Rising from the Ruins

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Roman Antiquities in Neoclassic Literature

By

Bruce C. Swaffield

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This entire work is dedicated to my wife, Jeannine, and our two children, BethAnn and Brendon. Each one of them sacrificed much through the years so that I could pursue my passion for writing and learning, especially about the ruins of Rome. In addition, I would like to thank my three grandchildren—Ellie, Lexi and Dom—for showing me the true spirit of life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD

JOHN PAUL RUSSO

The need to recover, both imaginatively and critically, the varied traditions of eighteenth-century English poetry and its offshoots has been an earnest motive in literary studies for the past century. The pioneering work of Elizabeth Manwaring, C.V. Deane, H.V.S. Ogden and Mary Ogden, and Robert Aubin and their many successors has now reached into nearly every corner of the field.[1] Other disciplines have contributed to this effort, often by scholars crossing disciplines, in art history, anthropology, archaeology, history, classics and cultural studies. As a result the poetry of ruins, a subgenre of topographical or "landscape poetry," has not enjoyed better circumstances for understanding and appreciation than at any other time since its original appearance. This happy situation is almost exactly the reverse of a hundred years ago when prejudice against neoclassical and even pre-Romantic poetry still dominated literary taste.

Roland Mortier has helped explain why the "poetics of ruins" spread across Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, often centered on Italian ruins or imitation Italian ruins.[2] As Bruce Swaffield shows in his elegant and comprehensive study of ruin poetry, the tradition actually begins with Du Bellay, though he too has antecedents. It was sustained for centuries, among other reasons, by the fact that Rome was the culmination of the Grand Tour. When in the nineteenth century tourism developed as an industry and Grand Tourists became just plain middle-class tourists, the fascination with classical ruins did not abate. On the contrary, it intersected with a rich complex of feelings associated with Italy that only intensified as industrial modernity swept all before it and threatened to sweep away almost everything behind it. Ruskin said, in praise of Italy, that "her name and her strength are dwelling with the pale nations

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[1] For a select bibliography see my "La poesia del Neoclassicismo al culto della sensibilità," in *Storia della civiltà letteraria inglese*, ed. Franco Marenco, vol. 2, *Il Settecento; il Romanticismo; il Vittorianismo* (Turin: UTET, 1996), pp. 117-19.

[2] Roland Mortier, *La poétique des ruines en France: Ses origines, ses variations de la Renaissance à Victor Hugo* (Geneva: Droz, 1974).

underneath the earth; the chief and chosen boast of her utmost pride is the *hic jacet*; she is but one wide sepulchre."[3] He crystallized his feelings with a line from Milton's *Il Penseroso*, two adjectives in the superlative degree, "Most musical, most melancholy" (1.542). Of deepest melancholy for Ruskin is the belief that the real Italy lies in its illustrious past, which is dead and can never be sufficiently mourned for. Yet its past stands forth eternally alive through the musical or aesthetic element that breathes life into its towns and cities, its art and culture, and its natural scenery—and, one should add, its ruins. In his earliest definition of the beautiful, "what is most musical will always be found most melancholy"; "there is no real beauty without a touch of sadness."[4] Who has not heard accents of this feeling in Richard Strauss's youthful tone poem *Aus Italien*, Rachmaninoff's *Isle of the Dead* (inspired by Böcklin's painting of the Italianate subject), or the orchestral work of Ottorino Respighi.

A ruin represents a balance and tension of opposing forces, notes Georg Simmel in his famous essay: the upward striving of the spirit and the downward-dragging force of nature. "The moment [the structure's] decay destroys the unity of the form, nature and spirit separate again and reveal their world-pervading original enmity—as if the artistic formation had only been an act of violence committed by the spirit to which the stone unwillingly submitted." Although victorious nature takes its revenge on spirit, the ruin nonetheless conveys a sense of peacefulness to the extent that the opposing forces "are working serenely together." Nor is a ruin merely half an arch, a broken wall, an interrupted aqueduct; Simmel even allowed for a dilapidated or inhabited building, something "often found in Italy off the main road." In such places, the impression of peace and aesthetic harmony is disturbed, not because "human beings destroy the work of man—this indeed is achieved by nature—but that men let it decay."[5] Either by choice or circumstance, people have not withstood the inevitable decline.

As Swaffield ranges across the field from Du Bellay, Spenser and John Dyer to T.H. Ormerod, Byron and Nicholas Michell, the significance of Ruskin and Simmel on the transcendent quality of the ruin is readily apparent. When, commenting on the poetry of Dyer (Wordsworth's

[3] *The Works of John Ruskin*, eds. E.T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, 39 vols. (London, 1903-1912), 1:19. Hereafter references to this edition are in the text and notes.
[4] Ibid., 1:18-19.
[5] Georg Simmel, "The Ruin," *Essays on Sociology, Philosophy, and Aesthetics*, ed. Kurt H. Wolff (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 260-61, 263: "Nature has transformed the work of art into material for her own expression, as she had previously served as material for art" (p. 262).

