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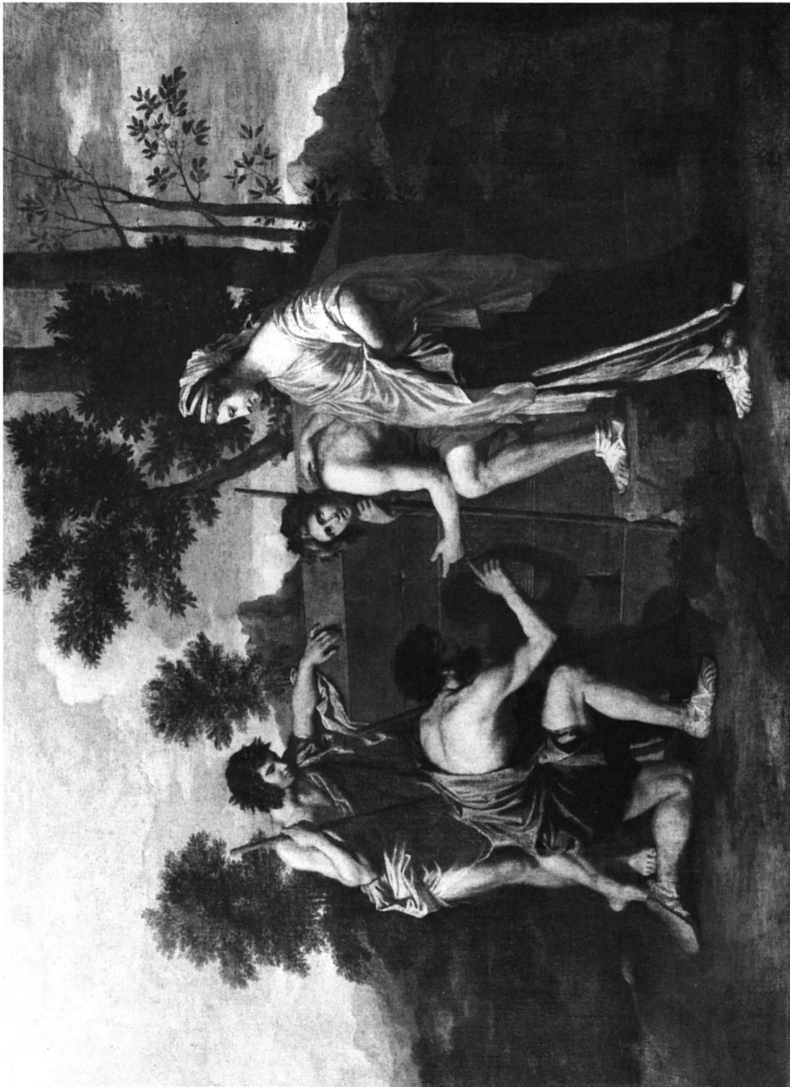
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*Nicolas Poussin's The Arcadian Shepherds, Musée du Louvre*

## "High Melancholy and Sweet": James and the Arcadian Tradition

by ADELINE R. TINTNER

THERE IS A particular strain in James's work best characterized by a phrase in *The Ambassadors*, "high melancholy and sweet," which embodies the Arcadian elegiac tradition. It is my intention to show where it appears and from what sources it is probably derived.

### I

Arcadia entered Western thought through Latin poetry. It was not in Greek Arcady that the idylls of Theocritus took place, but in Sicily, since Arcady itself had been described by Polybius as a cold and barren country. According to Erwin Panofsky, Arcadia, the imaginary golden realm invented by Virgil, differs from the Theocritan idyll because in it "dissonance is caused by the appearance of human suffering and frustrated love."<sup>1</sup> The resolution of this dissonance was "Virgil's most personal contribution to poetry." It is manifested in the "vespertinal mixture of sadness and tranquility" that results from our knowledge that death and the loss of love go hand in hand in Arcady. Further, Virgil established evening as the Arcadian time; the Eclogues are full of references to the evening star and lengthening shadows. Accepting death and frustrated love as essential to the Arcadian predicament, Virgil projected tragedy "either into the future or . . . the past." By this distancing he "transformed mythical truth into elegiac sentiment." The Arcadian ambience as we know it represents "a dream incarnate of ineffable happiness surrounded nevertheless with a halo of 'sweetly sad' melancholy." James's "high melancholy and sweet" is a distillation of this ambience. It is not to be confused with the pastoral.

