be going on. The human figures – that is, the shepherds – and their idyll surround or, to use Lagerlöf's word, envelop that which *will* endure, the rectangular stone tomb. If Lagerlöf is right, which I

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<sup>156</sup>Lagerlöf, *ibid.*

<sup>157</sup>*Ibid.*

do accept, Poussin has at the same time compounded one thematic expression of his idea with its visually expressed opposite.

The rectangular tomb is the place where the spatial oppositions, or contradictory or incompatible spaces, compounded in a queer spatial paradox, embody the very ideas that Poussin is simultaneously articulating thematically. It is appropriate that the thematic suggestion Lagerlöf has made would contradict the plainest visual reading, on one level. Both the thematic and the visual constructions of *The Arcadian Shepherds* are self-resisting. What Poussin realizes in this work, however, is a dazzling economy of means. The tomb symbolizes, among other things, simplicity itself. And yet its occupation of the pictorial space has rendered the entire picture destabilized, self-resisting and, therefore, profoundly queer. In effect, the tomb within the painting threatens to replace the painting.

We have already seen that, in *The Plague at Ashdod*, a great trough of space was opened in the pictorial field and that the figures were pressed, sucked in effect, into this void. In *Landscape with Pyramus and Thisbe*, that trough will be exchanged for a lake that resists and even cancels the spatial integrity of the scene. In *The Arcadian Shepherds*, painted halfway between these two works, the figures are left with nowhere to go. The space has been filled in advance by the tomb that displaces them from the centre of their own picture, generating, on the one hand, a pictorial critical mass, while dramatizing, on the other, the mis-fit that is otherwise found in the painting's construction and exclusion of the viewer's gaze. (That is, the gaze is constructed *as* excluded.) Like *Ashdod*, one measure of the queer space is how visual planes come into the spatial construction. Like the theatrical backdrop in the earlier painting, the vertical surface of the tomb stands for the reality of verticality of painting's surface. Like the painted scene in that earlier

painting, it reminds the viewer of the artifice of representation. This is held in tension, again, with the depicted planar surface of the Arcadian landscape. And yet at the same time, here, by virtue of its centrality it appears poised to nullify its containing pictorial *frame*. This painting is a recapitulation but also a clever reversal of the queer pictorial strategy seen right at the beginning of Poussin's time in Rome, his *Echo and Narcissus*. Many of his intermediate devices from other paintings are found and rearticulated here, as well. The early device of the *mise-en-abyme*, seen also in *Cephalus and Aurora*, among others – and the ghost of which will be seen again in the lake in *Landscape with Is Pyramus and Thisbe* – is referenced here, but daringly expanded and, indeed, transcended. The 1640 painting does not imply an infinite recess of contained images. Rather, it threatens to destroy containment.

*The Arcadian Shepherds* projects itself forward, into the viewer's space. Indeed, the tomb, which is not quite parallel to the picture plane, seems to protrude, very much like the elbow of the female figure, with whom it shares its foremost corner. [Fig.4.34] This detail, like other aspects of the painting, reveals it to be a work of art that is overly full, overdetermined, and *overwritten*. This elbow has its counterpart and opposite in another forearm, or rather its shadow. In his book, *To Destroy Painting*, Louis Marin states that, in this painting, "Poussin's representation of space [...] has been called 'divergent' because of the dynamic it generates by means of a spatial rotation."<sup>158</sup> Marin sees the landscape turning around the tomb as its central mass. The shadow of the forearm of the shepherd leaning in, which Marin has elsewhere likened to a scythe, serves also as an arrow which indicates the anticlockwise direction of motion, from left to right

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<sup>158</sup>Louis Marin, *To Destroy Painting*, trans. Mette Hjort (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995) 66.

in the foreground, and opposite in behind the tomb.<sup>159</sup> Turning around is one motion, sticking out and pressing forward is another. One reality of this painting is that it emphasizes self-containment. Another is that it foregrounds its projection forward. As a whole, it is a paradoxical palimpsest that combines within itself different present and potential spaces, some represented, some covered over and some implied. And yet, in its easy mood and apparent simplicity, it anticipates the smooth queerness of space (the homotopia) that will be seen in fifteen years in the *Holy Family in Egypt*.

According to Louis Marin, Poussin's paintings (many of them) are organized to exploit the occlusions of one reading to structure another. This establishes the limitations of reading and of seeing as the larger theme in Poussin's work, a *vanitas* reminding the viewer not of the transience of life but of the fragility of understanding. It is perhaps for this reason that the painting of 1640 called *The Arcadian Shepherds* or *Et in Arcadia Ego* is so often taken to exemplify Poussin's work as a whole. It is Poussin's project in miniature. Poussin is concerned with, and deploys, what could be called "visual latency," those underlying opposite potential readings that, when they first are beheld together, seem incompatible. I do not suggest that Marin is wrong. I suggest, instead, that he does not go far enough. A queer account of Poussin, though necessarily far less integrated and far less self-same than a rigidly semiological one, can locate in Poussin's paintings generally, and in this one in particular that so distils his pictorial approach, an understanding of visual latency that sees it not as a formula to be translated but as a phenomenon that has to be encountered in its fullest multiplicity.

The viewer's gaze, Marin has noted, is forced to move throughout the scene, ricocheting from one point to another. But Marin's reading takes account only of the

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<sup>159</sup>Ibid.

markers of direction, the glances and the pointing fingers of the youths in the scene. The same wandering eye – the forcibly migrating gaze – moves along lines defined by their exposed limbs. These shepherd boys brood on death, perhaps, but they also defy it with a languor that suggests ease, not exhaustion. The muscled arms and legs are on display and the shepherds' interest in the tomb and its meaning is not unequivocal. Only the kneeling shepherd, the eldest of the three and bearded, suggests an interest that survives the moment. Arcadia is a realm full of quiet corners and curious incidents. Any number of Poussin's other Arcadian scenes could be taking place nearby, perhaps behind the mountain. This is a land of pleasure and leisure as well as of danger and of loss. The two younger shepherd boys embody health and beauty as well as contingency. The female figure who places her hand upon the shoulder of the youth on the right may be Death but she may also be Painting. He is touched and marked by both and his beauty consists in his ultimate vulnerability as much as in his physique. A longing gaze, informed by homosexual desire, is one unavoidable potential response set up by this image. In compelling the viewer's gaze to peregrinate – at leisure – over the canvas surface, Poussin also compels it to linger for brief moments on the smooth limbs that delineate its wandering. These three figures, pressed forward by the painting's spatial paradox, are trapped in a space in the becoming, lost (and found) between two different readings, where they abide along an endless path through representation, forever young and beautiful and – paradoxically – forever doomed to pass away.

If the different potential readings of Poussin are regarded, not as rivals, but instead as partners, as making up a kind of conceptual hologram, then they open up for painting an entirely new dimension, one that truly succeeds in transcending itself and

thus, fully, that succeeds in representing the unrepresentable. In discussing *Landscape with Pyramus and Thisbe* Anthony Blunt picks up one aspect of Poussin's multiplicity, describing as stable exactly what I have presented as destabilized. Blunt writes:

Even when he paints a scene as stormy as the *Pyramus and Thisbe* [...] [Poussin] stabilizes the composition by anchoring it to the calm surface of the lake, on which, in spite of the wind, the trees are reflected with perfect clarity. The contrast with Claude [Lorrain] is revealing. His landscapes are based on infinite, not finite space. The eye is not led step by step through a closed space, but induced to gaze over the surface of the sea or to the full depth of the unbroken sky.<sup>160</sup>

Though I think we may forgive Blunt for not accounting for the queerness of Poussin's picture-making, he nevertheless identifies several aspects of that multiplicity which I interpret exactly as queer. Whereas Blunt sees the pictorial contradiction of the calm lake as stabilizing (and in one sense it is) it is also destabilizing of the larger pictorial project. Despite this, in formal terms, he puts his finger exactly on the difference between Poussin and his contemporary. Claude induces a vision of unity, his pictures are spatially stable. Poussin, by contrast, at every turn makes the viewer work to undermine the impression he or she is in the midst of forming. His pictures resist themselves, and their viewers. They are subversive of the conventions that structure them. They destabilize meanings, they collapse oppositions to imply the copresence of things that are logically exclusive, and they began to do all this, in the 1627 painting *Echo and Narcissus*, when Poussin was working to overcome the need to represent reflexivity, which had seemed impossible to represent visually. His strategy has very often been queer. Emerging in a charged collaboration with Giambattista Marino, Nicolas Poussin worked to bend a homoerotically-informed pictorial legacy in one subject, Narcissus, into a pictorial practice that could evade and transcend whatever could not be represented directly. This

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<sup>160</sup>Blunt, *ibid.*, 295-96.

approach proved to have vast applicability in those later subjects that would deal with semantic and visual matters no less tricky and, potentially for a painter, no less treacherous than homoeroticism. Towards the outset on this thesis, I observed that the Poussin scholar David Carrier suggests that, without the input of Anthony Blunt, Poussin's reputation might have been much the same as Claude's.<sup>161</sup> With all due respect to Carrier's point, that would suppose that the structure of Poussin's paintings, which is all but infinitely complex, would at the same time have gone unrecognized. Claude paints infinity; Poussin paints infinitely. Anthony Blunt may have recognized Poussin's multiplicity but he never invented it. It is, if anything, the other way around, I think.