"skillful genius"), Swaffield speaks of the ruins as representing a "spiritual continuation of life because they, too, remained despite the years," he touches upon one of their aspects that is insufficiently recognized. In one passage from *The Ruins of Rome*, Dyer alludes to the sun imagery linked to Christ in Milton's *Lycidas:* "the rising Sun/Flames on the Ruins, in the purer air" (*The Ruins of Rome* 20-21). Johnson in his *Life of Dyer* praises a religious passage in that poem "as conceived with the mind of a poet": "The Pilgrim oft/At dead of Night, 'mid his Oraison hears/Aghast the Voice of Time." Swaffield notes the religious imagery in George Keate's *Ancient and Modern Rome*, in William Whitehead's noble "Ode to the Tiber" which won him the Laureateship, in members of the Graveyard School, and minor poets in the later eighteenth century. In "Written at Ocriculum, in Italy" (1773), a work of genuine poetic feeling, the speaker is meditating upon the ruins when Wisdom appears to him and addresses the subject of human vanity. The moment recalls Boethius's *Consolations of Philosophy*. This anonymous poet was on the scene because the excavations at Otricoli, its modern name, were being carried on about the time the poem was being written. The famous head of Zeus Otricoli, now in the Vatican, was found there.

One of the pleasures of reading Swaffield is discovering gems of purest ray buried in the oceanic caves: Dyer's "Rushing from the woods, the spires/Seem from hence ascending fires!" or his "A little ruse, a little sway,/A sunbeam in a winter's day", or his "from yon blue Hills/Dim in the Clouds, the radiant Aqueducts/Turn their innumerable Arches o'er/The spacious Desert, bright'ning in the Sun"; Whitehead's "Fancy's retrospective eye"; William Parsons's "Constantius, on his car of gold/Forgot his triumph, to behold" (on arriving at Rome); Ormerod on the Colosseum, "the Moon's pale beam/Through rents of ruin cast its tranquil gleam!"; Thomson's "far-fam'd ruins . . . Proofs of a people, whose heroic aims/Soar'd far above the little selfish sphere/Of doubting modern life"; Addison's "And still I seem to tread on classic ground." Some lines have never lost their appeal, for example, a passage from Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* IV, much cited in the nineteenth century: "Oh Rome! My country! City of the soul!/The orphans of the heart must turn to thee,/Lone mother of dead empires." Margaret Fuller in her years in Rome in the late 1840s recalled these lines many times in her letters.[6]

[6] Cf. *Margaret Fuller: Transatlantic Crossings in a Revolutionary Age*, ed. Charles Capper and Cristina Giorcelli (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 2007).

PREFACE

The neoclassic tendency to write about the ruins of Rome was both an attempt to recapture the grandeur of the "golden age" of man as well as a lament for the passing of a great civilization. John Dyer, who wrote *The Ruins of Rome* in 1740, was largely responsible for the eighteenth-century revival of a unique subgenre of landscape poetry dealing with the ruins of the ancient world.

Few poems about the ruins had been written since *Antiquités de Rome* in 1558 by Joachim Du Bellay. Dyer was one of first neoclassic poets to return to the decaying stones of a past society as a source of poetic inspiration and imagination. As Du Bellay had done in *Antiquités de Rome*, Dyer regards the ruins from a nostalgic perspective. He views the relics as monuments of grandeur and greatness, but also of impending death and destruction.

While following most of the rules and standards of neoclassicism—that of imitating nature and giving pleasure to a reader—Dyer also includes his personal reactions and emotions in *The Ruins of Rome*. The work is composed from the position of a poet who serves as interpreter and translator of the subject, a primary characteristic of much "prospect" poetry in the eighteenth century. Numerous other writers quickly followed Dyer's example, including George Keate, William Whitehead and William Parsons.

The tendency by these poets to write about the ruins of Rome from a subjective point of view was one of the strongest themes in what Northrop Frye has called the "Age of Sensibility" (formerly known as "Pre-romanticism"). Although the renewed interest in Roman ruins continued well into the nineteenth century, influencing Romantic poets from Lord Byron to William Wordsworth, the evolution of this type of verse is a gradual process: it originated with Du Bellay's poem, continued through the influence of seventeenth-century paintings by Claude Lorrain and Salvator Rosa (not to mention the later art of Piranesi and Pannini), and reached maturity with the poetic interest in the imagination during the 1700s.

