

**CARAVAGGIO'S DRAMA: ART, THEATER, AND RELIGION DURING ITALY'S
"SPANISH AGE"**

by

Kathy Johnston-Keane

B.S. Art Education, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 1984

M.A. Art History, University of Pittsburgh, 2003

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This dissertation was presented

by

Kathy Johnston-Keane

It was defended on

March 19, 2010

and approved by

David G. Wilkins, Professor Emeritus, Dept. of the History of Art and Architecture

Kathleen Christian, Assistant Professor, Dept. of the History of Art and Architecture

H. Anne Weis, Associate Professor, Dept. of the History of Art and Architecture

Francesca Savioa, Associate Professor, Dept. of French and Italian Languages and Literature

Attilio Favorini, Professor, Dept. Theatre Arts

Dissertation Advisor:

Ann Sutherland Harris, Professor, Dept. of the History of Art and Architecture

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Kathy Johnston-Keane, PhD

University of Pittsburgh, 2010

Scholars often describe Caravaggio's paintings as inspired by scenes from quotidian life. A few see his work as influenced by popular dramas such as the *commedia dell'arte*. While one might think these are conflicting explanations, close examination shows that a wide variety of popular dramatic forms was as much part of daily life as daily life was part of popular drama. Caravaggio's "theatricality" is the careful depiction of quotidian life, expressed through the familiar language of popular dramatic forms, a sort of "visual vernacular" known to all classes. Caravaggio appropriated specific elements both found in a wide variety of popular theatrical media and recommended in treatises on oration, preaching, Jesuit spiritual exercises, and memory models, because they were proven to engage the emotions and make imagery memorable. Caravaggio went against painterly tradition and filled his shallow pictorial spaces with sharp side-lighting, deep shadow, and personages based on everyday life to make his paintings distinctive and to bolster his reputation among the general public, who was fascinated with dramatic entertainment. In Spanish Lombardy, Caravaggio saw public spectacles hosted by Spanish officials; the *Entierro*, a torch-lit procession with live actors and painted statuary; stage-like Sacro Monte chapels filled with polychrome statuary; and action packed and often violent illustrations from epics such as the vastly popular *Orlando Furioso*, which was frequently represented in street theater. In Rome, he frequently saw secular and religious street dramas and associated with elites, such as Cardinal del Monte and the Colonna family, who used various

forms of popular theater to enhance their reputations. In southern Italy, Caravaggio looked to Italian/Spanish hybrids of local drama, travelling *commedia dell'arte* troupes, local and Iberian drama and literature, and the Neapolitan *presepe* for inspiration. In the south, he transformed his polished Roman painting style into one with rough, brushwork, dark palette, somber mood, and deep psychological complexity, reflecting the current writings of the Spanish mystics, local dramatists and memory scholars. Thus, the artist's work serves as a lens that focuses, with illuminating intensity, on the wide range of dramatic forms found in Spanish Italy that were common sights in daily life.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Caravaggio (Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio 1571 - 1610) has been praised and criticized for rejecting traditional painting methods in favor of a dramatic, stark realism that derived its subject matter from daily life.¹ The people populating his works often seem to have been pulled from the streets and placed in a small, stage-like space in which a strong beam of light—like a spotlight—illuminates the scene. Although these city-dwellers were easily found in the *mercato* or *piazza*, they were also found on the stages of the traveling acting troupes performing in the same public spaces. Theater was as much part of Caravaggio's world as was the young dandy in a plumed hat, a gypsy girl telling fortunes, or a rough-faced farmer tending to his horse. As drama had become part of daily life, Caravaggio chose not to paint urban life directly as he encountered it,

¹ Early biographers Giovanni Baglioni and Giovanni Pietro Bellori both write about the artist's choice of copying from life rather than studying master works. Bellori's famous account of Caravaggio pulling a gypsy girl from the street for his *Gypsy Fortune-Teller* has been frequently cited by scholars discussing the artist's naturalism. It is debatable whether this event really happened. It may have been a fictional story dreamed up by Bellori to promote his much-loved classicism and use Caravaggio and his tragic life as a negative example of the dangers of naturalism, especially one that relied on depicting Rome's low-life citizens. For seventeenth-century historians see: Giovanni Baglione. *Le vite de' pittori, scultori et architetti. Dal pontificato di Gregorio XIII. del 1572. In fino a' tempi di Papa Urbano Ottavo nel 1642. Scritte da Gio. Baglione Romano e dedicate all' eminentissimo, e reverendissimo principe Girolamo Card. Colonna* (Roma: Stamperia d' Andrea Fei, 1642[original]). Giovanni Baglione, *Le vite de' pittori scultori et architetti : dal pontificato di Gregorio XIII fino a tutto quello d'Urbano VIII* (Bologna : A. Forni, 1975-1976).

For contemporary authors focusing on Caravaggio's naturalism, see: John F. Moffitt, *Caravaggio in Context: Learned Naturalism and Renaissance Humanism*. (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland & Company, 2004); John Varriano, *Caravaggio: the Art of Realism*. (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006); Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Painters of Reality: The Legacy of Leonardo and Caravaggio in Lombardy*. Andrea Bayer, ed. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004); Maurizio Calvese. *La realtà del Caravaggio* (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1990).

but rather translated scenes from his quotidian existence into images using the dramatic visual language of the theater.

Due to frequent mention of Caravaggio's "theatricality" in art historiography, my initial aim was to go beyond these vague metaphors regarding his "dramatic" and "theatrical" art.² Instead, I focus on the influence of dramatic media on the painter's oeuvre, specifically, his appropriation of such particular theatrical forms as bold side lighting, stock characters, shallow pictorial space, and representations of violent action. As popular street theater was accessible to all, Caravaggio could have seen a variety of theatrical entertainments. He could have watched performances such as the *Entierro* and *Sacra Rappresentazione*, which were sponsored by the Catholic Church to engage the masses; the frozen dramas of the *Sacro Monte* complexes of northern Italy, where sculpted "actors" enact biblical narrative within theater-like chapels; the masquerade balls and plays hosted by private citizens to display their wealth and sophistication; and street parades and public spectacles sponsored by Spanish officials in Iberian-controlled territories to demonstrate political power. Beyond the many official theatrical events, there would have been innumerable popular dramas performed in the streets and piazzas by travelling actors such as those enacting scenes from famous literature or improvisational scenarios performed *commedia dell'arte* troupes.

I would propose that Caravaggio, having seen theatrical performances, would have appropriated specific elements (sharp side-lighting, dark backgrounds, shallow pictorial space, stock characters, graphic depictions of violence, and psychological tension) from various forms of popular dramatic media. He did this, I argue, because these theatrical elements emotionally

² For a recent interpretation of Caravaggio's work by a filmmaker, see: Pierpaolo Venier, *Caravaggio drammaturgo: Lettura teatrale dell'opera pittorica*, ed. Fernando Noris (Azzano San Paolo: Bolis Edizioni, 2009).

engaged viewers of all classes and made his paintings appeal to a broad audience. To pursue this hypothesis, I explore the variety of popular entertainments that the artist must have seen as he traveled southward through Italy and I will illustrate the regional differences that existed, assessing the degree to which these regional entertainments influenced Caravaggio's artistic practices over the course of his career. My intent is to give the reader a clearer picture of the ways in which art, theater, and religion shaped Caravaggio's world.