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<sup>161</sup>See David Carrier, "Anthony Blunt's Poussin," in *Word & Image* 25.4 (Dec., 2009): 418. See also Chapter 1.



**CONCLUSION:**  
**SPECULATIVE HISTORIOGRAPHY**

Fictional accounts of the relationship between Anthony Blunt and Nicolas Poussin have dwelt, for literary reasons, upon the parallels between these two figures. In John Banville's 1997 novel *The Untouchable*, the Anthony Blunt character perceives and effortlessly expresses the sense of affinity between scholar and artist that caught the attention of George Steiner, Sheila McTighe and David Carrier. Banville's Victor Maskell, the Blunt character, confides to the reader:

I conceived and began to write my definitive monograph on Nicholas Poussin. It was to take me nearly twenty years to finish. Certain pygmies skulking in the groves of academe have dared to question the book's scholarly foundations, but I shall treat them with the silent contempt they deserve. I do not know of any other work, and nor do they, which comprehensively, exhaustively and – I shall dare to say it – magisterially captures the essence of the artist and his art as this one does. One might say, I have invented Poussin. I frequently think this is the chief function of the art historian, to synthesise, to concentrate, to *fix* his subject, to pull together into a unity all the disparate strands of character and inspiration and achievement that make up this singular being [...] From the start, from the time at Cambridge when I knew I could not be a mathematician, I saw Poussin as a paradigm for myself: the stoical bent, the rage for calm, the unshakeable belief in the transformative power of art. I *understood* him, as no one else understood him, and, for that matter, as I understood no one else.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, *this is fiction*. Banville's prose soliloquy captures the sense of affinity but it replaces the real mystery with an artful working-over of the received facts, without any real new insight. Blunt is distorted to fit Banville's frame or – to put it more sympathetically – Banville synthesizes, concentrates and fixes his own subject; he *invents* Victor Maskell, a certain approximation of Anthony Blunt.

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<sup>1</sup>John Banville, *The Untouchable* (London: Picador / Pan Macmillan, 1997) 343.

A second literary treatment of the Blunt figure – and one that does not change his name – is Alan Bennett’s 1991 play, *A Question of Attribution*. Rather than attempt to explain Blunt, it dramatically encapsulates his mystery, and dramatizes the conflict between different perceptions of him. The play is set after Blunt has been granted immunity but in the years before he is exposed by Margaret Thatcher’s government. It is an open question whether Queen Elizabeth II, who is throughout inscrutable, knows of his treachery. The play’s climax and the crystallization of its governing metaphor – the misattributed portrait – is an exchange about fakery and the attribution of works of art between Blunt and the Queen at Buckingham Palace.

Her Majesty the Queen: [...] I suppose too the context of the painting matters. Its history and provenance (is that the word?) confer on it a certain respectability. This can’t be a forgery, it’s in such and such a collection, its background and pedigree are impeccable – besides, it has been vetted by the experts. Isn’t that how the argument goes? So if one comes across a painting with the right background and pedigree, Sir Anthony, then it must be hard, I imagine – even inconceivable – to think that it is not what it claims to be. And even supposing someone in such circumstances did have suspicions, they would be chary about voicing them. Easier to leave things as they are [...] Stick to the official attribution rather than let the cat out of the bag and say, ‘Here we have a fake.’

Blunt: I still think the word ‘fake’ is inappropriate, Ma’am.

HMQ: If something is not what it claims to be, what is it?

Blunt: An enigma?

HMQ: That is, I think, the sophisticated answer.<sup>2</sup>

Later, as Blunt is leaving his meeting with the Queen, he comments upon this exchange to one of his assistants, Colin.

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<sup>2</sup>Alan Bennett, “A Question of Attribution,” in *Alan Bennett: Plays 2* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998) 344.

Blunt: Strange about the Royal Family. They ask you a great deal but tell you very little.

Colin: What were you talking about?

Blunt: I was talking about art. I'm not sure that she was.<sup>3</sup>

*A Question of Attribution* presents Blunt as an 'enigma' but – more importantly – casts this enigma as Blunt's preferred self-perception. He does not happen to be an enigma, he is an enigma because that is how he made himself. An enigma is, by definition, a riddle set in abstruse allegorical language.<sup>4</sup> It implies, therefore, that there is some key to solving it. Despite a clear similarity, an enigma is not identical to something queer, which presumes radical multiplicity and indeterminacy. It is, however, very much how something queer might appear to (or be perceived by) a discourse that does not allow for such indeterminacy. It is a riddle waiting to be solved. That is how it is misunderstood or even how it misunderstands itself.

In claiming, as I have, that both Anthony Blunt's manifold identity and Nicolas Poussin's art are queer and that this queerness accounts for their perceived affinity, I am proposing a radical interpretation of two well-established figures. This interpretive approach cuts against the grain of the longstanding reputations of both figures. My approach is given some purchase, however, because of the exposure of Blunt in 1979 as a (seemingly) monstrously complicated, contradictory creature. This is to say that an awareness has been forced upon the art historical and wider world that Blunt was something that could well be called queer. Prior to this exposure, any affinity between Blunt and Poussin would have been easy to explain. It would have resembled the self-

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 346.

<sup>4</sup>See *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, source online. Accessed: 29 Jun., 2011. [sv. "enigma."] <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/enigma>>

presentation of the Victor Maskell character in Banville's novel. Since Blunt's exposure, however, their affinity has been reconstituted as a problem. The queerness (or, normatively, the monstrosity) of Blunt would seem to entail a similar quality in Poussin. In arguing for her own thesis – that Poussin was associated with atheist and politically subversive *libertinage* – Sheila McTighe calls attention to the resistance to accepting such a view of the painter. She writes: “given Poussin's nearly mythical stature as the founder of a French national style, there is understandable reluctance to place him among the ranks of the unorthodox and the heretic, whether in social or artistic terms.”<sup>5</sup> This reluctance has not subsided. Blunt is a man – it has been observed – “about whom anything could be said.”<sup>6</sup> A queer interpretation of Poussin, however, is liable to encounter a strong, reflexive disciplinary objection. It is for this reason that my study has been inflected by a critical point of view. This is partly why it is framed historiographically, as a defence of queer art history.

I call what I have undertaken in this study a ‘speculative historiography’. The term ‘speculative historiography’ has two different established meanings. I stake out a position somewhere between these two meanings while coining a third, and very pedestrian, meaning for the term. Firstly – and originally – the term describes a philosophy of history which posits that the processes of history that are illustrated in the historical record derive from forces for which there is no direct evidence and that are only examinable by means of speculative philosophy.<sup>7</sup> In this case, it is the function of

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<sup>5</sup>Sheila McTighe, *Nicolas Poussin's Landscape Allegories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 16.

<sup>6</sup>Miranda Carter, *Anthony Blunt: His Lives* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2001) xiii.

<sup>7</sup>“The romantic-idealist trend in historiography, in fact, constitutes what may be termed a speculative historiography. The authors of this speculative historiography from Herder to Hegel postulate a metaphysical power, a non-material entity to be the driving force of history, and try to trace out the development of history from within the internal dynamics of this force.” I.D. Gaur, “The Enterprise of

speculative historiography to lay the forces bare as much as is possible.<sup>8</sup> Secondly, the term has come to be used – and mostly, though not necessarily, pejoratively – as the application of critical theory or theoretical interpretation to historical accounts in order to buttress or critique the factual record.<sup>9</sup> Others characterize the same development as the attainment of ‘pluralism’ and debate the value of that.<sup>10</sup> I shall embrace some elements of this conception but thirdly, and finally, I mean to deploy the term to mean quite simply what it most seems to mean: speculation as a tool for historiography.

Speculations can be plausible or implausible, sound or unsound, factually grounded and sensible or wild. I hope mine may be seen to be plausible, sound, and supported by what evidence there may be while not being contradicted by any evidence unless the contradiction is satisfactorily explained. But the very purpose of this speculation is to cross into terrain where the evidence is disputable or nonexistent either way. I hold that speculation always and inevitably does happen, whether it is openly

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Historiography: Past and Present” in *Essays in History and Historiography: India’s Struggle for Freedom* (New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 1998) 43.