All of these factors, especially the tendency of poets to record their individual feelings and insights concerning the ruins, are the elements that proved to be instrumental in the eventual development of Romanticism.

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No work of any length, value or worth is accomplished by one person alone. This book is no exception, for it has been the combined influence and efforts of many individuals who have made this manuscript possible.

Special thanks are owed to Robert Casillo, Cristina Giorcelli, Andrea Mariani, Evelyn Mayerson, Gaetano Prampolini and John Paul Russo. Each one of these professors inspired me through their enthusiasm and knowledge; in short, they taught me how to enjoy and love great literature. I also would like to recognize Loretta, GianCarlo and Rose, who have shown me a Rome that I could never have discovered on my own. My appreciation as well to Stephanie Longo for her expert advice and editing.

Finally, sincere gratitude to the late Alberta Fabris Grube of the Università Ca'Foscari di Venezia. May the wonderful memories of her teaching, living and writing continue to touch the world throughout future generations.

CHAPTER ONE

RISING FROM THE RUINS

Writing during the late first century BC, Virgil praises the cities of his native Italy because *civ*ilization (*civis*: city) depends on thriving cities. He also sets them within a natural landscape:

> Mark too her cities, so many and so proud,
> Of mighty toil the achievement, town on town
> Up rugged precipices heaved and reared,
> And rivers undergliding ancient walls. (*Georgics* II)

Indeed, Italy's rivers (one or two excepted and those near Virgil's birthplace in Mantua) are not so "deep," but her walls were already ancient in Virgil's time. Roughly fifteen centuries later, with the ancient Empire in complete ruin, Joachim Du Bellay laments the tragic loss in *Antiquités de Rome*, which was translated by Edmund Spenser in 1591:

> The corpes of *Rome* in ashes is entombed,
> And her great spirite reioyned to the spirite
> Of this great masse, is in the same enwombed;
> But her braue writings, which her famous merite
> In spight of time, out of the dust doth reare,
> Doo make her Idole through the world appeare. (st. 5)

The splendor of Vigil's beloved Italy, especially Rome, may have long since faded from sight, but to Du Bellay it is not forgotten. As he casts his eyes over the crumbling ruins of ancient temples and palaces, his imagination rebuilds a city that once was alive and vital in the midst of the modern city now flourishing anew. Du Bellay sees beauty in the weathered and mossy ruins of the Forum of Caesar, the Forum Square, the Temple of the Deified Caesar, the Temple of Vesta, the House of the Vestal Virgins and the Temple of Divus Romulus. Longing to recreate and relive the distant past, the poet describes an ancient city whose spirit at least cannot die—a city too magnificent to be buried or overcome by the ravages of

time. The Eternal City lives on through its ruins which exert tremendous power over the imagination.

In many respects, Rome represents a neoclassic ideal. The images found in *Antiquités de Rome* anticipate and are "clearly evocative" of the Roman engravings of Piranesi some 200 years later (Satterthwaite 117). So, too, are the landscape paintings of Claude Lorrain, Salvator Rosa, Hubert Robert, Giovanni Pannini and others. Such unique treatment of the ruins really begins with Du Bellay, although his poem certainly was not the first work to deal with the sublime attraction of these decaying stones. There are numerous earlier writings, especially *Mirabilia urbis Romae*, a twelfth-century guidebook to the ruins, and the observations of the learned Poggio Bracciolini. But *Antiquités de Rome* is perhaps the poem most responsible for what was to follow in the eighteenth century when there was a renewed interest in ancient Rome by numerous British poets.

Following Du Bellay's poem, the interest in classical ruins increased dramatically. Just a few decades after Spenser's translation appeared, several artists began painting landscapes of various ancient edifices in and around the city of Rome. These painters were profoundly inspired by the magnificent and stately ruins, and each one depicted scenes of intense melancholy much like Du Bellay describes in his poem:

> Behold what wreake, what ruine, and what wast,
> And how that she, which with her mightie powre
> Tam'd all the world, hath tam'd herselfe at last,
> The pray of time, which all things doth deuowre.
> *Rome* now of *Rome* is th' onely funerall,
> And onely *Rome* of *Rome* hath victorie;
> Ne ought saue *Tyber* hastning to his fall
> Remaines of all: O worlds inconstancie. (st. 3)

Du Bellay writes about the "*Rome* now of *Rome*" because only the city's ruins are sufficiently great and grand enough to serve as a monument to the original. His concern here is not so much with the aesthetic appearance of the ruins as it is with the great civilization that is represented by the massive stones. He concentrates mostly on the passage of time and the sad realization that this society is gone forever.