More broadly, I will examine facets of early modern culture that can be seen as "theatrical" in nature, such as literature, theatrical practice, and popular religious devotion. Through my examination of Caravaggio's oeuvre and these early modern dramatic forms, I have found a number of correspondences between popular theater and various aspects of Baroque culture, including not only the paintings of Caravaggio but also the visual arts, literature, religious devotions, and early memory theory. In fact, there was a ubiquitous presence of popular theatrical forms in Baroque culture. Based on contemporary descriptions of these performances and the public's reception of popular drama, I assert that Caravaggio's appropriation of dramatic conventions was a direct response to theater's popularity with the masses. For the artist, writer, or preacher who wanted to capture the attention of the public, appropriating elements that had already proven to engage the public emotionally was the most efficient means to attain their goal. Thus, the theater served as the perfect model for artists, authors, educators, and preachers, and this interest explains why scholars have often noted the "dramatic" nature of the Baroque Age.

While the general stereotypical characteristics of the "Theatrical Baroque" are an apt description of the swirling compositions of Rubens' paintings, the undulating curves of Borromini's architecture, and perhaps even the polyphony of Palestrina, Tomas Luis de Victoria, and J. S. Bach, there are direct links between the paintings of Caravaggio and early modern

theater, a similarity that goes beyond drawing vague comparisons with drama and that links the artist's work with specific theatrical practices. Caravaggio's paintings possess characteristics derived from particular forms of drama that were easily accessible to the artist, such as religious processional dramas, popular secular theater, *commedia dell'arte*, and theatrically-inspired sculpture groups.

While one might think that popular theater was an almost universal phenomenon, there were distinct regional forms. The theatrical sources from which Caravaggio derived his inspiration changed as he traveled. To describe more accurately the dramatic world to which this artist was exposed, I explore the variety of popular entertainments that the artist would have seen as he traveled southward through Italy, will illustrate the regional differences that existed, and will assess the degree to which these regional entertainments influenced Caravaggio's artistic practices over the course of his career. I will trace Caravaggio's footsteps as he made his way south from Milan to start his painting career Rome and later, as he moved through southern Italy as a fugitive from papal authorities.

Caravaggio was born in northern Italy and traveled as far south as Sicily and to Malta. Italy at this time was not a unified nation, but a loose collection of territories, republics, and city-states—each with distinct cultures. If the artist did draw from quotidian urban life—its common citizens, public devotions, and entertainments—as *seicento* and modern art historians reported—then these cultural differences should be evident in the paintings he executed while living in those regions. Another influence on Caravaggio may have been Spain, a nation which controlled over half the peninsula during the “*età spagnola*” (Spanish Age) and played a significant role in shaping *cinquecento* and *seicento* Italian culture. Caravaggio was born in a Spanish territory, Lombardy, and was a subject of the Spanish Crown. He was able to travel freely within Iberian-

controlled regions and had frequent exposure to their literature, drama, and spirituality. I posit that the artist's selective appropriation of Spanish culture helped set his work apart from those who chose to ignore the quotidian world around them, looking to traditional models—the great Italian masters—for inspiration. The exchange between Spain and Italy can be found in many facets of culture, including theater, literature, costume, religion, and even language.³ Thus, I take a new approach to Caravaggio by investigating the cultural exchange between the Spanish living in the Iberian-controlled regions of peninsula and the native Italians. After reconstructing the extent to which the Spanish influenced Italian culture during the *cinque-* and *seicento*, I describe the correspondences between elements of Spanish theater and Caravaggio's bold painting style.

Because Caravaggio looked to his surroundings for artistic inspiration, I focus on the literary forms and theatrical conventions particular to regions that Caravaggio visited and investigate the various cultural forces that shaped the painting and theatrical traditions in these areas. In this introductory chapter, I provide a general overview of early modern theater and discuss lighting and spatial conventions in popular drama. I also discuss biases and inaccuracies that need to be corrected to understand more clearly Caravaggio's art and the broader culture in which he lived. Although recent scholarship alludes to parallels between Caravaggio's art and Baroque theater, my research goes beyond vague metaphors and general references to “theatricality” by citing actual forms and techniques used in theatrical practice and by analyzing excerpts from contemporary dramatic literature.

³ Benedetto Croce. *La Spagna nella vita italiana durante la rinascenza*, 2nd ed. (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1922).

1.1 GENERAL HISTORY OF POPULAR THEATER

To establish links between Caravaggio's work and specific forms of popular theater, I first present some background on theatrical practice. Between 1350 and 1550 the medieval vernacular theater reached its peak in popularity.⁴ This rise in the popularity of secular theater is due in part to the prohibition of liturgical theater, a common venue for religious performances since the middle ages. The removal of theatrical performance from churches was made official during the Council of Trent (1545-63).⁵ Although churches were officially forbidden to host dramas, these interdicts were frequently ignored.⁶ Many performances were sponsored by groups as diverse as Jesuit colleges, religious confraternities, and craftsman's guilds.⁷ The loss of liturgical drama coincided with the rise of the Italian *commedia dell'arte*, first documented in 1545.⁸ By 1600, *commedia dell'arte* had spread throughout Europe; it continued to be popular until the eighteenth century.⁹ Theater was not suppressed, but was forced to find a new home in public spaces. Unlike the elaborate performances at Italian courts and *palazzi* that delighted their audiences with dazzling special effects, the simple stages of the popular theater such as the *commedia*

⁴ Oscar G. Brockett, *History of the Theatre*, eighth edition, with Franklin J. Hildy (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999), 93. Mendel Kohansky, *The Disreputable Profession: The Actor in Society* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1984), 39-40.

⁵ The Council forbade the singing of tropes, and the 1570 publication of the Roman Mass disallowed dramatic performance during liturgy Erika Fischer-Lichte, *History of European Drama and Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2002), 33-34.

⁶ The frequent use of theater by the Jesuits and their theatrical scenery for the Quarantore devotions attest to the lack of enforcement of the Council's prohibition of theater. On Jesuit theater, see: Per Bjurström, "Baroque Theater and the Jesuits" in *Baroque Art: The Jesuit Contribution*, eds., Rudolf Wittkower and Irma Jaffe (New York: Fordham University Press, 1972), 99-110.

⁷ Brockett, 95.

⁸ Siro Ferrone, *Commedie dell'Arte*, 1 (Milano: Mursia, 1985), 5.

⁹ Brockett, 143-144.

dell'arte and street processions focused on the interaction of the characters to engage their audiences.¹⁰

Because character relationships were primary in the popular theater, the sets for these dramas were modest compared with the sophisticated scenery of the Italian perspective stage.¹¹ During the feast-days of patron saints or the year-long festivities of the Jubilee Year, processional carts carrying *tableaux vivants* traveled the winding streets. The typical stage of the popular theater was a shallow, wooden platform resting on trestles with a simple curtain backdrop, usually of a solid color—most often a neutral tan, but could also be red or black. The backdrop could also be painted with a simple scene such as an arch, gate, or other architectural form to frame the scene.¹² If the play had a pastoral subject, then a bucolic scene could be painted on the cloth backdrop. Frequently, these popular dramas were performed outdoors during daylight hours, but occasionally there were nocturnal performances that employed artificial lighting.¹³ The actors of these dramas often were not highly trained, mere amateurs travelling with the charlatans who sold their wares in the *piazze*. The situations and characters of these amateur performances were based on those found in daily life.¹⁴

¹⁰Allardyce Nicoll, *The Development of the Theatre: A study of the Theatrical Art from the Beginnings to the Present Day* (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1927), 105. Fischer-Lichte, 132.

¹¹ Fischer-Lichte, 132.

¹² George R. Kernodle, *From Art to Theatre: Form and Convention in the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1944), 154-162; Paul C. Castagno, *The Early Commedia dell'arte (1550-1621: The Mannerist Context)* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 59-60.