<sup>8</sup>In his *Philosophy of History* Hegel argues that Speculation (that is, Philosophy) permits a historiographical understanding of what he identifies as the governing process of historical development, what is translated as ‘Spirit’ normally. See G.W.F. Hegel, “Introduction,” *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004) 8. *Geist*, however, has more purposeful and rational connotations in German than Spirit does in English. Some prefer terms such as ‘Absolute Spirit’ or ‘Spirit-Mind’ to convey its full sense. Hegel writes of it: “The principle of development involves also the existence of the latent germ of being – a capacity or potentiality striving to realize itself. This formal conception finds actual existence in Spirit, which has the History of the World for its theatre, its possession, and the sphere of its realization. It [Spirit] is not such a nature as to be tossed to and fro amid the superficial play of accidents, but is rather the absolute arbiter of things, entirely unmoved by contingencies, which, indeed, it applies and manages for its own purposes.” (Hegel, 54.) The agent could be different (in Marxism, it is the concrete relations inherent in societies, in Shopenhauer it is Will) but a speculative historiography, in this sense, is one that seeks to expose determining forces, whatever they may be.

<sup>9</sup>Richard Leo Enos writes about the effects, as he sees them, for graduate education and professional formation: “The orientation toward speculative historiography and passive criticism [...] reduces the time and emphasis of basic research so that students do not have adequate exposure to the activity of historical work in progress during their education. There is a risk that we could unwittingly be encouraging [them] to be dilettantes; that is, to dabble in historical study and commentary without method and without basic knowledge.” Richard Leo Enos, “Recovering the Lost Art of Researching the History of Rhetoric” in *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 29.4 (Autumn, 1999): 14.

<sup>10</sup>See Hayden V. White, “Historical Pluralism” in *Critical Inquiry* 12.3 (Spring, 1986): 480-493.

acknowledged or not, and that historical interpretation is necessarily always part-way premised upon it. My approach demands that my speculations be openly acknowledged but I do not accept that conventional speculations are owed any special deference by dint of their conventionality.

My approach, however, has an almost half-century long pedigree within historiography – in the sense of the criticism of history. In 1966 the American historian Hayden White published the essay “The Burden of History,” in which he claims that the discipline of history “is perhaps the conservative discipline par excellence.”<sup>11</sup> White accuses historians of affecting “a kind of wilful methodological naiveté.”<sup>12</sup> This conservatism among historians preserves a long out-dated view of the discipline occupying a middle ground between the intuitiveness of art and the positivism of natural science, a history that is suspicious of both extremes. According to White, history mediates between these poles and is fundamentally characterized by a search for textual or other material evidence (he mockingly calls it “the elusive document”) that may then be translated relatively transparently into historical knowledge.<sup>13</sup> By the mid twentieth century, White asserts, the discipline of history was alone in not recognizing the constructed character of its own knowledge claims while making contradictory intellectual demands. He writes: “The documentary record [...] first invites the exercise of speculative imagination by its incompleteness, and then discourages it by requiring that the historian remain bound to the consideration of those few facts which it does provide.”<sup>14</sup> In White’s view, history tends to bend current circumstances to fit a model of

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<sup>11</sup>White, “The Burden of History,” *History and Theory* 5.2 (1966): 124.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 132.

the world implicit in its methodological habits. White is a historian, however, and he thinks history can be saved: it must be reintegrated into the self-interrogating intellectual world that, by the mid-twentieth century, included both art and science. He writes:

*the burden of the historian* in our time is to re-establish the dignity of historical studies on a basis that will make them consonant with the aims and purposes of the intellectual community at large, that is, transform historical studies in such a way as to allow the historian to participate positively in the liberation of the present from *the burden of history*.<sup>15</sup>

Modern history must, like modern art and modern science, discover the provisional character of the frames of reference it brings to the objects in its view.<sup>16</sup>

Art history and history are not identical disciplines, of course, although this project, as a historiographical study concerning an art historian who is, independent of his art history, a historical figure of some importance, needs to be self-aware both as to its historical and art-historical claims. I have warned of the dangerous reflex – dangerous, at least, to queer readings of history – that is encapsulated in the adverb ‘just’. The methodological habit of suspicion that asks whether a thing could not *just* be something else, the simpler explanation, is what this project has consciously deferred. This possibility begins by foregrounding and contesting the operation of doubt. We need to do the exact opposite of putting the impulse to interject ‘just’ *under erasure*.<sup>17</sup> Rather than make absent some present term while still letting it operate in the minimal necessary degree, we must instead make present the absent: reflexive doubt, that shadowy habit of

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 124. All italics are White’s.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 134.

<sup>17</sup>A technique developed by Martin Heidegger to deal with the need of discussing Being without begging the question of the being-of-being. Writing the word but crossing it out (~~Being~~) allows it to function syntactically in its sentence while honouring, as much as possible, the obligation not to assume anything about it, even its own being. The idea would be developed considerably by Jacques Derrida. See: Martin Heidegger, *The Question of Being* [*zur Seinsfrage*, 1956], trans. Jean T. Wilde and William Kluback (New Haven: College and University Press Services, 1958) ; Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967).

negation, is to be brought into the light. Its objection can still be held but it is to be deferred, bracketed and provisionally dispelled, in a conscious act. This is all to expose an ideological reflex which we mean to interrogate. When the argument is done, in the silence that follows, the question whether it is not ‘just’ something simpler can be reconsidered.

We need to be aware of absence, of silences. The sociologist Stuart Hall was interviewed by Australian television on the narrative construction of reality. In a manner very similar to Hayden White’s work on the narrative structure of history writing, Hall discusses how television and print media present their journalism according to familiar story lines, which makes their stories intelligible but also undermines any readings which may contest the ideological program inherent in the form.<sup>18</sup> This tendency is made far worse by the invisibility of the stories’ structure – they seem entirely natural. These blind spots, according to Hall, are the tracks left by the determinations imposed by ideology:

I understand ideology here not in terms of making people Liberals or Conservatives or Communists – I am talking about the fact that in any society we all constantly make use of a whole set of frameworks of interpretation and understanding, often in a very [...] unconscious way, and that those things alone enable us to make sense of what is going on around us, what our position is, and what we are likely to do. [...] When people say to you, “Of course that’s so, isn’t it?” that “of course” is the most ideological moment, because that’s the moment at which you’re least aware that you are using a particular framework, and that if you used another framework the things that you are talking about would have a different meaning.<sup>19</sup>

The key to overcoming the limitation imposed by these ideological blinders – even though it is only a limited overcoming – is to deploy theoretical analyses that are

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<sup>18</sup>Stuart Hall, interviewed by John O’Hara [transcript] on *Doubletake*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC); broadcast 5 May, 1983. Retrieved from “Context: The Narrative Construction of Reality,” *Context 22: Dalkey Archive Press*, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Text Online. Accessed 23 November 2009. <<http://www.dalkeyarchive.com/article/show/31>>

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.



structured by different ideologies. Theory frames its concepts self-consciously and it accounts more directly for what it presumes in its ideological orientations; but the critical gesture is to move from one ideological position to another and thus to triangulate, in a sense, the position of things, or at least to reduce the size of ideological blind spots. Hall concludes:

[A]nother ideological position [...] allows you to see what the particular structure of one narrative is, and essentially what are its limits. Now I think that that process really begins by [...] identifying what I would call the silences in a particular narrative form. It is not what an ideology says, which is what we usually think; it's in the things that ideology always takes for granted, and the things it can't say – the things it systematically blips out on. That represents exactly the point of its selectivity [...].<sup>20</sup>

History is not an ideology *per se* but the methodological strictures it observes transmit diverse kinds of ideological priorities. A queer reading can, at worst, supplement it and allow our perception to penetrate methodological blind spots. It has been my contention that the key to understanding the main affinity shared between Blunt and Poussin is found in just such a blind spot, for traditional (non-queer, non-speculative) historiography.

I stated towards the outset of this Conclusion that I would be locating the project between the two established meanings of speculative historiography, while adding a very simple third. The two established meanings were the application of critical theory to historical evidence and the locating of some driving force in history, intelligible only through speculative philosophy. The third is the conscious use of speculation. By contrast, the ostensible avoidance of speculation is merely a better disguised reliance on that speculation inherent in the silences within 'common-sense,' that is, the assumptions within reigning approaches. This does not produce erroneous interpretations *per se* but it produces ones that depend on an illusory transparency. Traditional methodological

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

approaches in art history have noticed that Anthony Blunt and Nicolas Poussin seemed to share certain affinities, but affinities about which they could not be satisfactorily definite. In this thesis I have sought to resolve a problem engendered by heteronormativity by offering a queer solution.