In the Middle Ages the concept of Arcadia disappeared, but it returned with the revival of classical thought in the Renaissance as the vision of the golden age modified by the sadness of its ineluctible finitude. Once Sannázaro exaggerated the elegiac heritage from Virgil the mood was set. It is interesting that the Arcadian concept should have reached the seventeenth century not through the medium of literature, in which it had come down from classical antiquity, but in a painting based on an

1. Erwin Panofsky, "Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition," in *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (New York: Anchor, 1955), pp. 300-320.

inscription: "Et in Arcadia ego." Guercino's picture for the first time shows a skull addressing these words to a group of startled shepherds. "Even in Arcady I (Death) (am)." Death exists even in the idyllic realm of Arcady. Poussin painted two versions of this theme. The first, in Chatsworth, still shows the skull, now on a tomb, with the same inscription, "Et in Arcadia ego." The second, in the Louvre, painted a few years later, is the great disseminator of the concept (see illustration). However, this influential painting shows a change in iconography that will radically alter the interpretation of the Latin phrase. The skull has disappeared and only the tomb remains as the central motif of the painting. An Arcadian figure, detached from the others, stands in a melancholy reverie in the foreground of the painting. The meaning of *Et in Arcadia Ego* is now different. Since Death itself is no longer present as a skull, the *Ego* can only refer to the tomb and its occupant, a dead Arcadian, to a mortal speaking from the tomb. "I, too, even tho dead and buried, once lived in Arcadia, the realm of bliss." The change in meaning is recognized in the next century when Diderot describing the picture translates the motto as "Je vivais aussi dans la délicieuse Arcadie." The *et* is now attached to the *ego*. This translation, Panofsky has pointed out, "the literary source of all the variations now in use," is really a mistranslation, and it is not long before Goethe and Balzac as good Latinists change the word order to correspond to the change in meaning. And so it is that "Et ego in Arcadia" is the way Monsieur de Bourbonne says he also has been in Arcadia in Balzac's "Madame Firmiani," which I believe served as one of the sources of *The Ambassadors*.<sup>2</sup> This is also the way James translated it in "Brooksmith": "Yes, you too have been in Arcadia" (*CT*, pp. 8, 13),<sup>3</sup> when the habitués of a now dispersed salon meet sadly on the street.

This Arcadian stream reached James probably through two channels, one pictorial and the other literary. As it affected civilized Europe through the influence of a great painting, so it continued to be visible in the now equally influential painters of the French école gallante. James saw Watteau's "piping chevaliers and whispering countesses loom out of the clouded canvas like fancied twilight ghosts in the garden of a haunted palace,"<sup>4</sup> as he wrote in his review of the Wallace Collection in 1873. Even then he was sensitive to the "poignancy of their unreality," and felt the sadness of their world. "It almost brings tears to one's eyes

2. Adeline R. Tintner, "Balzac's 'Madame Firmiani' and James's *The Ambassadors*," *Comparative Literature*, XXV (Spring 1973), 128-135.

3. Parenthetical documentation: roman numerals refer to the New York Edition of *The Novels and Tales of Henry James* (New York, 1907-1909). Initials followed by page numbers refer to the following editions:

*CT* *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, ed. Leon Edel (Philadelphia, 1936), vol. VIII.

*E* Henry James, *The Europeans* (New York: Signet, 1964).

*P* Honoré de Balzac, *Les Paysans* (Paris: Conard, 1923).

*SF* Henry James, *The Sacred Fount* (New York: Grove, 1953).

4. Henry James, *The Painter's Eye*, ed. John L. Sweeney (Harvard, 1956), p. 77.

to think that a scheme of life so delicious . . . should be . . . as things go, extremely impracticable."<sup>5</sup> From Watteau he became familiar with the props of the rococo version of Arcadia which replaced the Poussin one, a blending of the Commedia dell'Arte types with the furniture of the elegant garden world, equipped with "statuary on florid pedestals," with fountains and with pavilions enjoyed by intimate couples bathed in a melancholy sweetness. For James rococo painting presented a treasury of Arcadian icons.

The second, the literary source that kept the Arcadian tradition alive in a form assimilable by James was Balzac's *Comédie Humaine*. As early as 1875 James had signalled out *Les Paysans*, Balzac's novel of Arcady, as one of his greatest achievements, and in 1902, just after having completed *The Ambassadors* and *The Wings of the Dove*, he praises "La Grenadière," a tale of an Arcadian landscape. "The tale exists for the sake of the enchanting objects involved" which are "almost by themselves a living subject,"<sup>6</sup> and with which a dying woman surrounds herself. But he goes further than to see this aspect in isolated cases. He views Balzac now, after his own version of the past in *The Ambassadors*, as appealing to an interest that "springs still from our own sense that . . . the order he describes is the old order that our sense of the past perversely recurs to as something happy we have irretrievably missed. His pages bristle with the revelation of the lingering earlier world."<sup>7</sup> There are many Arcadian passages in Balzac that James was bound, as a lifelong student and admirer of *La Comédie Humaine*, to absorb, to digest, and to reform in his own œuvre.