¹³ Fredrick Penzel, *Theatre Lighting before Electricity* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1978), 3.

¹⁴ Fischer-Lichte, 132.

1.2 THEATRICAL ELEMENTS IN CARAVAGGIO'S WORK

I explore particular features of these popular dramas, including their use of bright side-lighting, shallow performance space, simple architectural forms or curtains as backdrops, illogical juxtaposition of historical and contemporary characters, stock characters portraying events from everyday life, the reversal of the social hierarchy by portraying the lower classes in prominent roles, and the artistic autonomy of the actors.¹⁵ I will examine each of these characteristics, describing the use of similar features in Caravaggio's paintings. To link specific components of Caravaggio's imagery to specific elements of theater and literature, I will define and describe the specific dramatic forms that I will use in my analysis.

1.2.1 Sharp Side-Lighting

Caravaggio is famous for his dramatic *chiaroscuro*—a style of lighting that could easily be compared to the modern theatrical “spotlight”—as seen in his early *Saint Catherine* (1597/8) and his late *David with the Head of Goliath* (1609/10). [Figs. 1 & 2]¹⁶ The intense illumination does not radiate from a natural source but seems amplified and directed by artificial means. This strong side-lighting enhances the three-dimensional qualities of the scene and heightens the emotional impact of the narrative event. In Caravaggio's religious paintings, this light may have represented the presence of the Divine.¹⁷ Yet, for all of its symbolism, this light is not painted abstractly, as were the decorative gilded lines emanating from the head of a Botticelli Madonna.

¹⁵Kohansky, 40-45.

¹⁶ The author will provide a figure list and images upon request.

¹⁷ John Varriano, “Caravaggio and Religion,” in *Saints & Sinners: Caravaggio & the Baroque Image*, Franco Mormando, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 200.

Although Caravaggio paints the effects of this sacred illumination naturalistically, his light is manipulated to achieve a specific emotional effect—as was the stage lighting of the theater of his day.

Since the medieval era, light effects played a prominent role in the liturgical dramas, for light was used symbolically as a sign of God’s presence or to represent heaven.¹⁸ During the Renaissance, the use of light effects in church dramas continued to be popular. Set designers, eager to dazzle the audience, developed improved techniques to create these spectacular displays. As early as the fifteenth century, complicated machinery was designed to show heavenly beings in glorious, glowing splendor.¹⁹ Similarly, Caravaggio used bright beams of light to highlight the miraculous moments depicted in his many religious paintings and chose to illuminate scenes as if from an amplified, artificial source. His rays of light are not diffused, but intensified as if focused by a lens, in much the same way a mischievous child with a magnifying glass focuses sunlight to set paper ablaze. The chances for this type of light occurring naturally are rare, but in the world of theater, manipulating strong light to illuminate a scene from one side was common.²⁰ Caravaggio made no attempt to make this seem like a natural event; his choice of

¹⁸ “The God-light aesthetic so evident in the drama of Easter and Christmas derived from the fifth century, from Augustine and Dionysus the Pseudo-Areopagite. It developed in particular in France as early as the eighth century and reached a climax with the cathedral builders of the thirteenth century. The arrays of candles and lanterns that adorned the cloud- and paradise-constructions in fifteenth-century Florence and the Annunciation fire witnessed by the Bishop of Suzdal in that city constitute the most technically ambitious effects created specifically for the liturgical drama.” Dunbar Ogden, *The Staging of Drama in the Medieval Church* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002), 106-107. Also see: in Hibbard, 126.

¹⁹ One of the most elaborate machines was designed by the architect Filippo Brunelleschi for a representation of the Annunciation in S. Felice in Florence. This spectacular display hung twelve youths from the rafters in “paradise.” Lowered from the heavens was a copper, almond-shaped glory machine that contained the angel who speaks to Mary. The copper surface reflected light from the many candles and torches attached to the machine. These cloud and paradise machines were fitted with a multitude of lamps to captivate the audience with the miraculous light of God. Ogden, 106 – 107.

²⁰ Penzel, 3-13.

lighting style seems to have been an overt reference to a theatrical practice that everyone in the audience would have known.

Until the early Renaissance, theater lighting for interior spaces was in the audience area (“the house”) to light both the seating area and the stage. The modern idea of dimming the house lights and illuminating only the stage area would appear later in the *seicento*. As was the tradition in ancient and medieval theater, early renaissance dramas were performed during the day and outdoors. Although open-air stages had no need for artificial light, lanterns and torches regularly appeared on stage as props used to suggest night scenes. During the winter, however, when the daylight hours were few, a torch-like “cresset” was needed for supplementary illumination.²¹ And when performances were located indoors, they were illuminated with normal household lighting—oil lamps, torches, or candles. By the middle of the sixteenth century, these few primitive forms of lighting were still all that was available.²²

In later centuries, we find many examples of manipulated light in theater, which was used to create dazzling special effects, to highlight the actors’ faces and scenery, and to heighten the emotional impact of the scene. Italy has been referred to as the birthplace of theatrical lighting effects.²³ We are fortunate to have some extant writings of prominent dramatists and set designers which reveal some of the techniques employed and describe the desired lighting effect used for the Renaissance and Baroque stage. Although much of the literature documents the

²¹ “...a variety of torch, fitted on the end with an open iron cage to hold burning material.” Penzel, 4.

²² “The oil lamp, with animal or vegetable fat in a metal or clay container and floating wick, had been used since prehistoric times, as had the torch, perhaps the oldest of the three. The candle developed somewhat later, though there is no way to be exact as to the date. Candles were generally made of tallow and were hand-dipped; the molded candle was not introduced until the eighteenth century.” *Ibid*, 3-4.

²³ Lighting theory was being expounded by artists and architects like Sebastiano Serlio (1475-1554) who lived in Venice, Leone di Somi [sic] (1527-1592) who worked in Mantua, Angelo Ingegneri (c.1550 - c.1613), Niccolo Sabbatini (c. 1574-1654) who worked in Pesaro, and Josef Furtenbach (1591-1667), a German who had studied in Italy. Penzel, 5.

lighting techniques used in the theater of the elite classes, these techniques were soon adapted for use on popular stages.

During the Renaissance and Baroque periods, the theater architect was in charge of lighting and scenery. One such stage designer, Sebastiano Serlio (1475-c.1553), wrote about theater construction and lighting techniques in his *Second Book of Architecture* (1545). In his treatise entitled “Of Artificial Lights for the Scene,” he discussed various lighting instruments, how to color stage lights, and proper ways to mount lamps and candles. By this time, candle chandeliers were the standard way of lighting large halls for an audience. In his treatise, Serlio gives the earliest known description of *bozze*, devices that would become essential for *seicento* artificial lighting displays. [Fig. 3] Penzel summarizes Serlio’s description of *bozze*, which were “made of glass, of special shapes with flat and rounded sides to hold water. . . . Besides holding colored water for effects, these *bozze*, when filled with oil, could be used as lamps. The addition of a small metal holder containing a wick completed this conversion.”²⁴ Examples of these primitive lighting instruments can still be seen at the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza (built 1584). Serlio describes how they were employed:

There is a special way of placing these containers for the translucent colors. At the back of the painted houses where the lamps are to go is fastened a thin board pierced to hold the lamps separate, and below it is another board to hold the glass containers. Then each of these *bozze* is placed with the curved part to the opening and made fast lest it be shaken down by the dancing. Behind every one is placed a lamp that the lights may all be even. The sides of the *bozze* toward the lamps should be flat or convex the better to receive and send out the light. In the same manner such lamps are to be put in the openings on the perspective faces. When you need an especially strong light you put a torch behind a glass and behind the torch a barber’s basin well burnished.²⁵

²⁴ Penzel, 5.