Art history has been fraught with mythmaking and our ongoing inquiries – including this one – may be more of the same. As art historians, all we can do is to clarify where we stand and why. The pretence of not having an agenda is where dangerous myths begin. This is why literary fiction can be at once so insightful and at the same time, in this particular sense, so harmless. Self-conscious myths are more likely to be benign. What is the present myth, then? It is that Anthony Blunt's later careers and writings are the after-effects of an initial encounter with the Arcadian thematic. When Blunt first came across the Arcadian thematic, a homoerotic construction of it was already in place. Many of Poussin's later works are emanations from a comparable early encounter, with Arcadian poetry. Both Blunt and Poussin respond to a potential (or a latent meaning) in the pastoral tradition of Arcadia. Both appear to exploit it independently. Poussin works to adapt it and, whatever he may or may not have understood of it, Blunt's experience of this homoerotic potential is conditioned by Poussin. Poussin does not find and then repeat a homoerotic articulation of Arcadia. Rather, he finds it and adapts it, even stripping it of its manifest homoerotic significance while retaining in an encoded fashion that significance. In effect, Poussin's response to the homoerotic potential in Arcadian subject matter is to sublimate it and recover from it a more general – and stranger – indeterminacy. Blunt encounters this indeterminacy in Poussin's art – here is where their affinity takes place – and this indeterminacy should be called queer.

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**APPENDIX 1:**  
**A LETTER (ABOUT ANTHONY BLUNT) OF EZRA POUND**

[Handwritten] '4 Oct.' [1933]

[Printed Stationary:] Via Marsala 12-5

E. Pound, Rapallo

Editor Spectator / Sir:

I have not yet seen Mr Brodsky's volume on Gaudier / Brzeska and Mr Anthony Blunt's name is wholly new to me.

After the appearance of Mr Ede's book I received a number of letters asking me to attack Ede. These letters came from friends of Gaudiers who had been, to put it mildly, disgusted with Ede's account.

Miss Brzeska was a tragic figure with many admirable traits in her difficult character. She died in a mad house and her state of mind during the years previous was not such as to permit anyone to accept her statements without examination. She had at a very early period documents in a handwriting that one wd. have hesitated to call Gaudier's own. There is so far as I know nothing to rule out the idea of auto=suggestion.

Other friends of Gaudier have written me 'these letters contain nothing of Gaudier.'

The Lane catalogue of Gaudier's work published in 1916 contains a number of authentic letters. As to the quality of the book [that is, Pound's own companion Memoir], I shd. be the last to express an opinion. It contains no intentional lies. And if Mr Blunt thinks he has found any mis=statements of fact I shd. be obliged to for particulars.

Yr / Obt. Svt.

Ezra Pound [Signed 'Ezra Pound']

[Postscript:] The date on the Macfall letter wd. be significant, for Gaudier passed through several sets of acquaintance during his few years in London. John Cournos, one of his earlier, though not first firends [sic] differed with him about the abstract during the last, say, eight months before Gaudier went up to the front. In fact anyone's testimony will vary in value according to the years, 1912, '13, '14, By Sept. 1914 he was in the trenches. The bestial stupidity among art=critics, and half/artists in Eng. in 1910 to '14 did not conduce to serious attitude toward Gaudier outside a rather limited number of people. [Alfred Richard] Orage permitted a serious attitude, and W.L. Courtney of the Fortnightly was, I think, the first editor of a periodical received by well-established clubs, like the Athanaeum [sic], who permitted an eposition [sic] of some of Gaudier's aims.

Citation: Ezra Pound to the editor, *The Spectator*, 4 Oct., 1933. Anthony Frederick Blunt papers, The Courtauld Institute (CI AFB 489). This last number corresponds to the file number of the notebook in which the letter was discovered loose-leaf. It may subsequently have been filed independently.

For a facsimile of the above, see Appendix 3: Figures, Fig. 2.16.

**APPENDIX 2:****MARGARET THATCHER'S STATEMENT TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS**

(Abridged)

(15 November, 1979)

Prime Minister [Margaret Thatcher] in response to Mr. Leadbitter:

“In April 1964 Sir Anthony Blunt admitted to the security authorities that he had been recruited by and had acted as a talent-spotter for Russian intelligence before the war, when he was a don at Cambridge, and had passed information regularly to the Russians while he was a member of the Security Service between 1940 and 1945. He made this admission after being given an undertaking that he would not be prosecuted if he confessed. [...] The then Attorney-General decided in April 1964, after consultation with the Director of Public Prosecutions, that the public interest lay in trying to secure a confession from Blunt not only to arrive at a definite conclusion on his own involvement but also to obtain information from him about any others who might still be a danger. It was considered important to gain his co-operation in the continuing investigations by the security authorities, following the defections of Burgess, Maclean and Philby, into Soviet penetration of the security and intelligence services and other public services during and after the war. [...] The Queen's Private Secretary was informed in April 1964 both of Blunt's confession and of the immunity from prosecution on the basis of which it had been made. Blunt was not required to resign his appointment in the Royal Household,

which was unpaid. It carried with it no access to classified information and no risk to security, and the security authorities thought it desirable not to put at risk his co-operation in their continuing investigations. The decision to offer immunity from prosecution was taken because intensive investigation from 1951 to 1964 had produced no evidence to support charges. Successive Attorneys-General in 1972, in June 1974 and in June 1979 have agreed that, having regard to the immunity granted in order to obtain the confession which has always been and still is the only firm evidence against Blunt, there are no grounds on which criminal proceedings could be instituted.”

Source:

*Hansard* HC Deb 15 November 1979 (vol. 973): 679W-681W. Text online. Accessed 23 November 2009:

<[http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written\\_answers/1979/nov/15/security](http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1979/nov/15/security)>.



## APPENDIX 3:

## FIGURES



Figure 0.1 Nicolas Poussin, *Echo and Narcissus*, 1627. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Oil on canvas, 74cm x 100cm.



Figure 0.2 Hippolyte Flandrin, *Figure d'Étude (or Young Man by the Sea)*, 1836. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Oil on canvas, 98cm x 124cm.



Figure 0.3 Limbourg Brothers (Pol, Herman & Jean), *Les très riches heures du Jean, Duc de Berry: January* (detail), 1412-16. Musée Condé, Chantilly. Illumination on vellum, original: 22cm x 14cm.



Figure 1.1 Anne-Louis Girodet de Roucy-Trioson, *The Sleep of Endymion*, 1793. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Oil on canvas, 198cm x 261cm.