Similarly, seventeenth-century painters like Claude and Rosa believed that Rome in ruins was "a symbol of a lost world" (Macaulay 4), one which could only be recalled through the use of the imagination. They, as Du Bellay, lamented the loss of ancient Rome. Each artist sought to show the complementary beauty between the ruins and the surrounding countryside through variations of tone and color, and also by accenting

spatial relationships between various objects. These artistic techniques, combined with the subject matter of crumbling artifacts of immense splendor, allowed the painters to create scenes that were pleasing and provocative, both beautiful and sublime.

Eventually, the landscape paintings became so popular throughout Europe that they even influenced many eighteenth-century poets who wrote about the same ruins. As Elizabeth Manwaring, Myra Reynolds, C.V. Deane, Kenneth Clark and many others have already pointed out, there is a definite relationship between seventeenth-century painters and eighteenth-century writers such as John Dyer, Lord George Lyttelton, George Keate, William Whitehead and William Parsons. The two groups of artists shared a common interest in their awe of the grandeur of Rome and their grief that a magnificent society had vanished.

Of all the neoclassic poets who wrote about the antiquities of Rome, Dyer was the most influenced by seventeenth-century landscape painting. Claude, Rosa and Jonathan Richardson seem to have had the greatest impact on Dyer's poetry. He studied under Richardson prior to publishing the later versions of *Grongar Hill* and it is probably this instruction that helped to develop his sensitivity to painting, color and aerial perspective.

Dyer is a graphic poet who composes a scene to allow viewers to see it as clearly as if they were looking at a landscape by a painter. Such a visual effect is seen vividly as Dyer describes the ruins from a distance:

> Ev'n yet Majestical: The solemn Scene
> Elates the soul, while now the rising Sun
> Flames on the Ruins, in the purer air
> Tow'ring aloft, upon the glitt'ring plain,
> Like broken Rocks, a vast circumference;
> Rent Palaces, crush'd Columns, rifted Moles,
> Fanes roll'd on Fanes, and Tombs on buried Tombs.
> (*The Ruins of Rome* 19-25)

Dyer's description contains impressive variety and immense depth, much like one would expect to see in a landscape by Claude. In these lines, we are asked to imagine the "Majestical" ruins and "vast circumference" as well as the minute detail of the "broken Rocks" and "crush'd Columns." The poet intends his words to stir the mind beyond what one might experience first-hand by looking at the actual scene. No doubt Dyer was familiar with the critical works of John Dryden, Alexander Pope and Joseph Addison, all of whom were captivated by the influence of words and phrases on a reader's imagination. In addition to other later writers, Dyer must have been aware of such powers of the imagination and wit

because his poem on the ruins of Rome is, in many respects, a practical example of what the literary critics defined as "pleasurable" or "agreeable" and "sublime." The influence of early neoclassical criticism, coupled with that of seventeenth-century landscape painting, had a profound effect on all eighteenth-century poetry, particularly ruin poetry with ancient Rome as the theme.

Dyer was the first European poet since Du Bellay to compose a poem that dealt exclusively with Rome's antiquities. Following his *The Ruins of Rome* in 1740, poets, artists and critics suddenly became more interested in the palpable impact of ruins on the imagination. Perhaps the most dramatic example is seen in the engravings of Piranesi, who is able to stir the imagination and intellect of a viewer. Miranda Harvey aptly observes that Piranesi's "etchings of imaginary views are a forerunner of . . . later eighteenth century Romanticism and its predilection for melodrama and elemental fear, coupled with a taste for 'picturesque' ruins of rustic, bucolic landscapes" (7). From Du Bellay to Piranesi, there is a logical and gradual development in ruin poetry. Not only does the interest in Roman ruins culminate in the late eighteenth century, but its popularity and importance prefigured much of what was to follow in the Romantic period.

What made poets such as Dyer, Lyttelton, Keate and Whitehead frequently resemble Romantic writers more than their neoclassical contemporaries was their keen interest in exploring their own feelings about classical ruins—in elaborating these emotions, and in confronting the threat and danger contained in them. Imposing ruins pose a challenge to moderns in the way the ancients did: there was a touching hope that if you could capture the essence of their spirit you might build or write something that approached them, or even surpassed them, in greatness.

Nearly all of the poets who wrote about Rome adhered to the rules and standards of neoclassicism—the imitation of nature, the value of tradition, the use of poetry to offer instruction and pleasure to a reader—but they added another dimension. In their poems they included personal reactions and feelings towards the ruins, thus expanding the role of the individual poet-narrator and the subjective experience. This group of poets turned from the neoclassic tradition, choosing instead to emphasize the importance of the poet as an interpreter and translator of a certain subject. Unlike their contemporaries, they were more concerned with how they felt about the ruins than in how these stones looked or even the stories they told. Dyer, for example, appreciated the immense beauty of the ruins. Still, he was unable to suppress the feelings of ambivalence that he had toward them.