²⁵ Barnard Hewitt, ed., *Renaissance Stage: Documents of Serlio, Sabbattini and Furtenbach* (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami, 1958), 34.

Penzel noted the similarity between the basin, glass, and torch combination and the modern spotlight used today for stage performances. To color the light, Serlio stated that the water could be colored with translucent colors.²⁶ Although Serlio, as a stage architect, lit his stage sets “from behind and from a low angle in front,” theater lighting was not as it is today, for the chandeliers above the audience remained lit throughout the performance. While stage lighting was multi-directional, sets were painted with shadows suggesting that the light emanated from a single source on one side of the stage.²⁷ This painted side-lighting on Serlio’s sets is similar to that in Caravaggio’s paintings.

Another dramatist writing on theater practice was Leone de’ Sommi (c. 1525 - c. 1590). Born to born to Jewish parents living in Mantua, he was fortunate to be in Mantua during the apogee of its Renaissance cultural growth, a period of relative peace and prosperity for the Jewish community of Mantua. A member of the renowned Portaleone family, which had many famous doctors and scientists, De’ Sommi chose a literary career and authored around 15 plays, most of them written in Italian, as well as a comedy, written in Hebrew, *A Comedy of Betrothal*.²⁸ He became associated with the Gonzaga court and built a successful career and wrote a treatise on the theater entitled *Quattro dialoghi in material di rappresentazioni sceniche* (Four Dialogues on Scenic Representation, c. 1570). This was one of the earliest treatises on the

²⁶ “For blue, Serlio recommended a sal ammoniac and salt mixture, and to turn this to a green, saffron could be added. Wine produced red tints, and water was filtered through felt for “diamond.” Penzel, 6. Techniques for colored light effects were also used by Giorgio Vasari in a performance of *Talanta* in Venice, “...reflections of certain lamps filled with distilled water that glowed within them, produced an admirable light....well-made crystal globes a braccia [approx. 2 feet] high full of various shades of color, which because of a large lamp within that diaphanous body, made a very great light.” Giorgio Vasari, *Vasari on Theatre*, ed. and trans. Thomas A. Pallen (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 41-42.

²⁷ Penzel, 6.

²⁸ *A Comedy of Betrothal* (וישודיקד אתוהידב תוהצ) was the earliest surviving work of its kind in the Hebrew language.

art of stage direction, and Leone laid out a methodology of play production, from the selection of a text through its performance. This was written in the style of a conversation in which De' Sommi reveals many of his secrets for successful stage direction. In "The Fourth Dialogue," the main focus of which is stage lighting, De' Sommi describes how one manipulates lighting to achieve the appropriate mood:

. . . I remember once I had to produce a tragedy of this kind. During all the time when the episodes were happy in mood I had the stage brightly illuminated, but so soon as the first unhappy incident occurred – the unexpected death of a queen . . . I contrived (by prearrangement, of course) that at that instant most of the stage lights not used for the perspective were darkened or extinguished.²⁹

De' Sommi continued by explaining that it is much easier for the audience to see the action if the stage is lit with a strong light and the auditorium is left dark. For him, the darkness created a somber mood and allowed the viewer to focus on the action. This development takes us one step closer to Caravaggio's style of lighting. For the same reason as De' Sommi, Caravaggio probably chose to emulate the theater setting by using dark backgrounds and illuminating his actors with his signature spotlight effect.

De' Sommi described the manner in which the direction and focus of light can be controlled by the use of clear glass *bozze*. Like Serlio, he says that color could be added to the water for special effects.³⁰ Artificial lighting that employed colored liquids in glass vessels for sharply focused side-lighting is also documented in the Medici theater festivals in 1565 and 1566. Domenico Mellini described the lens-like focusing of the *bozze*:

²⁹ Jaco Guinsburg, "Leone de' Sommi: A Precursor of Modern Theatricality," from Ahuva Belkin, *Leone de' Sommi and the Performing Arts* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1997), 227.

³⁰ Leone de' Sommi, *Quattro dialoghi in material di rappresentazioni scheniche* (Milano: Edizioni Il Polifilo, 1968), 64.

...the lights inside were intensified by distilled water with the refracting function of a lens. Additional sources of illumination were provided by ten silvered figures supporting crystal bowls....each bowl was filled with colored water and lighted from behind.³¹

Note the language, “the refracting function of a lens,” reflecting the fascination for the newly discovered principles of the lens and optics during this period of history.

In 1598, a set designer named Angelo Ingegneri stressed the great importance of lighting from above using “tinsel reflectors” to “direct the beams” on the actors’ faces. This focused lighting:

...consists of hanging up a valance between the stage heavens and the roof auditorium.... On the inner side facing the stage it is to be fitted with many lighted lamps, having tinsel reflectors to direct the beams upon the actors. These lamps ought to be firmly fixed at the top and lit before being drawn up to the positions they are to occupy.³²

To emphasize the special side-lighting effects, he recommended that the house lights be darkened during the play. This controlled lighting was used both to emphasize the features of the actors and to highlight the relief friezes and architectural elements created for the play. These effects could be achieved only by strong lighting from one side of the stage.

Nicola Sabbattini provides additional evidence for the benefits of side-lighting the stage in his *Manual for Constructing Theatrical Scenes and Machines* (1638)—a compilation of earlier sources and practices. Like Angelo Ingegneri, Sabbattini advocated concealing the oil lamps, and

³¹ Alexander. M. Nagler, *Theatre festivals of the Medici 1539-1637* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 15.

³² Penzel, 9.

mentioned other lighting techniques such as side-lighting and footlights. He discouraged the use of footlights because they “make the actors’ faces look pale, and send fumes into the audience.”³³ He further described the proper lighting of the stage in the section entitled “How to Place the Highlights and Shadows in Painting the Scene:”

Here there are many diverse opinions. Some believe in having the illumination...toward the spectators. Others place the illumination behind the scenery, and still others at one side. If the lighting is thought of as being in the front, then the scene will be so light and so insipid that it will not be pleasing. [Fig 4a] The spectators will not be able to make out any details....If the lighting is thought of as coming...from behind the scenery [Fig 4b], as others devise, the scene will appear so crude and dark that even if a large quantity of lights are placed there, the spectators will experience dissatisfaction since they will always have the impression that they are not seeing clearly...the various parts of the scenery. But if the illumination is set at one side [Fig. 4c], left or right, the houses, the back shutter, the stage floor, and the whole scene will have a finer appearance than by any other method. It will give complete pleasure to the spectators, for the highlights and the shadows are distributed in the way that will give the greatest beauty...Hence we believe, and this has been commonly demonstrated, that the greatest praise will be gained by this method of painting the scene and placing the light.³⁴

Sabbattini included prints illustrating his theories on stage lighting. These three prints show both the desirable and undesirable lighting. The third image displaying the side-lit scenery illustrates his preferred mode. [Fig. 4c]

Another pictorial source showing the common use of the side-lit stage is a collection of eight engravings from an edition of the comedy *Gli Inganni* (Venice, 1592) by Curtio Gonzaga. [Fig. 5] These printed images show strong side-lighting being used during a performance of a

³³ Hewitt, 45.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 59-61.

Renaissance comedy, and are variations on the prescribed comedic stage of Serlio.³⁵ Although there may have been some secondary lighting from the front (possibly footlights), the strongly cast shadows of the stage indicate that the lighting was mainly from one side.