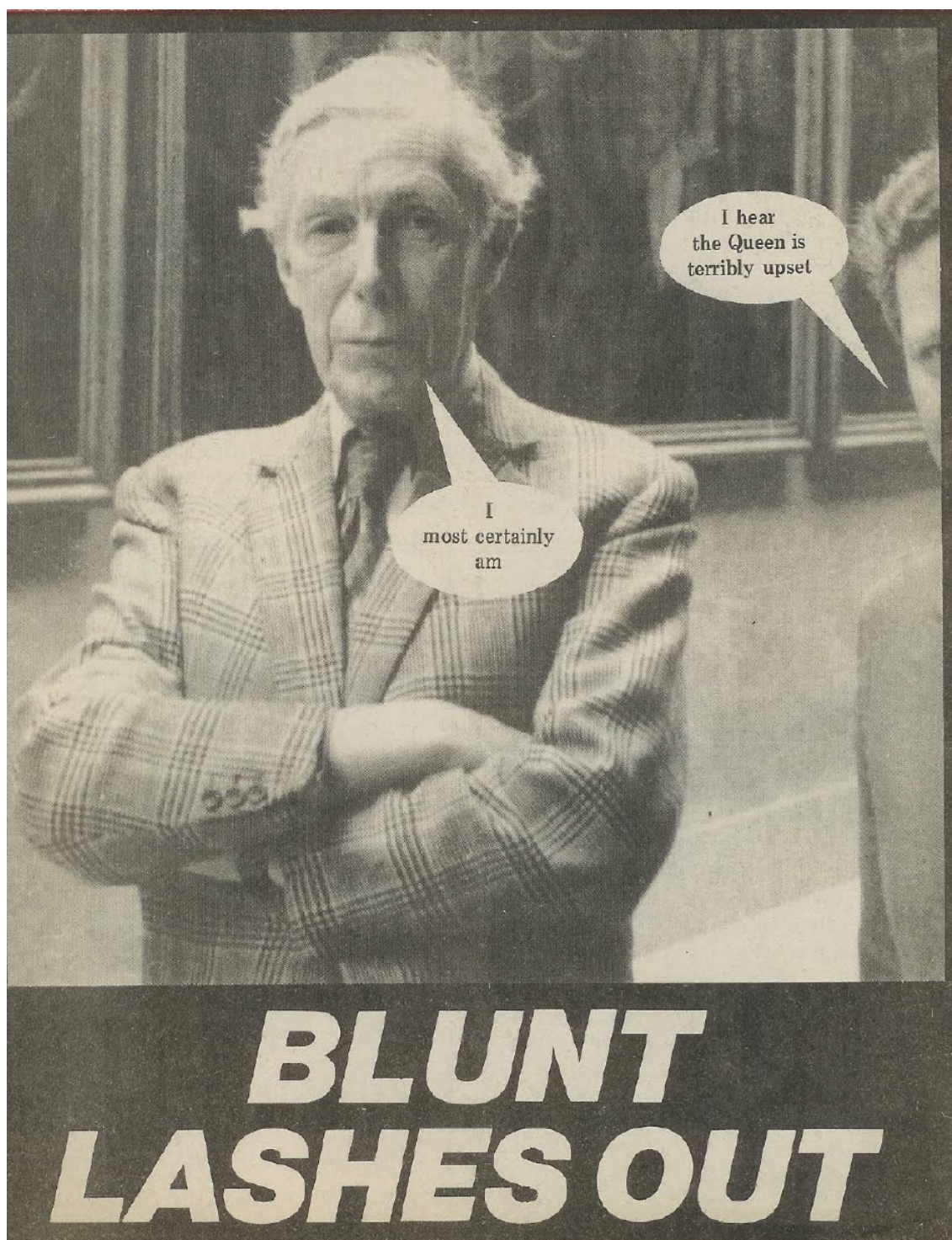
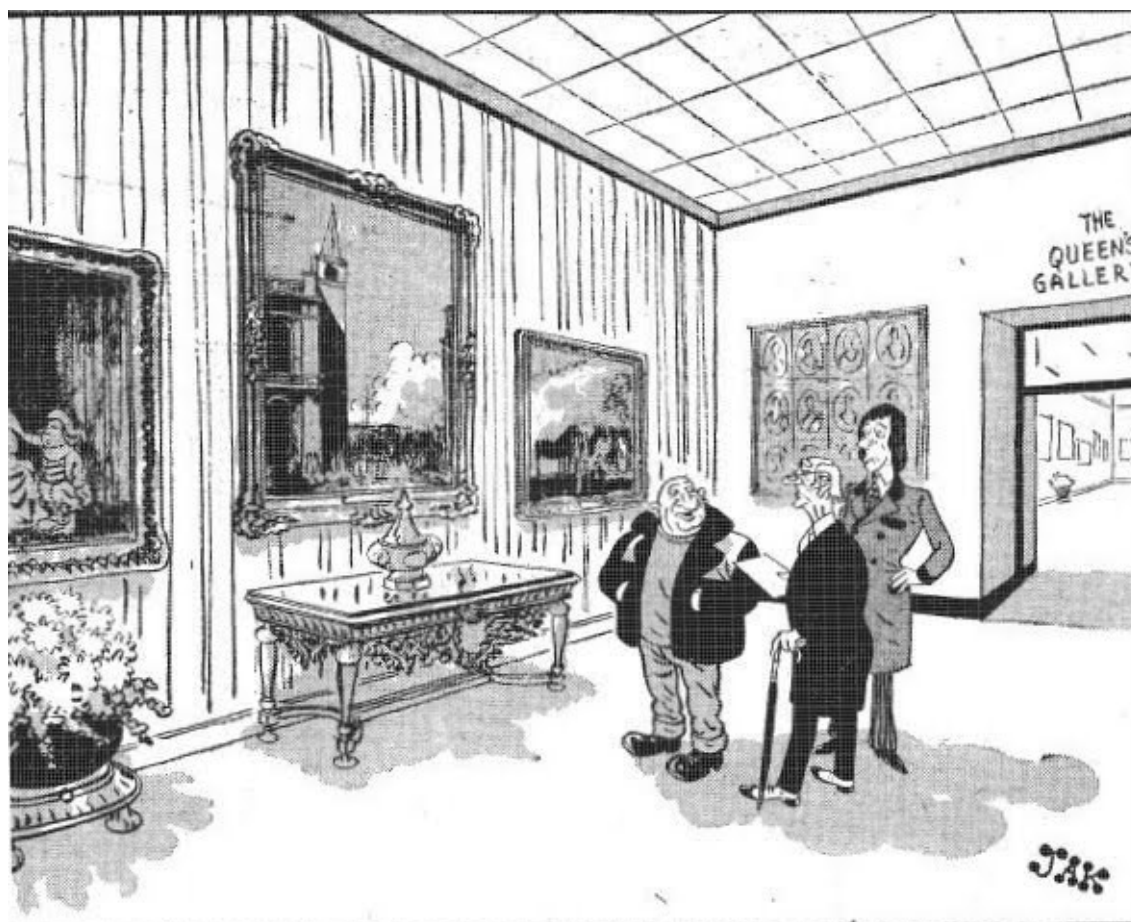
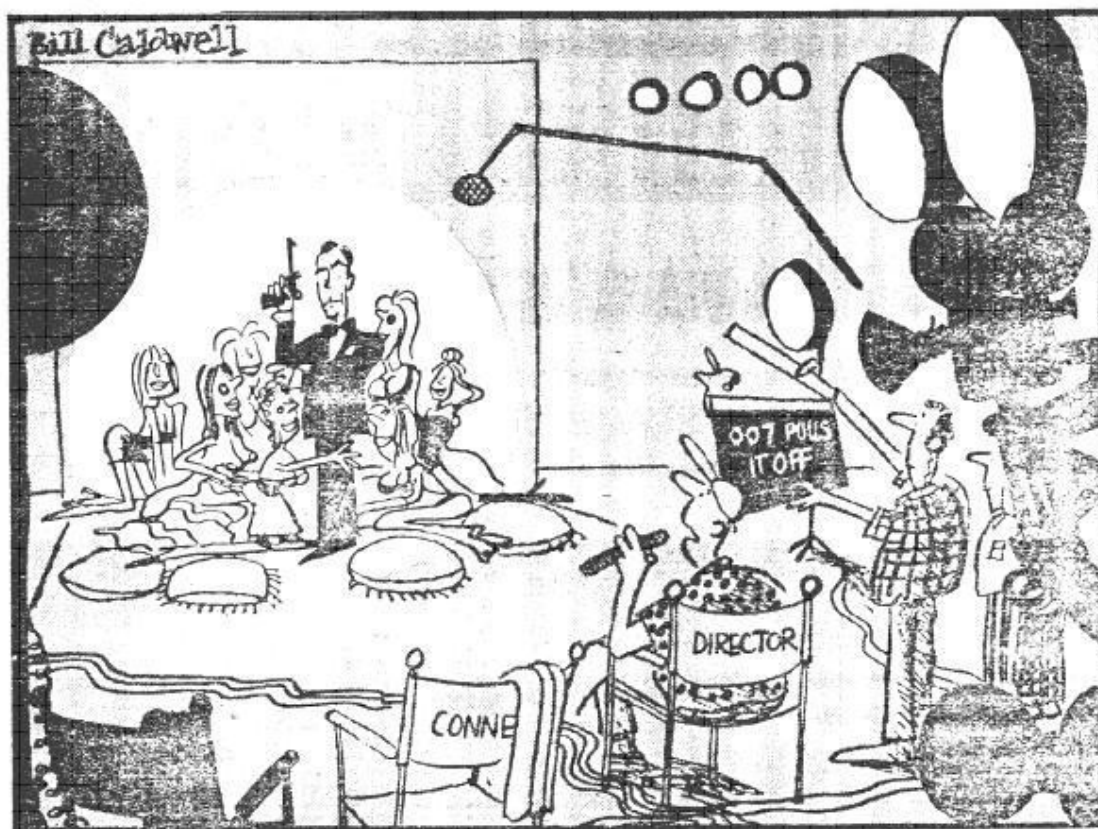


Figure 1.2 Cover, *Private Eye* (called *Private Spy*) 468 (23 Nov., 1979). Print.



**"I may not know much about art, but I'm married and I've been cleared by MI5!"**

Figure 1.3 Raymond Jackson (JAK), cartoon, *The Evening Standard* (20 Nov., 1979).  
Print.



" We've decided a real spy would be surrounded by gays—that OK with you 007 ? "

Figure 1.4 Bill Caldwell, "007 Pulls It Off" (cartoon), *The Daily Star* (20 Nov., 1979). Print.



Figure 1.5 Stan McMurtry (MAC), cartoon, *The Daily Mail* (19 Nov., 1979). Print.



Figure 2.1 Titian, *Worship of Venus*, 1516-18. Museo del Prado, Madrid. Oil on canvas, 172cm x 175cm.





Figure 2.2 Titian, *Bacchus and Ariadne*, 1520-22. National Gallery, London. Oil on canvas, 175cm x 190cm.