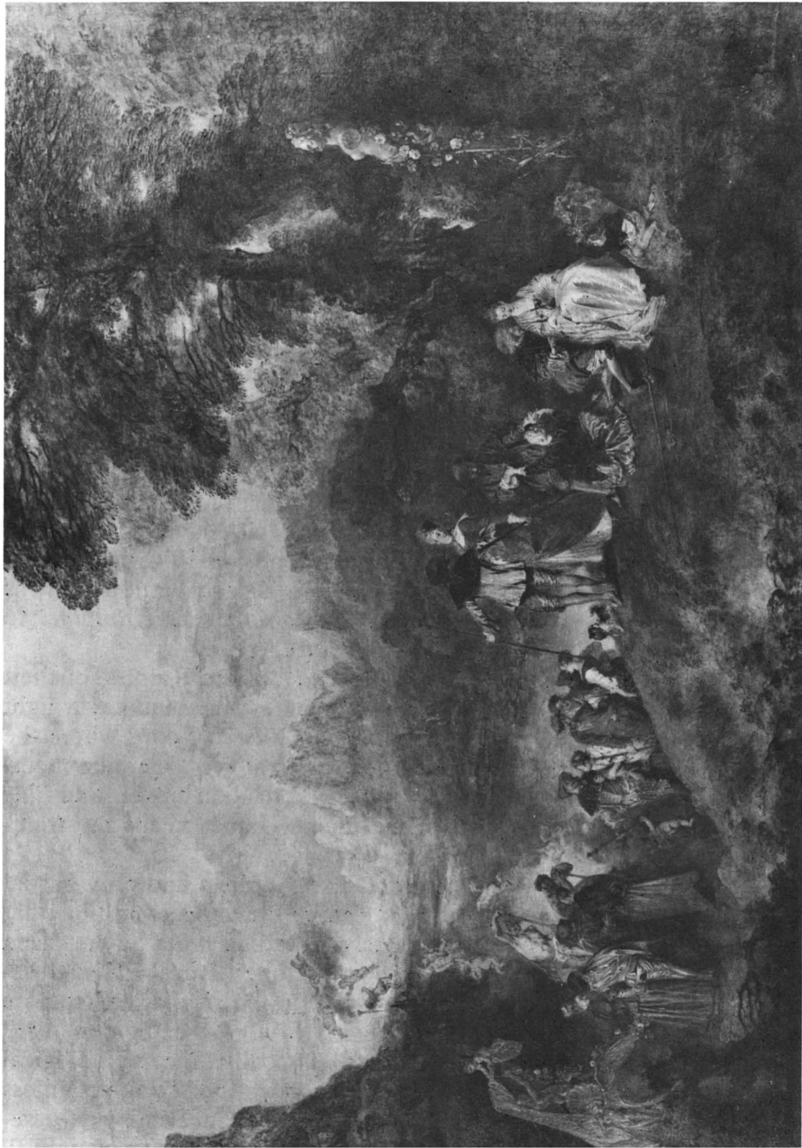
In *The Europeans*, in *The Portrait of a Lady* where Ralph Touchett is bathed in Arcadianism, in "Brooksmith" where James makes a light gloss on the "Et in Arcadia Ego" theme, in *The Sacred Fount* where the Arcadian episode interferes with the nameless narrator's "scientific method," in *The Ambassadors*, his most complete Arcadian novel, and *The Wings of the Dove*, a tapering off of the theme, James keeps the tradition alive.

To see what James does with this theme in its earliest and only partial manifestation, *The Europeans*, we must realize that the condition that makes this clearly pastoral novel ultimately Arcadian is its having been placed two generations before James's own lifetime. Rural life had become the suburbs of Boston in James's own time but forty years before he felt it had enjoyed the "trustfulness" and "ton of the Golden Age" (*E*, p. 33). To Felix, the expatriate artist, it recalls "the mythological era." It is "a paradise" rather than an Arcadia, with the "lying" countess as the threat of the serpent, even though the Virgilian evening is a recurrent time in this novel of innumerable sunsets. Although all is well

5. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

6. Henry James, *Notes on Novelists* (New York, 1914), p. 125.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 125.



*Antoine Watteau's The Voyage to Cythera, Musée du Louvre*

in this idyllic environment, life suffers from the Arcadian predicament only in so far that it no longer can exist in 1877, and thus must be viewed as part of the irretrievable past. James has gone to Balzac's chief Arcadian novel, *Les Paysans*, for some of the atmosphere and details. The proof of this is the literal lifting of a description from Balzac's novel of the Chinese ornaments in the salon of "the Arcadia" of Burgundy, the chateau of Les Aigues-Vives. It occurs in James's description of Robert Acton's oriental collection — "And then he possessed the most delightful *chinoiseries* — trophies of his sojourn in the Celestial empire: pagodas of ebony and cabinets of ivory;" (these reappear, the first in *The Golden Bowl*, the second in *The Ivory Tower*) "sculptured monsters, grinning and leering on chimney-pieces" (*E*, p. 85). Compare these last words with Balzac's description of the oriental curiosities in the salon at Les Aigues: "China monsters splitting their sides with laughter on the mantelshelf," ("où sur la cheminée riaient à gorge déployée les monstres de porcelaine chinoise") (*P*, p. 21).

In *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), James has applied the Arcadian motif, not to an era historically doomed, but to a character personally condemned by ill health to an untimely death. Ralph has death in him, and rich and unoccupied, he points to his imaginary double in a doomed painted world. He has his identifying deity in the Watteau/Lancret figure, a fitting symbol of his predicament. When the members of the party view the pictures in the gallery at Gardencourt, Henrietta Stackpole "looked at him as if he himself had been a picture" (III, 124). As they pass the painting Ralph himself points to the guitar-playing figure. "That's my ideal of a regular occupation" (III, 124). The name of Ralph Touchett's home, Gardencourt, is a linking of two milieux of the 18th century — the garden and the court, one showing the effect of personality on nature, the other measuring the formal spaces in front of and within the house of the pleasure-seeking couples. His first important scene with Isabel takes place "in the thickening dusk" in the grassy court of his Winchester Square house in London where he is made aware of his fatal illness, and not in the drawing room of that house. In the second scene where he declares his hopeless passion to Isabel this note is repeated although transferred to Italy. He is sitting in "the clear gloom" of the court's shade in the Palazzo Crescentini. Accompanied again by an emblematic work of art, this time in the style of Bernini, Ralph sits "at the base of a statue of Terpsichore" (IV, 63) and tells Isabel, "I love you but I love you without hope" (IV, 72). James places him at the base of a statue representing one of the muses, the Dance, both in ironic contrast to his physical lack of fitness, and as a concrete rendering of his life-style, a device employed in painting from Watteau through Fragonard. The scene of Isabel sitting "one afternoon" after "the sun had begun to sink" in the Roman Forum with "the long shadows of broken column and vague pedestal" (III, 414) shows James

using this trick of the rococo school of painters of prefiguring Isabel's ruin by emblematic objects. When Caspar and Henrietta offer to accompany Ralph home to England in what he knows is a journey to his deathbed, he says with irony, "it's the golden age!" (IV, 300). While dying later at Gardencourt Ralph says again to Isabel, "Dear Isabel, life is better . . . Death is good — but there's no love" (IV, 414). After his death Isabel meditates in the park in the evening (we are given the time in the novel). Remembering the idyllic past of her life in the setting of Gardencourt, and knowing she must return to her tomb with Osmond, she engages in an Arcadian reverie.

In the short story "Brooksmith" (1891), James literally translates *Et ego in Arcadia*. At the very beginning he describes how the ex habitués of a now extinct literary salon greet each other whenever they meet. "Yes, you too have been in Arcadia," we seem not too grumpily to allow" (CT, pp. 8, 13). The nurturing spirit of this salon had been the butler, Brooksmith. "Mr. Offord's drawing room was indeed Brooksmith's garden, his pruned and tended *parterre*, and if we all flourished there and grew well in our places it was largely owing to his supervision" (CT, pp. 8, 14). The garden tended by the butler suggests Candide's garden, that purely eighteenth century conversion of the école gallante park into a personally controlled nature, for Mr. Offord when he begins to fail in health was gotten up to "look, to my imagination, like the dying Voltaire" (CT, pp. 8, 22). Butlering in an atmosphere of "Montaigne and Saint-Simon" (CT, pp. 8, 18) (the golden age of France) Brooksmith could not adjust to Philistine situations. When the narrator meets him waiting on tables in other houses he finds "We were in intellectual sympathy. . . . In short we had been in Arcadia together, and we had both come to *this*!" (CT, pp. 8, 27). Unlike the gentleman telling the tale, the servant cannot accept the notion of death so necessary to Arcadia. For him the mortal idyll is subsumed under the immortal. So Brooksmith simply disappears one day in his white waistcoat and the narrator likes to think "he is changing the plates of the immortal Gods" (CT, pp. 8, 31).