1.2.2 Shallow Pictorial Space

Unlike the deep perspective scenes depicted in works of many painters who preceded him, Caravaggio's depiction of space in his paintings is unusual in being shallow and often devoid of architectural detail. When the artist does show some kind of architectural form—as in his *Martyrdom of Saint Matthew*, *Beheading of John the Baptist*, and *Burial of Saint Lucy*—he defines the pictorial space by means of a curtain or archway that is hidden, almost imperceptible, in the deep shadow of the background. [Figs. 6, 7 & 8] This is a type of naturalistically-painted artifice, because a comparable shallowness would not often be found in the “real” world. Nevertheless, this sort of shallow space was a well-known characteristic of the simple popular that were seen almost daily in the streets and *piazze* of Italy. [Fig. 9]

What is thought today to be Caravaggio's unusual use of space was a long-standing tradition in the earliest forms of church drama. Elaborate religious performances in Baroque churches evolved from medieval liturgical dramas and public processions celebrating feast-days and holy days such as Easter and Corpus Christi.³⁶ Although these religious celebrations originated during the Middle Ages, they were still being performed in Caravaggio's day. In fact there had been a resurgence in religious street theater after the Council of Trent, when it was

³⁵ Leone de' Sommi, *Quattro dialoghi*, xv, xxvi, xlii, lxi, 8, 27, 37, 58, 83.

³⁶ Brockett, 85.

acknowledged that the future of the Catholic Church lay in its ability to engage the public. Public performance also offered an opportunity to show the resilience and strength of the Church after the Protestant Reformation, as was the case for the Holy Jubilee of 1600.³⁷

Seicento descendants of medieval plays utilized a very shallow performance space with little to suggest the setting, possibly a cloth backdrop or available architectural elements such as the arch on the front of a church or a portico. These minimal settings date back to the medieval processional performances, which used only the small, shallow stage of a mobile cart as a performance surface. Liturgical plays were performed inside the churches in front of architectural elements such as side altars and tombs. One such play, the *Visitatio Sepulchri*, was often staged in front of the sepulcher—the elaborately decorated stone tomb that was a permanent part of church architecture and served as the focus of the Easter celebration.³⁸ The arched entrance to the sepulcher served as a background for the drama, with its proscenium-like form framing the performance and delineating the theatrical space and its biblical characters from the world of the audience. The sepulcher was more than just a special frame, for its potent meaning (a symbol of Christ’s death and resurrection), added significance to the drama performed before it. Other plays, such as *The Raising of Lazarus*, utilized the distinct architecture and symbolic power of the sepulcher as a scenic device—this time to signify the tomb of Lazarus.³⁹ We see a similar use of simple ready-made architectural forms in Caravaggio’s *Martyrdom of Saint Matthew* and *Raising of Lazarus*. [Figs. 6 & 10]

³⁷ Alessandro Zuccai, ed., *La Storia dei Gubilliei: volume terzo 1600-1775* (Prato: Giunti Gruppo Editoriale, 1999), 104-129.

³⁸ Ogden, 24-26.

³⁹In the rubrics for this play, the theatrical term *platea* is used to refer to the neutral playing area in front of the entrance of the sepulcher. *Ibid.*, 39-99.

In these early plays we see the theatrical origins of Caravaggio's simple background, some of which appear to be curtains at the back of the scene, especially those paintings in the artist's last years, such as *David with the Head of Goliath* and *Martyrdom of Saint Ursula*. [Figs. 2 & 11] When plays became more complex and required more scenes, additional spaces were needed within the churches. Usually small niches such as side chapels were used, with the viewers processing from one area to the next. When there was no available architecturally defined space, curtains could be used to "frame" the performance areas, a technique common throughout Europe. These curtains were often rich textiles, such as silk or velvet (frequently red in color) and were either attached to the church architecture or hung from poles to define a small playing space.⁴⁰ George Kernodle suggested that the archetype of the simple curtain stage may have been the cloths hung in churches and later in the streets on festival occasions, specifically those of the medieval mountebanks and *tableau vivants*.⁴¹ These curtained spaces can be seen in Caravaggio's *Death of the Virgin*, *Madonna of the Rosary*, and *Judith Beheading Holofernes*. [Figs. 12, 13 & 14]

The use of shallow space was employed not only in the sacred dramas in the churches and religious processions, but also in the secular dramas found in city streets centuries later, such as the sixteenth-century *commedia dell'arte*. [Fig. 15] In these plays, the interaction between the actors, not the scenery, was the main attraction and, therefore, were minimal when compared to the elaborate stages of the spectacles hosted by the elite class. The stages of charlatans and traveling theatrical troupes consisted of:

⁴⁰ Ogden, 101-102.

⁴¹ Kernodle, 154-155.

a crude wooden rectangular or square platform on trestles, which could be placed in a public square, against a Doge's palace, under a tree, along a road-side, or in a building. This form ... was devoid of any attempt at scenery....The most elementary attempt at scenery was the placing of a curtain supported by poles across the back part of the stage. Frequently the curtain was split to permit entrances....⁴²

Like the church dramas, the *commedia dell'arte* used stages that were shallow, with curtains at the back that could be pulled to the side to allow actors to enter and exit the stage.⁴³

[Fig. 16]

1.2.3 Characterization

The characters who populate Caravaggio's paintings can be classified in four general categories: 1) beautiful androgynous boys, 2) idealized biblical personages, 3) contemporary urban folk (mostly lower- and middle-class citizens), and 4) stock characters drawn from popular theater. In Caravaggio's stock characters include: the swaggering *bravi* types, hot-tempered and quick to draw a sword; the lovely *inamorata*, who is beautiful and intelligent; the old fool, who despite learning and wealth, could not see the truth if it were in front of him; and the *zanni* type, a scoundrel and trickster who thought nothing of hurting others for his own gain. These character-types, made popular in the literature and drama of the day, were immediately recognizable and brought with them their well-known personalities, adding meaning to the pictorial scene. These stock characters served as the core for the *commedia* repertoire and were immediately

⁴²John H. McDowell, "An Iconographical Study of the early *Commedia dell'Arte* (1560-1650)," Doctoral Dissertation, Yale University, 1937, 21-7 as quoted in Castagno, 59-60.

⁴³*Ibid.*

recognized throughout Europe by their costume, dialect, and mannerisms. While the *commedia dell'arte* saw international popularity with its stock characters, there were regional differences in literary and theatrical characterization. I will explore these regional variations of characterization and costume at length later within the individual chapters dedicated to the regions that Caravaggio visited: Milan, Rome, and southern Italy. We shall see that the theater reflected the particular tastes and customs of the region in which it was performed and these cultural differences may have left their mark on Caravaggio's paintings.