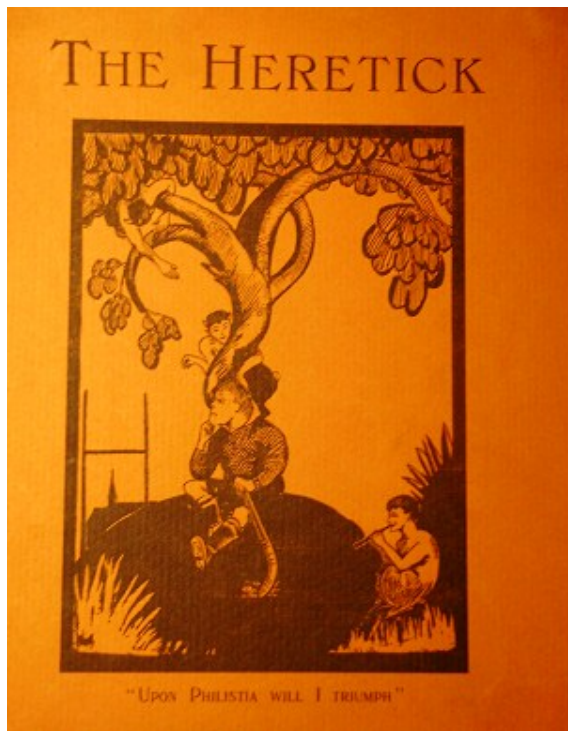


Figure 2.3 Cover, *The Heretick 1*, 1924. Print. (Left)

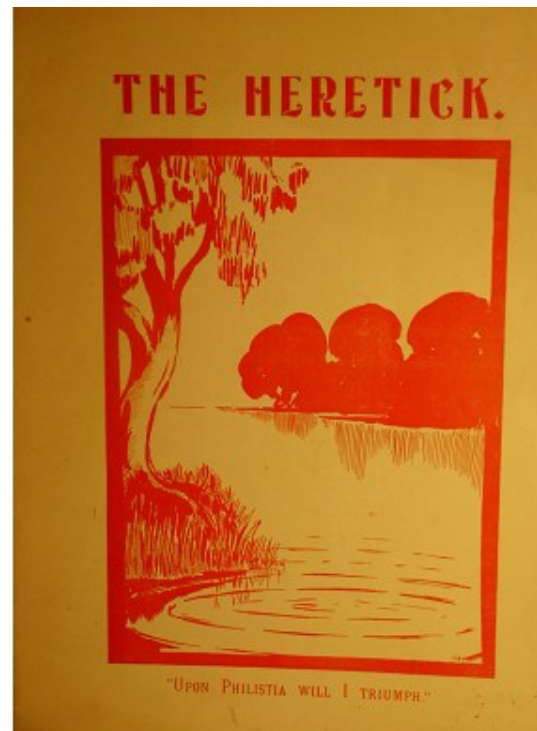


Figure 2.4 Cover, *The Heretick 2*, 1924. Print. (Right)



4 Oct.

VIA MARSALA 12 - 5

E. POUND

RAPALLO

Editor Spectator / Sir

I have not yet seen Mr Brodsky's volume on Gaudier/ Brzeska and Mr Anthony Blunt's name is wholly new to me.

After the appearance of Mr Ede's book I received a number of letters asking me to attack Ede. These letters came from friends of Gaudier's who had been , to put it mildly , disgusted with Ede's account.

Miss ~~Brzeska~~ Brzeska was a tragic figure with many admirable traits in her difficult character. She died in a mad house and her state of mind during the years previous was not such as to permit anyone to accept her statements without examination. She had at a very early period documents in a handwriting ~~that~~ that one wd. have hesitated to call Gaudier's own, ~~although~~ . There is so far as I know nothing to rule out the idea of auto-suggestion.

Other friends of Gaudier have written me " these letters contain nothing of Gaudier. "

The Lane catalogue of Gaudier's work published in 1916 contains a number of authentic letters. As to the quality of the book , I shd. be the last to express an opinion. It contains no intentional lies. And if Mr Blunt thinks he has found any mis-statements of fact I shd. be obliged to for particulars.

yr/ obt. svt.

Ezra Pound

The date on the Macfall letter wd. be significant, for Gaudier passed through several sets of acquaintance during his few years in London. John Cournoos, one of his earlier, though not first friends differed with about the abstract during the last , say , eight months before Gaudier went to the front. In fact anyone's testimony will vary in value according to the years , 1912, '13, '14 , By Sept. 1914 he was in the trenches . The bestial stupidity among art-critics , and half/artists in Eng. in 1910 to '14 did not conduce to serious attitude toward Gaudier outside a rather limited number of people. Orage permitted a serious attitude , and Courtney of the Fortnightly was, I think, the first editor of a periodical received by well established clubs , like the Athanaeum , who permitted an eposition of some of Gaudier's aims.

Figure 2.5 Facsimile (Letter). Ezra Pound to the editor, *The Spectator* (4 Oct., 1933).



Figure 2.6 Francesco Guercino, *Et in Arcadia Ego*, 1618-22. Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica (Palazzo Barberini), Rome. Oil on canvas, 82cm x 91cm.



Figure 2.7 Nicolas Poussin, *The Arcadian Shepherds*, 1627. Devonshire Collection, Chatsworth House, Derbyshire. Oil on canvas, 101cm x 82cm.



Figure 2.8 Nicolas Poussin, *The Arcadian Shepherds*, 1640. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Oil on canvas, 87cm x 120cm.



Figure 2.9 Thomas Eakins, *The Swimming Hole*, 1884-85. Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth. Oil on canvas, 70cm x 92cm.



Figure 2.10 Thomas Eakins, *Arcadia*, 1883. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Oil on canvas, 98cm x 114cm.

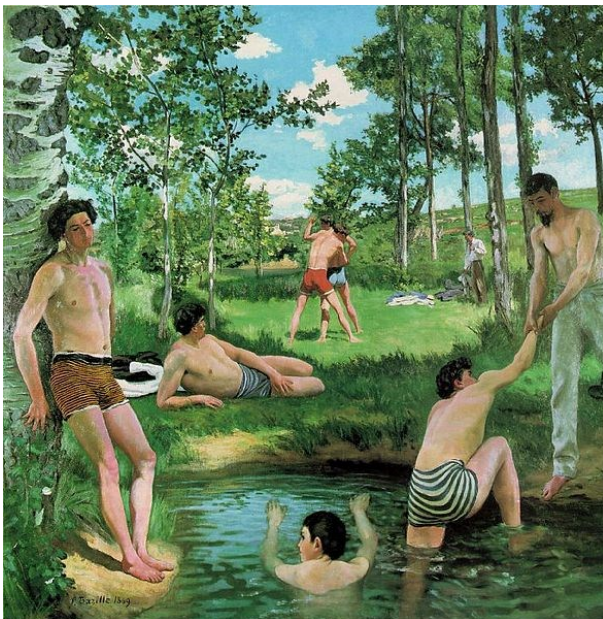


Figure 2.11 Frédérique Barzille, *Summer Scene*, 1869. Fogg Museum of Art, Boston. Oil on canvas, 158cm x 159cm.





Figure 2.12 Wilhelm von Gloeden, *Untitled (1)*, n.d. (c.1900.) Photographic print.



Figure 2.13 Wilhelm von Gloeden, *Untitled (2)*, n.d. (c.1900.) Photographic print.



Figure 2.14 Wilhelm von Gloeden, *Untitled (3)*, n.d. (c.1900.) Photographic print.