In the crumbling walls and columns, Dyer saw numerous contrasts: the splendor and the horrors of the Roman Empire; the success which helped both to build and to destroy an entire civilization; the "golden age" of classical Rome compared to the "dark age" of Catholicism and modern Roman society; and the constancy and permanence of nature compared to the brief, mortal life of man. Such expressions of personal thought and insight are characteristic of Romantic poetry, and it is interesting to note that the neoclassic poems about the ruins of Rome contain similar subjective attitudes.

Another element of the "Age of Sensibility" which is found in this subgenre of poems is that the poets viewed ancient Rome as representing an ideal, a world that somehow transcended time. These poets were searching for peace, tranquility and lasting values, all the qualities of life which they felt their age did not afford. They understood that the passage of time had nearly erased every vestige of the past; all that remained were fragmented ruins, the physical symbols of a culture which was gone but one that could not die. Yet while ancient Rome had nearly vanished, its spirit remained. Interestingly, this *ubi sunt* theme—which reflects on the fate of earlier generations—is found throughout Dyer's *The Ruins of Rome* though the work was written and published before the "graveyard poems" of Robert Blair, Edward Young, Thomas Gray and James Hervey. Dyer, however, was not as somber and gloomy as the graveyard poets who, anticipating the foreboding concern for death (characteristic of the critics of the "sublime"), show a marked interest over loss of the self in death.

Ruin poets like Dyer looked beyond the grave and were able to see the living traces of an entire civilization even though its people were dead, buried beneath the same stones that once were so much a part of their daily activities. The ruins now represented a spiritual continuation of life because they, too, remained despite the years. Like the Romantic poets, the neoclassical writers stressed the importance of time in terms of past, present and future.

The attention to time and the subjective attitude of the poet, along with the keen ability to interpret the subject, are strong romantic notions which are characteristic of nearly all neoclassic poems dealing with the ruins of Rome. The significance of these types of poems has been vastly overlooked by most critics. Few scholars, if any, have ever considered the influence this subgenre has had on Romanticism. The importance of such a study is long overdue, for many of the primary elements that eventually lead toward Romanticism find their ontogenesis in eighteenth-century ruin poems. By understanding why certain neoclassical poets chose to meditate on the ruins of Rome, one can gain a better insight into the overall

development of Romanticism. It is a progression that begins with Petrarch, increases through Du Bellay's *Antiquités de Rome*, continues with seventeenth-century landscape painting and the philosophical awareness of the imagination, finally reaching fruition in the neoclassical ruin poems of Dyer, Keate, Whitehead and more than a dozen others who had come to Rome in search of understanding and meaning. Not only did they want to see what remained, but they also wanted to feel the loss for themselves.

CHAPTER TWO

ANCIENT ROME: PERSPECTIVES AND PERCEPTIONS

For centuries Rome has been a subject of great mediation and curiosity among writers, poets, tourists, architects and archeologists. As far back as the fourth century, guidebooks were published to help Christian pilgrims find various religious sites and churches. By the twelfth century, people were visiting the city to see the ancient ruins. Many of them would have been familiar with the *Mirabilia urbis Romae (The Marvels of Rome)*, which included descriptions, legends and topography of the city. What a visitor to Rome would have seen then is considerably more that what one would see today. Unfortunately, there are few extant descriptions of the ruins as they appeared to early travelers, long before many of the old buildings fell victim to the effects of time and man. According to Edward Gibbon, many monuments and edifices were still intact in the ninth century, perhaps even later, and it was not until the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries when "the principles of destruction acted with vigorous and increasing energy" (1440). By the time of Pope Eugenius IV (1431-1447), much of Rome's ancient grandeur had faded considerably, while massive building programs in other parts of the city continued to flourish. Viewing what then remained of the old heart of Rome, Poggio, who was attached to Eugenius' court, describes the desolation and decay he observed from the Capitoline Hill:

> The hill of the Capitol, on which we sit, was formerly the head of the Roman empire, the citadel of the earth, the terror of kings; illustrated by the footsteps of so many triumphs, enriched with the spoils and tributes of so many nations. This spectacle of the world, how is it fallen! how changed! how defaced! the path of victory is obliterated by vines, and the benches of the senators are concealed by a dunghill. . . . The forum of the Roman people, where they assembled to enact their laws and elect their magistrates, is now enclosed for the cultivation of pot-herbs, or thrown open to the reception of swine and buffaloes. The public and private edifices, that were found for eternity, lie prostrate, naked, and broken, like the limbs of a mighty giant; and the ruin is the more visible, from the

> stupendous relics that have survived the injuries of time and fortune.[1] (Gibbon 1438-1439)

Poggio explains that over the centuries the two principal factors which have been responsible for the destruction of the ancient buildings are earthquakes and vandalism. In fact, an earthquake in 1348 or 1349 partially destroyed the western side of the Colosseum and soon afterward the great structure began to be used as a quarry (Burckhardt 184). Some of the stones had been burned to lime, while others were used to erect new buildings. Much of the travertine seen today in St. Peter's Basilica actually came from the ancient Colosseum (MacKendrick 230).