While there were specific regional character types, there also were some common trends in theatrical characterization that had developed during the Medieval and Renaissance periods. When the control of drama shifted from the Church to secular organizations, there was a simultaneous shift in the characters featured on the stage. Although biblical and historical figures continued to be presented in the dramas, "common people" appeared more frequently as lead characters in both religious and secular plays. The change of attitude toward humanity, giving it a more elevated position in relation to the cosmos, accompanied the penetration of humanist philosophy and even Reformation thought in Italy and throughout Europe, but humanism recognized the virtue of intellectuals, not the common person.⁴⁴ In the works of Caravaggio and popular theater, however, the lives of ordinary men and women were considered worthy of representation on canvas and on stage. In the theater, drama imitated life and the world was a large stage. In the introduction to his *Dialogues* (c. 1565), Leone de' Sommi states:

...people in their earthly existence behave like actors on a stage. They are cast in tragedies or in comedies, some of them as princes and others as commoners or

⁴⁴ On Reformation thought in Italy see: George Kenneth Brown, *Italy and the Reformation to 1550* (New York: Russell & Russell), 1971, 78-83, 223-239; Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 101-104; John T. Spike, *Caravaggio* (New York: Abbeville Press, 2001), 98-100.

slaves. They wear a variety of strange and wonderful masks and are called to appear on-stage so that each may represent, as best he can, his appointed character. When the show is over, man is stripped of his borrowed costume and returned to his former, spiritual state. One earns praise or damnation according to the manner in which one has played his role.⁴⁵

In this quote, De' Sommi described his interpretation of the *theatrum mundi* metaphor. Perhaps theater's growing trend showing the common individual and everyday life as stuff for staged performance is what inspired Caravaggio to present his painted figures as if in a theatrical performance. Whether or not this is true, the theater did begin to depict everyday people more frequently, especially in the middle of the sixteenth century with the birth of the *commedia dell'arte*. Thus, popular drama provided Caravaggio with new and convenient depictions of daily life that became the raw material for Caravaggio's his low-life characters. Although refined gentlemen and ladies also populated the stage, the most prominent (and popular) of the theatrical characters were the crafty servants who often tricked their foolish masters.⁴⁶

Like these popular dramas, Caravaggio's paintings emphasized common persons. In his *Madonna of Loreto*, the lower-class is presented as a pair of tattered pilgrims, appearing more like posed characters from a *tableau vivant* than a genre painting of real-life Italian citizens. [Fig. 17] Caravaggio again uses naturalistically-painted artifice to isolate his figures and heighten the emotional impact of the scene. The pilgrims, with their dirty feet, are brought to the immediate foreground, while the Madonna, dressed in a luxurious red velvet dress, acknowledges their devotion with a simple nod of her head. The setting of this scene is minimal. On the left, a

⁴⁵ Shimon Levy, "A Comparison of Theory and Practice in de' Sommi's *Dialogues*", in Belkin, 173-174.

⁴⁶ However, this class reversal did not last throughout the duration of the play. True to the rules of comedy, the bad servants were punished and the class hierarchy was restored. Brockett, 126-127, 143-148.

simple door frame and a wall of cracked stucco delineate the space, while everything else is obscured in a curtain of darkness. This scene is not lit with a soft Raphaellesque light, but the dramatic light of the stage designer. A bold light from the upper left, as if from the heavens, or at least the spotlight above, focuses the attention of the viewer on the simple exchange between the humble devotees and the Virgin Mother of God. Through his careful selection of lighting effect, framing device, and characterization, Caravaggio presents us with a moving drama that moves us as much now as it did when Giovanni Baglione described the popular public response in the seventeenth century.

At this point it may be useful to contextualize these specific theatrical techniques within my more general thesis. Both playwrights and church leaders were aware of the emotional impact that theater had upon its audience. By using lighting effects, and by creating spatial relationships between the stage and the viewers, the theater transported the spectator into the action, heightening their receptivity to the spiritual message enacted on stage. As Caravaggio was aware of these theatrical techniques and their apparent effectiveness with audiences, he probably employed these dramatic forms because they provided him with a ready-made visual language that was known to all social classes. Caravaggio also may have adapted this dramatic language to enhance the popularity of his paintings, and to appropriate some of the fame enjoyed by famous playwrights. This popular appeal, however, did not win Caravaggio praise with critics such as Baglione and Bellori, who preferred the classicizing style taught in the art academies of the day. They preferred an elitist art that the educated could appreciate. For them, Caravaggio's popularity with the lower class proved that his work was inferior. Therefore, these theatrical techniques in Caravaggio's work, these points of connection between the artist's

paintings and popular dramatic forms, had a polarizing effect. They won him popularity with the lower class, but proved a liability with the elite who preferred a more classical style.

1.3 POPULARITY AS LIABILITY

For many years, Caravaggio's popularity with the lower class led *seicento* classicists to disparage his work, a persisting negative bias evident in the work of scholars in later centuries who neglected his work. It has been only within the last sixty years, since the 1940's when Roberto Longhi reintroduced the public to Caravaggio's work, that scholars have taken this Lombard artist's work more seriously.⁴⁷ Caravaggio's contemporaries noted his popularity with the common person, reflecting the paintings' and the artist's lack of decorum and slavish dependence on a model. As classicism was the preferred style among academic painters, many perceived Caravaggio's bold naturalism to be unrefined.

Seicento critics' negative opinions of realism parallel that of Michelangelo when he criticized Flemish realism. The Tuscan artist said it would appeal to the devout, "to women, especially to the very old and the very young, and also to monks and nuns and to certain noblemen who have no sense of harmony."⁴⁸ He continued by saying "In Flanders they paint, with a view to deceiving sensual vision" and criticized Flemish obsession with illusionism "done without reason or art, without symmetry or proportion, without skillful selection." Baglioni had a similarly negative response to Caravaggio's *Madonna of Loreto*, noting only the "muddy feet" of one pilgrim and the "soiled and torn cap" of the other. He continued saying "because of the pettiness in the details of a grand painting the public made a great fuss over it."⁴⁹ [Fig. 17] Here, humanist elitism is evident. High art was for the learned few. If the masses liked it, could it be considered fine art? The classicists who ran the painting academies stressed rules of decorum and ideas drawn from the works of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero. Rejecting the ideas of

⁴⁷ Bernard Berenson. *Caravaggio: His Incongruity and His Fame*. (London: Chapman & Hall, 1953), ii.

⁴⁸ Francisco de Hollanda, *Four Dialogues on Painting*, trans. Aubrey F. G. Bell (London, 1928), 15-18 as quoted in Robert Klein and Henri Zerner, *Italian Art 1500-1600 Sources and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966), 34.

⁴⁹ Baglione, trans. in Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 354.

these revered men was a rejection of the very tradition of painting and was considered dangerous. Bellori, after crediting Caravaggio with advancing the art of painting, noted:

Nevertheless, he lacked *invenzione*, decorum, *disegno*, or any knowledge of the science of painting. The moment the model was taken from him, his hand and mind became empty. Nonetheless many artists were taken by this style and gladly embraced it, since without any kind of effort it opened the way to easy copying, imitating common forms lacking beauty. Thus as Caravaggio suppressed the dignity of art, everybody did as he pleased, and what followed was contempt for beautiful things, the authority of antiquity and Raphael destroyed.⁵⁰

Caravaggio's close attention to quotidian life set him at odds with these classically-minded critics and biographers, and his widespread popularity added to their apprehension. To insure that posterity would be saved from the bold, dangerous art of Caravaggio, *seicento* biographers, while reporting his popularity with the masses, took pains to chronicle the artist's episodes of eccentric behavior and violent temper, suggesting that his undisciplined approach to painting derived from an eccentric mind and uncontrollable passions.⁵¹ For the classicists who feared change, this "modern" painter was mad.

Throughout the nineteenth century, these early accounts were taken as fact, perpetuating a portrait of the artist as an uncultured rascal who possessed an uncanny ability to paint. He was thought to have associated only with the rough lower class—having contact with Rome's elite only when it was time to search for patrons.⁵² During this same period, as art history was first developing toward the academic field we know today, Caravaggio's art was seen as vulgar and coarse. It was too dark and bloody for the delicate sensibilities of those who in the later

⁵⁰ Bellori, *Le vite*, 212, as translated in Hibbard, 371-2.

⁵¹ Catherine Puglisi, "Caravaggio's Life and *Lives* over Four Centuries" in Genevieve Warwick, ed., *Caravaggio: Realism, Rebellion, Reception* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2006), 23-35.