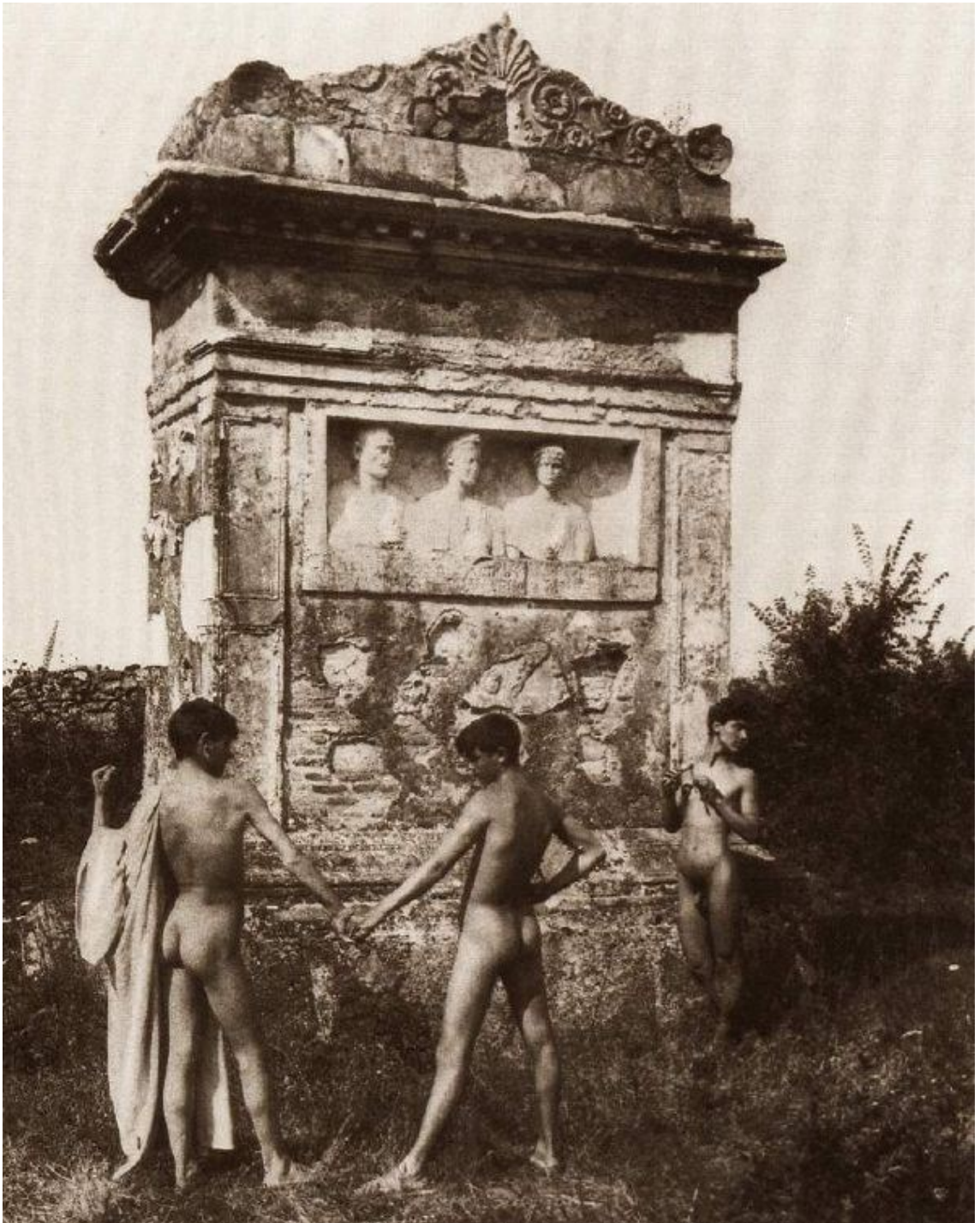


Figure 2.15 Wilhelm von Plüschow, *Three Boys in The Via Appia Antica*, n.d. (c.1900) Photographic print.



Figure 3.1 Caravaggio, *Amor Vincit Omnia*, 1602-3. Staatliche Museen, Berlin. Oil on canvas, 156cm x 113cm.



Figure 3.2 Nicolas Poussin, *Allegorical Scene (or Choice between Virtue and Vice)*, c.1624. Szépművészeti Múzeum, Budapest. Pen and wash on paper, 18cm x 33cm.



Figure 3.3 Nicolas Poussin, *Sleeping Venus and Cupid*, 1626. Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden. Oil on canvas, 71cm x 96cm.



Figure 3.4 Nicolas Poussin, *Sleeping Nymph with Satyrs*, 1626. Kunsthaus, Zurich. Oil on canvas, 77cm x 100cm. (Above Left)

Figure 3.5 Nicolas Poussin, *Satyrs Carrying a Nymph on His Back with Putti and Faun in an Arcadian Landscape*, 1627. Staatliche Museen, Kassel. Oil on canvas, 96cm x 75cm. (Above Right)



Figure 3.6 Nicolas Poussin, *Venus Surprised by a Satyr*, 1626. The Royal Collection, Windsor Castle. Pen and wash on paper, 12cm x 26cm.



Figure 3.7 Marcantonio Raimondi, *Satyr Disrobing a Sleeping Nymph*, 1470/82-1527/34. The British Museum, London. Engraving, 11cm x 18cm. (Left)

Figure 3.8 Marcantonio Raimondi, *Satyr Carrying a Nymph, and Another about to Slap Her*, (c.1470/82-1527/34) c. 1524. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. Engraving, 18cm x 14cm. (Right)

Figure 3.9 Bernardo Castello, *Narcissus*, 1613. Private collection/ location unknown. (Sold in auction by Bonhams, London: 9 Dec., 2002. Lot 63.) Pen and wash with white highlights on paper, 21cm x 15cm. (Below Left)

Figure 3.10 Anonymous, *Narcissus* (detail), 27 B.C.E.-79 C.E. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples (from Pompeii). Fresco. (Below Right)







Figure 3.11 Salvador Dalí, *Metamorphosis of Narcissus*, 1937. Tate Modern, London. Oil on canvas, 51cm x 78cm.



Figure 3.12 Caravaggio, *Narcissus*, 1597-99. Galleria Nazionale dell'Arte Antica (Palazzo Barberini), Rome. Oil on canvas, 100cm x 92cm.



Figure 3.13 Nicolas Poussin, *Echo and Narcissus* (framed), 1627. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Oil on canvas, 74cm x 100cm (dimensions unframed).



Figure 3.14 Nicolas Poussin, *Venus Anointing the Dead Adonis*, 1626-27. Musée des Beaux-arts, Caen. Oil on canvas, 57cm x 128cm.



Figure 3.15 Nicolas Poussin, *Cephalus and Aurora*, c.1630. National Gallery, London. Oil on canvas, 96cm x 130cm.



Figure 3.16 Nicolas Poussin, *Lamentation over the Dead Christ*, 1628-29. National Gallery, London. Oil on canvas, 101cm x 145cm.



Figure 3.17 Nicolas Poussin, *Bacchanal before a Herm of Pan*, 1631-33. National Gallery, London. Oil on canvas, 100cm x 142cm.



Figure 3.18 Nicolas Poussin, *Dance before a Herm of Pan*, n.d. (possibly 1628-30). Royal Collection, Windsor Castle. Pen and wash over pencil on paper, 21cm x 33cm.



Figure 3.19 Nicolas Poussin, *A Dance to the Music of Time*, 1634-36. Wallace Collection, London. Oil on canvas, 82cm x 104cm.



Figure 3.20 Nicolas Poussin, *A Dance to the Music of Time*, c.1635. National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh. Pen and ink on paper, 15cm x 20cm.



Figure 4.1 Nicolas Poussin, *Rape of the Sabines* [or *Abduction of the Sabines*], 1634. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Oil on canvas, 155cm x 210cm.



Figure 4.2 Jean de Boulogne (Giambologna), *Rape of the Sabines*, 1581-83. Loggia dei Lanzi, Florence. Marble. 410cm (tall). (Left)



Figure 4.3 *Ludovisi Gaul* or *Gaul Killing Himself and his Wife*, c. 230-220 BCE (original). Museo Nazionale delle Terme, Rome. Marble. 211 cm. (Right)



Figure 4.4 Agesander, Athenodoros and Polydorus (attributed), *Laocoön Group* or *Laocoön and His Sons*, c. 25 BCE. Vatican Museums, Rome. Marble.





Figure 4.5 Nicolas Poussin, *Plague at Ashdod*, 1630. Musée du Louvre, Paris.  
Oil on canvas, 148cm x 198cm.



Figure 4.6 Nicolas Poussin, *Rape of the Sabines*, 1637-8. Musée du Louvre, Paris.  
Oil on canvas, 159cm x 206cm. (Left)



Figure 4.7 Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *The Rape of Proserpina*, 1621-22. Galleria  
Borghese, Rome. Marble. 255cm. (Right)



Figure 4.8 Nicolas Poussin, *The Capture of Jerusalem by Titus*, 1638. Kunsthistorisches Museen, Vienna. Oil on canvas, 147cm x 199cm.



Figure 4.9 Anonymous, *Arch of Titus* (south relief panel detail), 82 CE. Forum Archeological Park (Velian Hill), Rome. Marble. Approx.. 400cm (wide).



Figure 4.10 Nicolas Poussin, *The Destruction and Sack of the Temple of Jerusalem*, 1625-26. Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Oil on canvas, 146cm x 94cm. (Left)

Figure 4.11 Nicolas Poussin, *The Destruction and Sack of the Temple of Jerusalem* (detail), 1625-6. Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Oil on canvas, original: 146cm x 94cm. (Right)



Figure 4.12 Nicolas Poussin, *The Realm of Flora*, 1631. Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden. Oil on canvas, 131cm x 182cm.



Figure 4.13 *Scena Tragica*, illustration from Sebastiano Serlio's *Il primo-secondo libri d'architettura*, 1545 (Paris). Print. (Left)



Figure 4.14 *Scena Satirica*, illustration from Sebastiano Serlio's *Il primo-secondo libri d'architettura*, 1545 (Paris). Print. (Right)



Figure 4.15 Marcantonio Raimondi (after Raphael), *Il Morbetto (the Plague)*, 1515. Engraving.