When he writes *The Sacred Fount* in 1901, James has mastered the repertory of the Arcadian theme. He combines "the grounds of some castle of enchantment" (SF, p. 128) with the actors in a drama of "frustrated love and memory of death" to produce an elegiac sentiment. Written just before *The Ambassadors* it is a preparatory excursion into the fully developed Arcadian mode. The props and climate are fused with human sadness. In "this consecrated nook . . . the type of all the bemused and remembered" under "an evening sky" the narrator sits on a bench surrounded "by weather-stained statues on florid pedestals" (SF, p. 130), the familiar rococo furniture of the école gallante. He sees May Server, the sad mother of three dead children and the victim, he supposes, of passion, walk "down the vista," and he is moved by an



expanding tenderness (*SF*, p. 136). For Mrs. Server's tragedy was "that her consciousness survived." They are joined by Mr. Briss, the other presumed victim of passion, appearing "ten years older," looking at the "marks of the hour, at the rich twilight, deeper now in the avenues" (*SF*, p. 153). For the narrator finds himself "quite as sorry for him as I had been for Mrs. Server." "We were in a beautiful old picture, we were in a beautiful old tale" (*SF*, p. 130).

Another scene reinvests the *Commedia dell'Arte* aspect of Watteau's Arcadianism with new life. The characters look at a picture of a young man holding "a representation of a human face, modelled and coloured, in wax, and enamelled metal, in some substance not human. The object thus appears a complete mask, such as might have been fantastically fitted and worn" (*SF*, p. 55). There follows a discussion between Mrs. Server who sees the mask as the "mask of death . . . with an awful grimace!" and the narrator who sees it as Mrs. Server. This mask is not as outlandish as the narrator would have us believe. For it was part of the regular costume of Harlequin and can be seen closely fitting the entire face on a Harlequin in the Watteau in the Wallace Collection called "Harlequin and Columbine." It is absolutely clear to me that in this picture Columbine is being scared by Harlequin wearing the mask with "an awful grimace" (*SF*, p. 56). The group is also called "Italian Comedians make love in a garden," and the dalliance of the Harlequin-Columbine pair seems to be contrasted to the more tranquil and serious love-making of a balancing group of figures. The picture was also mentioned in 1875 in de Goncourt's catalogue of engraved works of Watteau as "Voulez-vous triompher des belles?" "Would you like to succeed with women?"<sup>8</sup> The Harlequin with the mask who succeeds only in frightening his woman companion is obviously an example of how *not* to succeed with women. Another echo of the *Commedia dell'Arte* by James occurs a little later in the story when the narrator has "cast about for some light in which I could show that I — *à plus forte raison* — was a pantaloon" (*SF*, p. 111).

However, this Arcadia, where all the elements have been blended in proper proportion, functions merely as a diversion in the history of the narrator's objective — the proof of his psychological theory of human cannibalism. It does not control the composition of the novella. Indeed, it creates a mood that the narrator finds disturbing to his ratiocination and irrelevant to his investigations. "There was no point at which my assurance could by the scientific method, judge itself complete enough not to regard feeling . . . as an interference" (*SF*, p. 296). The entire Arcadian mood of human suffering in an idyllic environment has been distracting for the investigator.

A year later in *The Ambassadors* the entire arc of composition is

8. Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *L'Art du XVIII<sup>ème</sup> Siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, n.d.), p. 76.

completed in the Arcadian strain. Where it had been an intrusion in *The Sacred Fount*, now it creates the dominant atmosphere. Without *The Sacred Fount* as a prior exercise in the realization of an Arcadian episode, in which the dissonance between an idyllic environment and frustrated love and death is created, the gradual envelopment of all the characters in the mood of Arcadia could not have been so subtly achieved.

It is the evening of Chad and Madame de Vionnet's love affair; the summer will end, Madame de Vionnet will lose her lover and nothing but frustration and the death of love is in her future. The awareness of this elegiac sentiment grows gradually in the consciousness of Strether who on a mission to save Chad learns to see the nature and value of the liaison, and to love and pity the doomed woman. To some it may appear that he has missed out on the whole experience. He himself, in his *carpe diem* speech to "Little Bilham," fears this has happened. But "The Story in It" written about the same time shows that James believed that *one* could have a romance as well as two. What Strether has certainly not missed is the elegiac message recorded in his sensibility.