⁵² Moffitt, 10-14. On Caravaggio biographies, see: Puglisi, "Caravaggio's Life," 23-35.

centuries favored the constrained classicism of the ancients and the Italian Renaissance.⁵³ This preference for classicism can be seen in writings such as *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der Griechischen Werke in der Mahleri und Bilderkunst* (Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works, published 1755) and *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums* (The History of Ancient Art, published 1764) by Johann Joachim Winckelmann.⁵⁴ His outspoken condemnation of the Baroque (and to a lesser extent the late Renaissance) for its lack of idealization and its excesses influenced aesthetics and art history in following centuries. Thus along with other Baroque painters, Caravaggio would be considered derivative and inferior to their more refined predecessors, the artists of the Renaissance and the masters of classical Greece and Rome.

In the eighteenth century, the term “baroque” was used to describe something extravagant and grotesque. Jacob Burckhardt in *Der Cicerone* also harshly criticized Baroque art, describing the transition from the Renaissance to Baroque as the “degeneration of a dialect.”⁵⁵ Later, Cornelius Gurlitt, Alois Riegl, and Heinrich Wölfflin demonstrated that Baroque art was a valid style worth serious consideration.⁵⁶ Even Burckhardt reconsidered his harsh assessment of the Baroque, confessing in 1875 that “My respect for the baroque is increasing by the hour, and I am

⁵³ Moffitt, 10-14.

⁵⁴Johann Joachim Winckelmann. *Reflections on the imitation of Greek works in painting and sculpture*. (La Salle, IL : Open Court, 1987 and Johann Joachim Winckelmann. *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*. (Boston : J.R. Osgood, 1880) English version: *Reflections on the painting and sculpture of the Greeks, 1765, [with Instructions for the connoisseur, and An essay on grace in works of art]*. (Menston, Eng.: Scolar Press, 1972)

⁵⁵ Jacob Burckhardt. *Der Cicerone; eine Anleitung zum Genuss der Kunstwerke italiens*. For the English version: *The cicerone; or, Art guide to painting in Italy. For the use of travellers*. A. von Zahn, ed. Trans. from the German by Mrs. A.H. Clough. (London, J. Murray, 1873)

⁵⁶ David Sobrevilla, “Aesthetics and Ethnocentrism” in *Cultural Relativism and Philosophy: North and Latin Perspectives*, Marcelo Dascal, ed.(Leiden and Boston: E.J. Brill, 1991), 219. His *Renaissance und Barock* (1888) introduced “Baroque” as a stylistic category and a serious area of study. For Wölfflin, what we now call 16th-century “Mannerism” was part of the Baroque aesthetic, one that Burckhardt and most French and English-speaking scholars for a generation after him dismissed as degenerate.

ready to recognise it as the true conclusion and ultimate end of living architecture.”⁵⁷ Yet in the 1920’s, the Italian philosopher and aesthete Benedetto Croce continued the negative bias by complaining about the insubstantiality of the Baroque style.⁵⁸

Although the tide was slowly turning for Baroque studies, Caravaggio and many other artists of the period were still seen as inferior by many art historians. In the 1950’s, historians began to reconsider the common negative perception of the period and to research this period to reveal the complex nature of the cultural, political, and religious forces at work on the peninsula. However, many were still wary of the flamboyant Baroque. In 1948, Bernard Berenson warned the western art historian to resist studying work that “has not contributed to the mainstream, no matter how interesting, how magnificent in itself” and instructed them to exclude from their studies “most German and even Spanish and Dutch art.” He thought art history should “dwell less and less on the art after Caravaggio.”⁵⁹ While at least acknowledging Caravaggio as worthy of study, Berenson admitted in his introduction of *Caravaggio: His Incongruity & His Fame* (1953) that he never really considered Caravaggio worthy of attention until after Roberto Longhi’s work in the 1940’s; he observed that any dark, ugly painting from the seventeenth century was usually considered a painting by Caravaggio.⁶⁰

Although Roberto Longhi’s groundbreaking Caravaggio exhibition forced scholars to reassess Caravaggio’s work, thinking about the period in which the painter lived has not changed significantly. The recent historical revisions dealing the *età spagnola* have made little impact on Caravaggio studies. Art historiography seems to be clinging to nineteenth-century models, which

⁵⁷ As quoted in Barry Mitchell’s website “Theory of Music”
<http://theoryofmusic.wordpress.com/2009/03/30/essential-themes-of-the-baroque/>

⁵⁸ Croce. *La Spagna*, 246.

⁵⁹ Bernard Berenson, *Aesthetics and History in the Visual Arts*. (New York City: Pantheon, 1948), 235-6

⁶⁰ Berenson, *Caravaggio*, i-ii.

perpetuate the idea of Italian purity in Renaissance and Baroque, a matter I discuss in at length in chapter 4.⁶¹

In sum, Caravaggio's borrowing of quotidian characterization (stock characterization and realistic depiction of lower-class citizens) from popular theater, and as we will see (in chapters 2, 3 and 4) his use of sharp side-lighting and dark—what I have identified as elements of popular drama—led critics to disparage his work. Since about 1950, scholars and critics have praised Caravaggio with the term “dramatic.” Thus theater has been indirectly implicated in Caravaggio's unpopularity with the critics before 1950, and since that time has been connected with his comeback.⁶² Yet what do scholars mean by “dramatic”?

1.4 SCHOLARS ON CARAVAGGIO'S “DRAMATIC” PAINTINGS

Although the extensive art historical literature on Caravaggio often describes his paintings as theatrical or dramatic, few scholars have explored in any depth the possible connections between the artist's work and early 17th-century popular theater. Those art historians who mention Caravaggio's “dramatic” use of gesture, color, or lighting often employ such theatrical terms merely as complimentary metaphors to describe his skillful depiction of the intense emotional state of his figures and his ability to capture the viewer's imagination.

⁶¹ Many Italianists strongly resist the idea that the greatness of the renaissance could be less a result of Italian genius than an auspicious convergence of ideas and persons from a variety of cultures during a time when innovation and exploration were encouraged. Sebastian Schütze, “The Politics of Counter-Reformation Iconography and a Quest for the Spanishness of Neapolitan Art” in *Spain in Italy: Politics, Society, and Religion 1500-1700*. Thomas James Dandeleit and John A. Marino, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 2006)

⁶² These negative associations may have been strengthened by the use of “theatricality” as a derogatory term, used in much the same way as we now use “histrionics.” This is Fried's use of “theatricality” in his work on French painting. These attitudes would affect the art historiography of subsequent centuries. Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980)

A few scholars are more specific in their references to theater by noting Caravaggio's possible use of costumes and subjects found in early contemporary popular theater. Their comments, however, mainly focus on Caravaggio's depictions of poor peasants, young men wearing plumed hats, gypsy fortune tellers, and graphic descriptions of violence. Barry Wind looks at Caravaggio's depictions of the lower class and notes that the depiction of ridiculous, base actions of the peasant in late *cinquecento* genre paintings may have found a precedent in early comedy.⁶³ Mina Gregori also links these peasant and ruffian characters to early Italian theater and postulates that the "play of hands," colorful costumes, and the theme of deception in the *Fortune Teller* and *The Cardsharps* are derived directly from the *commedia dell'arte*. She suggests that these two paintings reflect a tradition of theatre-related genre paintings.⁶⁴ Catherine Puglisi agrees with Gregori and briefly speculates in her monograph on Caravaggio that the artist may have looked to the characters and situations depicted in *commedia dell'arte*, principally those depicting card players and gypsies. Yet, similar connections with other forms of early Italian drama have not been more carefully explored, especially those depicting religious subjects.