Because of all the plundering that has occurred through the years, and the fact that newer buildings were usually erected on top of the ruins of an older one, the modern visitor is only able to imagine the true beauty of ancient Rome. Even with the help of artistic projections and archeological explorations, it is difficult to envision a city of such proportions and extravagance. What remains of the Colosseum, the Flavian Amphitheatre as it was originally known, gives us an idea of the size of some of the past temples and palaces in what is known today as the Roman Forum. This entire area—encompassing the fora of Vespasian, Nerva, Augustus, Trajan and Julius Caesar—attracted the attention of poets and writers of the Renaissance as well as the eighteenth century.

Before examining why these artists chose to use the ruins of Rome as a subject for their work, it is necessary to understand the condition of the ruins in both literary periods. Poggio, writing in the fifteenth century, describes much more than Du Bellay would have seen even a century later when he wrote *Antiquités de Rome*.[2] No doubt much less was left two centuries later—following the Renaissance during which many of the old buildings were used to build new structures—when poets like Dyer,

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[1] The tone and organization of this passage echoes Virgil's description in *The Aeneid*, Book II, beginning with line 274: *ei mihi, qualis erat! quantum mutatus ab illo/Hectore, qui redit exuvias indutus Achilli/vel Danaum Phrygios iaculatus puppibus ignis!* (Ah me! What aspect was his! How changed from that Hector who returns after donning the spoils of Achilles or hurling on Danaan ships the Phrygian fires!). Translated by H. Rushton Fairclough in *Virgil* (Harvard, 1965). I also am indebted to James E. Wellington's article, "Pope's 'Alas! How Chang'd'" (*The Carrell*, December 1966), which discusses numerous translations and variations of the above verses.

[2] See Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1439-1440) for a detailed accounting of what Poggio saw and recorded. Gibbon compares Poggio's images to that of a ninth-century pilgrim who mentions several buildings that had disappeared by the thirteenth century.

Lyttelton, Keate, Whitehead, Addison and James Thomson began writing about the ruins. Despite the great fascination in the ruins among eighteenth-century tourists and writers, there are surprisingly few physical descriptions recorded during this period. One of the extant accounts is *A Picture of Italy* (1791) by W. De Archenholtz and translated by Joseph Trapp. Writing in the height of the traditional Grand Tour, De Archenholtz describes the ruins of the Colosseum along with other edifices as they appeared in the late eighteenth century:

> In spite of the great care taken not to touch the ruins of the great Coliseum, which has been done formerly, it falls by degrees under the power of time; huge masses of stone detach themselves from it and roll upon each other; as there are everywhere wide breaches between, and there is no cement to keep them together, it may naturally be supposed, that in a few centuries more [than] nothing of the upper part will be left: but the lower, with its enormous vaults, is made for eternity, and will surely outlast all the ruins of Rome. . . . Of the broken stones of this gigantic work, the palace of Farnese, St. Mark's, and the chancery have been erected. Its amphitheatrical ruins are now held sacred, as so many Christians suffered martyrdom in them. Altars have been erected within, before which some devout souls are always praying, in order to obtain the indulgences annexed to those acts of devotion.[3] (183-184)

The triumphal arches of Titus, Constantine and Severus, all of which were in good condition during the time of Poggio, now were suffering from the decay of time and human neglect. The Arch of Titus, for example, was "most shockingly mutilated" (De Archenholtz 184); the Arch of Constantine had eight fine statues without heads" (185); and the Arch of Severus was "half covered with earth" (188). What remained of the other structures in the eighteenth century also was less than what existed three centuries earlier.

> Rome is admirable only in part. Several of the most splendid edifices stand in corners, where they can have no effect, and are, above all, surrounded by mean objects. The pantheon, for instance, stands upon a little spot where the women roast fishes all day long and sell other provisions. The great place, called Navonna, which has the finest fountain in Italy, is mostly beset with indifferent houses, and serves the purpose of a rag fair. The splendid fountain of Trevi, with its opera scenes, lies quite concealed. The admirable stairs of *Trinita di Monte* are degraded by a mean church, to which they lead. The great church of Laterano, of which the pope himself

[3] The printer's *s* has been changed from the *f* which is used in the original text.