The mood is established at the beginning. Strether comes to Paris "in something already so like the evening of life" (XXI, 40). It is in Gloriani's "queer old garden" in late afternoon that the atmosphere and stage properties of the rococo Arcady are invoked. Here "the little party had practically adjourned to the open air, but the open air was in such conditions all a chamber of state" (XXI, 196), which stresses the formality of the garden. There appears a rococo artifact, "a small pavilion, clear-faced and sequestered, an effect of polished parquet, of fine white panel and spare sallow gilt, of decoration delicate and rare" (XXI, 195). "Little Bilham" says the atmosphere is such that it "puts us all back—into the last century." Strether remarks that it puts him "rather forward." Bilham answers that that makes him "of the century before." Strether responds that, "as such a specimen of the rococo" he can't expect to please the ladies. "On the contrary," answers "Little Bilham," "we all adore here — the rococo, and where is there a better setting for it than the whole thing, the pavilion and the garden, together?" (XXI, 201). Miss Barrace, "this picturesque and original lady who struck him (Strether) so oddly, as both antique and modern" (XXI, 263), also reminds him "of some last-century portrait of a clever head without powder" (XXI, 113). She also epitomizes the best quality of the social butterfly, the capacity to see, "the pleasure of observation is so visible in her" (XXI, 263). Typical yet idiosyncratic, her repeated "wonderful"s and "oh, oh, oh"s are an echo of some stage figure, some actress burlesquing the function of sight. She "looked at them with convex Parisian eyes and through a glass with a remarkably long tortoise-shell handle" (XXI, 113). She might have stepped out of Watteau's painting of Gersaint's picture gallery, where a lorgnetted wom-

an peers closely at a painting and nearly all the persons are engaged in "seeing." Miss Barrace always appears, like the deity of the place, with her attributes fully visible — her mannerisms of speech, her lorgnette, and her penetrating social vision. What connects the pastoral atmosphere of Gloriani's party to Arcadianism is Strether's speech to "Little Bilham." Whereas there's still time for "Little Bilham" ("The right time is *any* time that one is still so lucky as to have" [XXI, 218]), it's too late for Strether. This awareness of what he has missed in life, this dissonance between Strether's past and the idyllic background of the party produce "a mixture of sadness and tranquility." It is the first note struck of the Arcadian air that will intensify as the story builds.

The arrival of the Pococks gives James an opportunity to use a ploy characteristic of all pastoral styles, from Sidney to Watteau: the coupling of characters. Waymarsh moves from Miss Barrace to Sarah Pocock, Jim links up with Mme. de Vionnet and Mamie Pocock with "Little Bilham," reminding one of the couples in *The Voyage to Cytherea* in the Louvre (which James could easily have known well) (see illustration), or the couples in *The Sacred Fount*. The coupling is transient, temporary, the part of a celebration soon to end, and so the pastoral is converted into the Arcadian.

The scene which reveals the adulterous nature of the liaison is carefully presented. Taking the train, Strether reviews what France has been to him, "the medium of art, the nursery of letters." We note significantly that it is "practically as distant as Greece, but practically also well-nigh as consecrated" (XXII, 245). Nostalgia is in the air — "not a breath of the cooler evening that wasn't somehow a syllable of the text" (XXII, 254). The Virgilian time of day is observed when Strether arrives at the inn "towards six o'clock" (XXII, 252); it is considerably after that time when he spots the lovers; and he does not return to Paris with them until late that night. Why should James bother to be so specific about the time unless he wished to create the vespertinal atmosphere? Strether even sits in "a pavilion," the permanent architectural feature of rococo Arcadia, even though in this scene it is "primitive," unlike the elegant one in Gloriani's garden. The landscape is an ideal one for it is actually a reconstitution of a painting he had once coveted in a Boston art gallery. He sees "the remembered mixture resolved back into its elements" (XXII, 246). This imaginative reconstruction derives from the same impulse that made eighteenth century English landscape designers transpose Claude Lorraine's Virgilian paintings to the actual meadows and fields of English noblemen. Claude was a favorite painter of James, and at one time was preferred by him to Turner. What clinches the Arcadianism of this scene is the final dissonance between the idyllic setting and the brute fact of adultery.

Strether's relation with Marie de Vionnet is laced with Arcadianism. Every time he visited her he penetrated an environment in which her

