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TAKI, Ryōsuke. The Subject of Poussin's *Landscape with a Man Pursued by a Snake* and its Source

Nicolas Poussin's landscape paintings often contain subject matter rather alien to the genre's traditional vocabulary. His obsession with the motif of unexpected encounters with a snake in idyllic settings is particularly perplexing. *Landscape with a Man Pursued by a Snake*, now in the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and originally painted in the late 1630s for the Roman patron Cassiano dal Pozzo or his younger brother Carlo Antonio, marks the first appearance of this recurrent motif in his landscapes. This article argues that the mysterious Montreal painting derives its subject from the allegorical figure of Danger (pericolo) in Cesare Ripa's renowned *Iconologia*, which is closely related to the famous aphorism from Virgil's third *Eclogue*: *latet anguis in herba* (there is a snake hiding in the grass). According to Ripa, the image of a young man attacked by a snake is a reminder to remain vigilant, prudent, and moderate, even during one's heyday, in preparation for the inevitable reversal of fortune. It must have offered a most fascinating source of inspiration for Poussin, who was most likely influenced by stoicism and searched for remedies for the whims of fate.

In fact, nearly ten years after creating the Montreal canvas, Poussin wrote a letter expressing his desire to produce a series of paintings to represent tricks of Fortune inflicted upon the unsuspecting humanity. In the artist's words, they were to "recall men to the consideration of the virtue and wisdom one must acquire in order to remain firm and immobile against the efforts of this blind madwoman." It was probably no coincidence that around the same year he produced *Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake*, another enigmatic painting featuring the fatal encounter with a snake in a most placid setting. This painting may safely be considered as a further refinement of the Montreal painting, with a more elaborate spatial organisation and more logical expression of human passion. In a similar vein, *Landscape with Orpheus and Eurydice* as well as *Rape of Europa*, both painted during the same period, can be seen as a recasting of the moral of Danger in mythological terms, with attention to the flowery meadows as a topos for transitory and precarious pleasure. The flower-picking girl being attacked by a snake featured not only in the *Orpheus* landscape, but also in *Rape of Europa* and was probably more than a mere figure of Eurydice. It probably represented the archetypal image of humanity as exposed to hidden dangers as a result of indulging in luxuries and pleasures.

Finally, it is interesting to note that Ripa's Danger allegory represents a thunderstorm besides the snake attack. If we follow Ripa's explanation, this is an indication of God's sovereignty over vicissitudes of human fate. In other words, the Danger allegory was also emblematic of human weakness and helplessness in the face of God's providence. Poussin may have been aware of these theological implications; immediately after *Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake*, he showed great interest in depicting people tossed about by inclement weather in the pendants *Landscape with a Calm* and *Landscape with a Storm*, as well as in *Landscape with Pyramus and Thisbe*. Accordingly, the results of this study could serve as a stepping stone for further research on Poussin's depiction of storms in general, including *Deluge* from his late *Four Seasons* series, wherein snakes appear under the flash of lightning.

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