> is rector, is situate in the fields. Even St. Peter's has very bad avenues before one comes to the colonnade. (152)

By the time that De Archenholtz viewed the ruins of the numerous fora, many locations of the temples were barely discernable. He says that a "cattle-market" had been established where once stood the proud temples of Vesta, Castor and Pollux, Saturn, Vespasian, Venus and Rome, and Julius Caesar.

> The ancient Forum Romanus, or public market place, does indeed exhibit a sad spectacle. Among the huge ruins on all sides; we behold three columns which stand quite separate, and are looked upon as the finest in Italy: the place which was formerly filled with statues, and contained the rostrum of the Ciceros; the place where so many great occurrences happened, and where the people of Rome decided, during many centuries, the fate of all nations, is now degraded to a cattle-market. Here was the temple of concord, built by Camillus, the dictator; that of Saturn, in which the public treasures were kept; that of *Jupiter tonans*, or the thundering Jove; besides those of Antonine and Faustina: the front of the latter, which makes the entrance to a church, is still to be seen, with many other temples and public buildings. (187)

Despite the demise of all these glorious temples and palaces, artists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were able to see beyond the moss-covered stones and teetering columns; they imagined all the magnificence of the structures and how Rome must have appeared during the early years of the empire. So, too, they knew (for the most part) the historical significance of the buildings: roughly when each was built, during what period and why (see Appendix A). This knowledge was necessary to them, as well as to a reader, to point out the contrast between past and present.

In continuing to provide a graphic snapshot of Rome in the late 1700s, De Archenholtz highlights the enormous difference between what Rome was and what it had become. He revels in the glory of this once-great civilization and, at the same time, laments the loss.

> The Forum Traganum built by Apollodorus, the Greek architect, was, after the field of Mars, the most magnificent place of ancient Rome: upon it have been temples, colonnades, porticoes, quite covered with bronze, many marble and metal statues, besides the great equestrian statue of Trajan, his triumphal arch, the magnificent pilar, &c. This *tout ensemble* was so admirable, that when the emperor Constantius, son of Constantine the Great, came to Rome, he was so enraptured with the splendor of this city, especially with this forum, as to avow, that fame, which is in all things surpassed the thing itself, had not done justice to Rome. Nothing

> remains of the magnificence of this forum, except the majestic column, which stands upon a mean undignified spot, and whose high base lies buried under ground, so that one must go down many steps before one reaches its foot. What an immense elucidation of historical facts is to be found in this single monument! (178-179)

Only one "majestic column" now remained of this "most magnificent place." Gone forever were the "temples, colonnades, porticoes, . . . the great equestrian statue of Trajan" along with "his triumphal arch." Everything that made the city so grand was now marked by a "single monument," a solitary symbol representing the eternal spirit of Rome. How ironic, too, to appreciate this lonely structure "one must do down many steps" to reach the foundation that was buried beneath the ground.

Writers and poets were equally inspired by the panorama of ruins throughout other parts of the city as well. For De Archenholtz, one of the most impressive was the transformation of the area known as the *Campus Martius*.

> The ancient field of Mars . . . is at present quite beset with buildings, and makes the most populous part of modern Rome. There was, perhaps, never a finer place on earth than this; its enormous circumference was environed with the most magnificent buildings, whose scite [sic] was highly advantageous. The mausoleum of Augustus, and his two obelisks, the baths of Nero, the circus of Alexander Severus, the Pantheon, the baths of Adrian, the baths of Agrippa, the theatre of Pompey, with a Colossus near it, the circus of Flaminius, the theatre of Marcellus, the naumachia of Augustus, the column of Antonine, besides a great number of porticoes, fountains, temples, and palaces, graced this spot. (177-178)

This open area was once a natural floodplain running along the Tiber River. Through the years, one building after another was constructed; pasture and wheat fields gave way to elegant temples, "magnificent temples" and sprawling roads in every direction. Never was there "a finer place on earth than this." Centuries later, though, nature was reclaiming its dominance as these ancient relics were gradually overcome by weeds and undergrowth.

According to De Archenholtz, other structures were succumbing to neglect and decay. The triumphal arches of Titus, Constantine and Severus, were even partly covered by dirt and debris.