tragic future was adumbrated. He always went to her flat in the evening. The first time "between half past five and six," he is aware that her house was filled with "relics" which recall the Virgilian presence of death (especially in the Fifth Eclogue). Her whole flat represented that Arcady which Panofsky sees as "a haven, not only from a faulty reality but also . . . from a questionable present."<sup>9</sup> The past was contained in Mme. de Vionnet's things, her future was at stake, and her present in the judgment of Woollett was surely questionable. Looking back at a suite of rooms, he was aware that "the whole thing made a vista, which he found high melancholy and sweet" (XXII, 125). (The vista was dear to Watteau who plants a suite of rooms where one would least expect a distant view of mysteriously receding space, in the stage-like center background of Gersaint's painting shop.) Strether's last visit to Mme. de Vionnet, after the revelation in the country, takes place even later than the others, "between nine and ten" (XXII, 273). The Arcadian dusk is emphasized by the appearance of "clusters of candles," and by the sound of "the small splash of the fountains," that ubiquitous rococo décor (symbolic perhaps of physical love), that "he heard once more, from the empty court" (XXII, 274). Original as always, and having a historical advantage over the artists and writers of the eighteenth and mid-nineteenth century, James can specify the tragic future. It is invaded by "the sounds . . . the omens" of the French Revolution. "His hostess was dressed as for thunderous times, and it fell in with the kind of imagination we have just attributed to him" that she must be dressed as Madame Roland "on the scaffold" (XXII, 275). The world of Chateaubriand and Lamartine, traces of whom are also in Mme. de Vionnet's flat, takes precedence. The "high melancholy and sweet," (a curiously poetic phrase using the French word order), pervading this flat, is a distillation of the Arcadian ambience, "a dream incarnate of ineffable happiness," as Panofsky describes it, "surrounded nevertheless with a halo of 'sweetly sad' melancholy,"<sup>10</sup> pregnant with the sense of disaster in the near future. Idyllic Paris and idyllic love which Strether has been contemplating and even experiencing will pass into tragic pain and disorder. At the end of the book the reader knows that Chad will be saved from the Arcadian trap by his practical American business sense. Strether perceives the tragedy as does Poussin's melancholic Arcadian, but Marie de Vionnet, deity of the place, Paris, who is compared "to a goddess still partly engaged in a morning cloud, or to a sea-nymph waist-high in the summer-surge" (XXI, 270), must fall victim to the inevitable transience of the Arcadian dream. She knows that Strether can do nothing to help her. The idyll with Chad must end in her abandonment, "for the only certainty is that I shall be the loser in the end" (XXII, 288).

9. Panofsky, p. 303.

10. Panofsky, p. 297.

The last invocation of the Arcadian strain appears in *The Wings of the Dove*. Volume one builds up an idyllic life set in charming circumstances which reaches its height in "the great historic house" at Matcham, Lord Warburton's place, which "had, for Milly . . . as the centre of an almost extravagantly grand Watteau-composition, a tone as of old gold" (XIX, 208). The mention of Watteau conjures up the vision for the reader and absolves James from the concrete details he avoids after the first half of the novel. It also signalizes Milly's death, as it had Ralph Touchett's. At the Watteau-like party, previewing her own death in the Bronzino portrait that resembles her she asks Kate to accompany her to the doctor who is to give her the death sentence. Kate says, "'What a remarkable time to talk of such things! . . . Here in the midst of — !' But Kate could only sigh for wonder — almost visibly too for pity" (XIX, 228). In Volume two when Milly bows to her sacrificial role, the mood changes from the classical one of elegiac nostalgia to one of redemption, and the significance of Christmas, the wings of the dove, and the change from profane to sacred love banish the presence of Watteau and the rococo. *Et ego in Arcadia* has run its course in James's work.

## II

Balzac's *Comédie Humaine* offers many striking examples of the Arcadian mood which James knew well and admired. The early story, "Madame Firmiani" (1831), is not only a miniature version of *The Ambassadors* because of its plot (an uncle comes to Paris to save his nephew from a ruinous *femme du monde* only to discover she is an angel) but because it is presented by Balzac as a story to be read only in Arcadian mood. "Si vous pensez par hasard aux personnes chères que vous avez perdues; si vous êtes seul, s'il est nuit ou si le jour tombe, poursuivez la lecture de cette histoire; autrement, vous jetteriez le livre ici."<sup>11</sup> At the end, the uncle, Monsieur de Bourbonne, realizes that even though "j'ai aussi aimé, *et ego in Arcadia*," he had only been *making* love, not loving. "Autrefois nous faisions l'amour, aujourd'hui vous aimez."<sup>12</sup> Like Strether, he realizes that the young couple are experiencing something he has missed. There is sadness for himself in the witnessing of their joy. I have already cited James's borrowings from *Les Paysans* for *The Europeans* and his high opinion of the work. The Arcadianism of the Balzac novel is all pervasive. The beautiful chateau, Les Aigues, furnished in the pre-revolutionary era, is coveted and finally destroyed by a bunch of grasping peasants and local *intriguants*. Balzac consciously summons up all the paraphernalia of

11. Honoré de Balzac, *La Comédie Humaine: Madame Firmiani* (Paris: Conrad, 1912), p. 356.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 376.