Figure 4.16 Marcantonio Raimondi (after Raphael), *Il Giudizio di Paride (the Judgment of Paris)*, 1515. Engraving.



Figure 4.17 Hans Holbein the Younger, *The French Ambassadors or Jean de Dinteville and Georges de Selve*, 1533. Oil on panel, 207cm x 210cm.

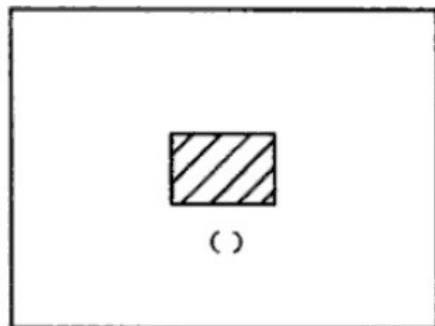


Figure 4.18 Illustration from Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991) 94.



Figure 4.19 Nicolas Poussin, *Plague at Ashdod* (detail), 1630. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Oil on canvas, original: 148cm x 198cm.



Figure 4.20 Alfred Hitchcock, dir., *Vertigo* (2 film stills), 1958. Universal Studios.





Figure 4.21 Nicolas Poussin, *Holy Family in Egypt*, 1655-57. The Hermitage, St. Petersburg. Oil on canvas, original: 105cm x 145cm.



Figure 4.22 Anonymous, *Nile Mosaic of Palestrina* (detail 1), c. 100 BCE. Palazzo Barberini, Palestrina. Mosaic, original: 585cm x 431cm.



Figure 4.23 Anonymous, *Nile Mosaic of Palestrina* (detail 2), c. 100 BCE. Palazzo Barberini, Palestrina. Mosaic, original: 585cm x 431cm. (Above Left)



Figure 4.24 Anonymous, *Nile Mosaic of Palestrina* (detail 3), c. 100 BCE. Palazzo Barberini, Palestrina. Mosaic, original: 585cm x 431cm. (Above Right)

Figure 4.25 Nicolas Poussin, *Holy Family in Egypt* (detail), 1655-57. The Hermitage, St. Petersburg. Oil on canvas, original: 105cm x 145cm. (Below)





Figure 4.26 Nicolas Poussin, *Landscape with Pyramus and Thisbe*, 1651. Städelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt. Oil on canvas, 193cm x 174cm.

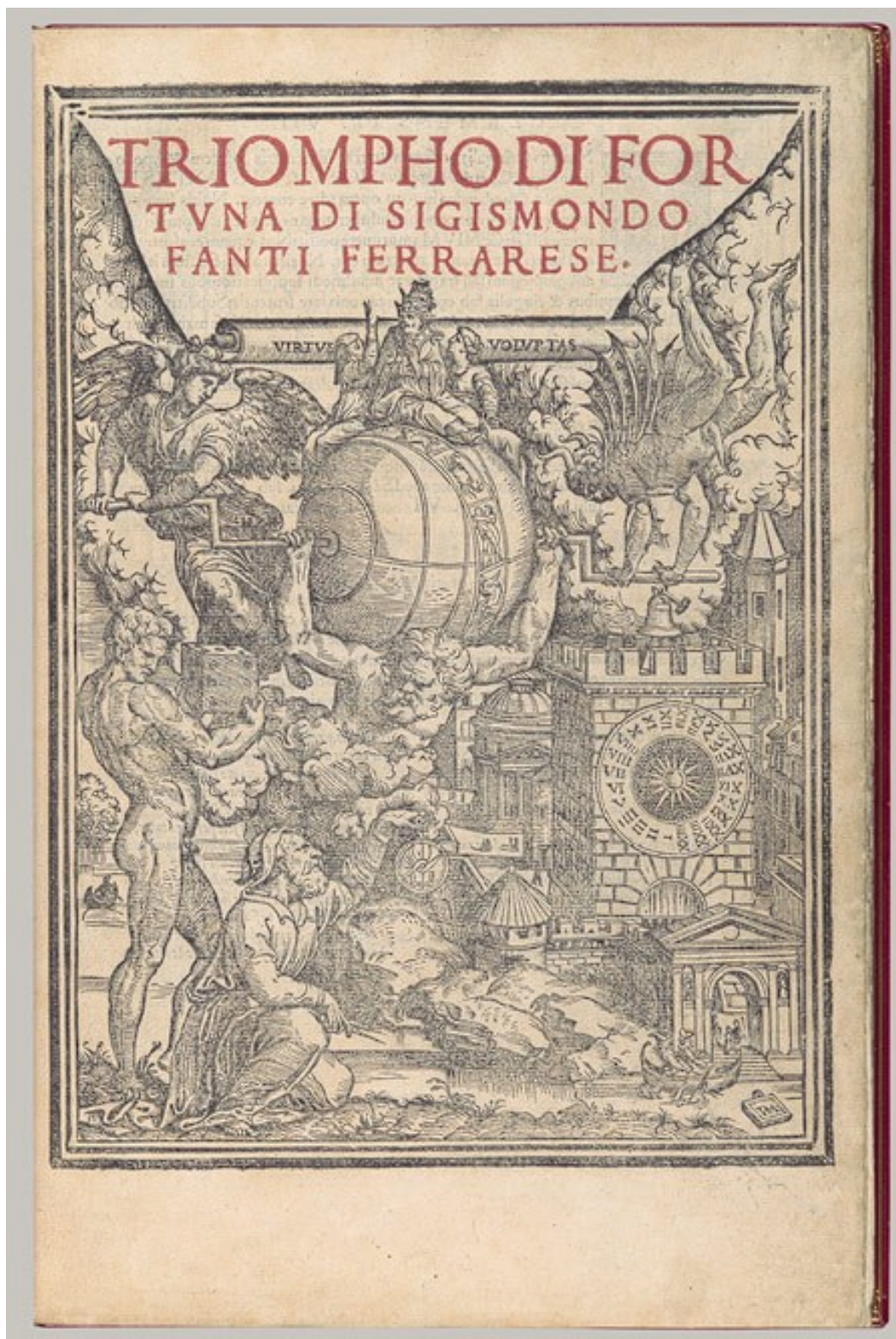


Figure 4.27 Baldassare Peruzzi, frontispiece, *Triumpho di Fortuna* (the Triumph of Fortune), 1526. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Print.

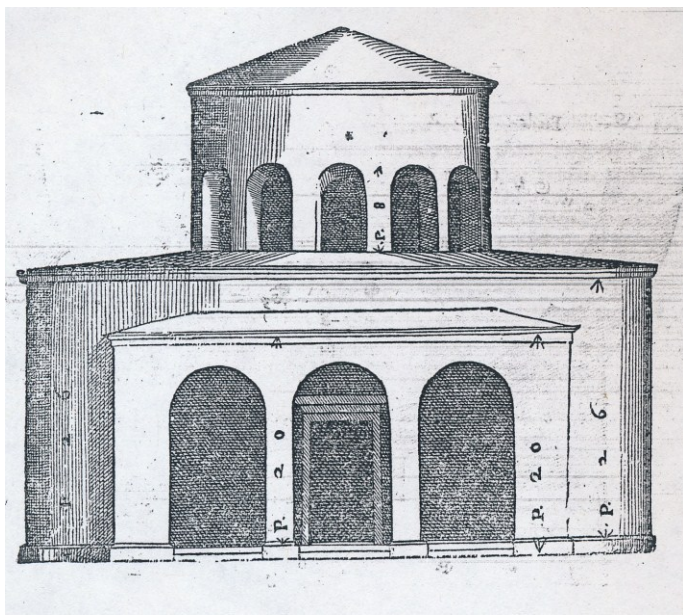


Figure 4.28 Andrea Palladio, *Tempio di Baccho* (Temple of Bacchus), 1570. Woodcut. Illustration from *The Four Books on Architecture*.

Figure 4.29 Nicolas Poussin, *Landscape with a Calm*, 1650-51. Getty Museum, Los Angeles. Oil on canvas, 97cm x 131cm. (Below)





Figure 4.30 Gaspard Isac, *Semele's Death and the Birth of Bacchus*, 1629. Etching. From Blaise de Vigenère, ed., *Les Images de Philostrate* (The *Imagines* of Philostratus), Paris (1629).



Figure 4.31 Nicolas Poussin, *Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake* (detail), 1648. National Gallery, London. Oil on canvas, original: 119cm x 199cm.



Figure 4.32 Nicolas Poussin, *The Arcadian Shepherds* (detail 1), 1640. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Oil on canvas, original: 87cm x 120cm.



Figure 4.33 Nicolas Poussin, *Self-Portrait*, 1650. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Oil on canvas, 78cm x 94cm.





Figure 4.34 Nicolas Poussin, *The Arcadian Shepherds* (detail 2), 1640. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Oil on canvas, original: 87cm x 120cm.