> Near the Coliseum is the triumphal arch of Titus, which looks now like the gate of some little walled town: it stands at the farthest corner of the ancient Roman Forum, stript of all its ornaments, and most shockingly mutilated. This splendid monument, in spite of its inscriptions, would be

> looked upon as a common thoroughfare, did not the excellent bas-reliefs of its inside engage one's attention. The ground is so elevated here that one may grasp the figures. . . . This arch has been shamefully neglected, whilst so many insignificant things are preserved with the greatest carefulness. . . . (184)
>
> Greater care has been taken of the arch of Constantine; they not only left untouched its own ornaments, but even stript that of Titus, to embellish the monument of the first christian emperor, which title has atoned for all his heinous crimes. . . . (185)
>
> The white marble triumphal arch of Septimus Severus . . . is half covered with earth; its great lateral arcades are entirely filled up with it, but, in other respects it has been tolerably well preserved. Here the people ascended the *Via Sacra*, or the holy way, which leads to the Capitol; but he that wishes to reach it now, must pass over a great sand-hill, and its principal avenue is at present from the opposite side. (188-189)

All of these sights confronted, and confounded, all those who came to Rome to see what had become of the greatest civilization in the world. They wanted to see for themselves what remained, no doubt hoping to observe and experience enough to imagine life during the "golden age" of the empire.

The neoclassical poets were not the first to contemplate the ruins, meditating on both the grandeur and the baseness of life in ancient Rome. But they were the first to look beyond the common lives of these people and see the civilization for what it could have been—not what it was. For the poets, Rome was an ideal. Despite the faults of its people or its culture, the ruins were monuments that attested to the brilliance of a society. Writers viewed the ruins, particularly the Colosseum, with wonder and awe which then gave rise to sublime insights into the past. There were several critical reasons, says James W. Johnson, why so many neoclassical poets looked to Rome's past for inspiration.

> Roman civilization was admired for its stability, its durability, its material prosperity and achievement, and its "strength." . . . Thus, to the classicist, Roman stability was due to the tripartite balanced government and a carefully codified legal system. Its durability was the result of a sensible and scrupulously observed constitution and carefully inculcated values. Roman prosperity was caused by solidly established agricultural practices and the regulation of monetary policy by the Senate. Its art and artifacts were the product of a national spirit of "genius" in part the result of climate. And Roman "strength" was synonymous with "public spirit" or "patriotism." (94)

Despite its faults and problems, Rome was indeed a great nation. From its

system of government to its interest in the arts to its "established agricultural practices" (at least in the beginning), the Roman Empire offered much to those who lived there.

The poets saw these unique qualities reflected in the ruins. As a result, they tended to overlook many of the less desirable aspects, such as the gladiatorial contests in the Colosseum and the "military dictatorship" of the Roman army:

> The importance of military dictatorship in Rome was ignored, and the standing armies that made Rome "strong" were anathema to the Briton. Roman "prosperity" was often the companion to usury and plutocracy, but the classicist's eyes were shut to that fact as they were to the system of slavery that underpinned the Roman economy. Furthermore, Roman polytheism and its part in stabilizing Mediterranean civilization were widely ignored by Neo-Classicists of Christian persuasion.
>
> This is not to say that English classicists glossed over the weakness of Rome in order to glorify it as the nonpareil of nations. They were well aware of the vicious and bloodthirsty aspects of Roman culture: the bestial hedonism of the "mob," the cynical demagogues, the famines and plagues, the civil wars. But many aspects of Roman culture they thought useful applied to English culture; and they adopted a theory of cultural causation which permitted them to find some factors relevant and others not. (Johnson 94-95)

For the most part, the neoclassicists recalled the more positive attributes of Roman civilization that influenced later generations and cultures throughout the world. In Rome, they saw order, stability and a deep regard for art, especially sculpture. These values were important to eighteenth-century poets because of the basic beliefs in the authority of the past. "The ruins of the ancients were the beginnings of poetic wisdom," says Margaret M. Fitzgerald (147), and most writers of this period sought insights from the past to help them write better, truer poetry. According to Henry A. Beers, the "respect for authority" was the classical influence which marked much of eighteenth-century poetry.

> Once more, the eighteenth century was classical in its respect for authority. It desired to put itself under discipline, to follow the rule, to discover a formula of correctness in all the arts, to set up a tribunal of taste and establish canons of composition, to maintain standards, copy models and patterns, comply with conventions, and chastise lawlessness. In a word, its spirit was academic. (47)

Neoclassical ruin poetry was all of this and more. These particular poets followed each one of the accepted conventions, but they added another

element that made their poetry highly distinctive. In writing about the ruins, they began to interpret what they saw and included these internal reactions and sensations in the poems. Addison, Lyttelton, Thomson, Dyer, Keate, Whitehead and Parsons all infused their poems on ruins with passionate, melancholic reflections of the ancient city. Their works embodied what was to mark the conventions of the Romantics in the next century. What captured their imagination, of course, was the ability of the ruins to withstand the effects of time and nature. The stones were the very artifacts of a society that was the center of the world. They viewed Rome as the seat and center of all civilization, and the crumbling edifices were reminders of this once great period. The grandeur of Rome was gone, but it was yet attainable through the poetic imagination.