Arcadia ("L'Arcadie est en Bourgoyne et non en Grèce, L'Arcadie est aux Aigues et non ailleurs!" [P, p. 10]). Chapter two is called "Une bucolique oubliée par Virgile," in which a peasant cheats the visiting writer who is dazzled by "Mon Arcadie." Chapter ten is called "Mélancolie d'une femme heureuse," showing how aware Balzac was of the dissonance between the idyllic place and the destructive aims of the peasants. In this chapter even Poussin's painting, *Et in Arcadia Ego* is cited: "Quand Le Poussin . . . a fait du paysage un accessoire dans ses 'Bergers d'Arcadie,' il avait bien deviné que l'homme devient petit et misérable, lorsque dans une toile la nature est la principal" (P, p. 184). Now melancholic forebodings experienced in Arcady culminate in the Curé's question: "expliquez donc comment, au milieu des félicités parfaites, l'homme est toujours saisi de pressentiments vagues mais sinistres? . . ." (P, p. 187).

"La Grenadière" is cited as a masterpiece in 1875 by James, and admired in 1876 as a miraculous work written in a "single night,"<sup>13</sup> and he refers in 1902 to how the "enchancing aspects involved . . . made them almost by themselves a living subject."<sup>14</sup> It is not surprising that this tale should be revisited by him just when he was writing *The Wings of the Dove*, for the theme is similar. Lady Brandon as Mme. Willemssens rents the beautiful house in the Touraine countryside to secure for her illegitimate children a future and simply to die in an Arcadian environment. The fertile landscape and her gradual death constitute the entire story. As Lady Brandon buries herself in her beautiful house, so Milly buries herself in her "temple of art" in Venice.

Although there are countless other passages illustrating the Arcadian mode in Balzac's tales, especially in *Une Femme de Trente Ans*, I feel I am justified in thinking that the three stories just analyzed have contributed most to this strain. James made his debt to Balzac abundantly clear. "If a work of imagination, of fiction, interests me at all . . . I always want to write it over in my own way."<sup>15</sup> It is very likely, especially at the turn of the century when he has had a "renewal of intimacy and . . . loyalty"<sup>16</sup> to Balzac that any handling of the Arcadian theme would be unthinkable for him without consulting, either consciously or unconsciously, his store of memories of Balzac's striking exhibitions of that mode. Without the mass of evidential data that Balzac uses, James achieves the "sad tranquility" better than his master. His invention of a perceiving consciousness reproduces the Virgilian poetic commentary only equaled by Poussin, and perhaps Proust.

The other source that fed his imagination was, of course, Watteau, and James was in the vanguard of appreciators when his remarks in the 1873 review of the Wallace Collection preceded Edmond de Goncourt's

13. Henry James, *French Poets and Novelists* (London, 1878), p. 169.

14. *Notes on Novelists*, p. 120.

15. *The Letters of Henry James*, ed. Percy Lubbock (New York, 1920), I, 396.

16. *Notes on Novelists*, p. 109.

catalogue raisonnée of Watteau and the de Goncourt brothers' *L' Art de Dixhuitième Siècle* by two years. For these were the books that launched the modern taste for Watteau, and expressed the appreciation of the melancholic mood behind the pleasure; "L'amour qui songe et qui pense, l'amour moderne, avec ses aspirations et sa couronne de mélancolie." They saw the "lente et vogue harmonie . . . derrière les paroles rieuses. . . ." <sup>17</sup> James knew and read the de Goncourts. When James mentions Watteau in the *Portrait of a Lady* and *The Wings of the Dove* he summons up a penumbra of associations without going into details. In *The Ambassadors* he finds those details concretely alive in their survival in the life of pleasure of contemporary Paris, and invokes Watteau's world without needing to mention him. The *mobilier* of the rococo continues to furnish the garden party. Madame de Vionnet's apartment, the coupling and recoupling of characters, the depiction of pleasures about to be, or just having been, engaged in with the suggestion of tragedy projected "either into the future or the past," <sup>18</sup> are facets of Watteau's Arcadianism reappearing in *The Ambassadors*. James had a sense that Watteau's generation had experienced "something happy we have irretrievably missed," and from it he distilled his sense of the "high melancholy and sweet."

Proust continued the Arcadian strain and today Anthony Powell is the heir to the tradition. It is an interesting comment on the cycles of taste to note that once again a writer finds the emblematic expression of Arcadia in a painting. Although it hangs in the great repository of eighteenth century art in England, the Wallace Collection, it is not Watteau who now inspires Powell. It is once more Poussin, the great initiator of the mode, whose *Dance to the Music of Time* does for the mid-twentieth century what his companion piece *Et in Arcadia Ego* did for the end of the nineteenth.

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17. De Goncourt, pp. 13, 14.

18. Critics are agreed that Watteau's voyage, whether *to* or *from* Cytherea, is surely not *on* Cytherea.