Alfred Moir suggests that a print with a *commedia dell'arte* theme served as a model for the pose and physiognomy of one of the apostles in Caravaggio's *Supper at Emmaus* (1601), now in National Gallery in London.⁶⁵ Silvia Danesi Squarzina speculates that the artist's attention to realistic detail in the many graphic depictions of violence in his religious paintings may have been inspired by staged representations of violence on stage and public executions in

⁶³ Barry Wind, "Pitture Ridicole: Some Late Cinquecento Comic Genre Paintings" in *Storia dell'Arte*, 20, (1974), 25-35.

⁶⁴ Catherine Puglisi, *Caravaggio* (London: Phaidon, 1998), 78 (*commedia dell'arte*) and 191 (*tableaux vivants*); Alfred Moir, *Caravaggio* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989), 24 and 52; Mina Gregori, *Age of Caravaggio* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1985), 215-220.

⁶⁵ Moir, 24 and 52.

Rome's *piazze*, such as the beheading of Beatrice Cenci (1599) and the burning of Giordano Bruno (1600).⁶⁶ [Fig. 18]

Although these hypotheses are attractive, comedy and violence are universal features of literature, painting, and drama. I deal instead with both the content and the *form* of theatrical practice—lighting, spatial relationships, characterization, and narrative action. My research looks at the broad trends in early theater and elements and forms of theatrical practice to inform our reading of Caravaggio's paintings. While terminology and concepts such as “theatricality” help describe the general theater-like qualities in the painter's work, I strive to go beyond generalizing by looking at specific theatrical forms and practices. I show *how* and *why* Caravaggio looked to theater for his painting models, and discuss *what* elements of theater he borrowed. Before launching into my exploration into early theatrical practice, I will place my research within the context of current ideas on “theatricality.” Although “theatricality” is a timely topic and is in the mind of many modern scholars, it is problematic term because its overuse brings problems and confusion.

1.5 “THEATRICALITY” IN ART HISTORY

It is useful to examine the writings of art historians and their interpretations of “theatricality” as applied to the visual arts. Michael Fried's article, “Thoughts on Caravaggio,” describes the term “theatricality” as the ability to transfix the viewer as a result of studying the figures in a painting

⁶⁶ Silvia Danesi Squarzina, “Pittura e Rappresentazione: Caravaggio e il Teatro della Crudeltà,” in *La luce nella pittura lombarda*, ed. Claudio Strinati and Rossella Vodret (Milano: Electa, 2000), 89-97.

that are “absorbed” in an action.⁶⁷ In this way the figure represented on canvas “performs” for the benefit of the viewer. While Fried does note that Caravaggio’s work possesses theatrical qualities, he does not see his work as possessing the brand of “theatricality” suggested by his narrow definition. Fried reserved the term for 18th-century French paintings that display a self-conscious drama, which might be described pejoratively as “histrionic.”

For Fried, “theatricality” bears a specific meaning that goes beyond the generally “theatrical.” In *Absorption and Theatricality*, Fried discusses at length the term as applied to eighteenth-century French paintings, a period which saw the use of theatrical characteristics taken to such extremes that figures’ actions and emotional states seemed wholly artificial and “histrionic” in the worst sense of the word. This excessive painting style earned artists such as Jean-Baptiste Greuze the “scorn and incomprehension of later generations.”⁶⁸ Fried’s work explores the psychology of the viewer and spectatorship, but does not discuss artistic appropriation of actual theatrical practice. His essay may explain something of the popularity and emotional impact of Caravaggio’s work on the modern viewer, but it does not examine what the sources of his imagery or why he chose theater as a model. The broad use of the term “theatricality” demonstrates Fried’s influence and popularity within many diverse fields. One must remember that his work of theatricality is rooted in his studies of eighteenth-century painting, and therefore, laden with the attitudes of that particular period of French history. For Fried, “theatricality” is much more than just being like theater.

Differences between general terms such as “theatrical” and “theatricality,” terms often thought to be virtually interchangeable in meaning, cause problems. The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines the adjectival usage of “theatrical” as “...relating to, or suitable for dramatic

⁶⁷ Michael Fried, “Thoughts on Caravaggio.” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Autumn, 1997), 13-56.

⁶⁸ Fried, *Absorption*, 107-8.

performance or the theater” or “marked by exaggerated self-display and unnatural behavior; affectedly dramatic.”⁶⁹ As an adjective, “theatrical” denotes “stage performances or a stage performance, especially by amateurs” or “affectedly dramatic gestures or behavior; histrionics.” It possesses both a neutral and a negative meaning. “Theatricality” is simply listed afterward as the noun form of the adjective “theatrical.”⁷⁰ Although the dictionary definitions say that the terms share the same meaning, the recent use of “theatricality” in specific way particular to field such as art history, cultural studies, and theater studies suggest otherwise—the meaning varies between disciplines.

Fried’s usage of “theatricality” has the more negative meaning. These terms, with their loose and ambiguous connection to staged performance, have been appropriated and adapted by fields such as anthropology, gender studies, psychology, and art history—due in part to the broad popularity of Fried’s work.⁷¹ But “theatricality” as appropriated by each field of study, possesses its own specific meaning. So varied are the diverse interpretations of this term that its meaning is almost incomprehensible.⁷²

⁶⁹ American Heritage Dictionary definition

⁷⁰ theatrical. Dictionary.com. *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/theatrical> (accessed: August 13, 2007).

⁷¹ For essays on Fried’s work, see: *Refracting vision : essays on the writings of Michael Fried*, eds. Jill Beaulieu, Mary Roberts and Toni Ross (Sydney [N.S.W.] : Power Publications, c2000).

⁷² Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait, eds. *Theatricality: Theatre and Performance Theory* (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1-2. “...the idea of theatricality has achieved an extraordinary range of meanings, making it everything from an act to an attitude, a style to a semiotic system, a medium to a message. It is a sign empty of meaning; it is the meaning of all signs....Although it obviously derives its meaning from the world of theatre, *theatricality* can be abstracted from the theatre itself and then applied to any and all aspects of human life....Thus it can be defined exclusively as a specific type of performance style or inclusively as all the semiotic codes of theatrical representation....So, it is a mode of representation or a style of behavior characterized by histrionic actions, manners, and devices, and hence a practice; yet it is also an interpretive model for describing psychological identity, social ceremonies, communal festivities, and public spectacles, and hence a theoretical concept....Thus, to some people, it is that which is quintessentially the whole theatre, while to others it is the theatre subsumed into the whole world....Given these contending meanings, it is crucial that we be able to discern what is meant when a writer uses the term “theatricality,” but too often we are confronted with vague definitions, unspecified parameters, contradictory applications, and tautological reasoning. Hence, the meaning of theatricality cannot be taken for granted.”

Although “theatricality” is useful in a more general, metaphorical way, I choose to go beyond this common usage by exploring sources found in *cinque-* and *seicento* literature and theatrical practice which describe specific dramatic characteristics shared by Caravaggio’s paintings. If substantial connections between the artist’s work and early modern literature and theater can be demonstrated, these connections may explain many of his best-known stylistic characteristics and offer new interpretations of his *oeuvre*, giving us a deeper understanding of Caravaggio and the time period in which he lived. My study paints a detailed portrait of Caravaggio’s world by presenting to the reader various forms of popular and religious theater that Caravaggio could have seen and the literature that inspired many dramatic performances. The world of the theater was available to all, from the makeshift theaters of the city streets to the elegant halls of Italy’s *palazzi*. Caravaggio would have had constant exposure to such entertainments as the artist traveled south from Spanish-controlled Lombardy, to Rome, and then to the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily.

As seen in the above examples, early modern theater was almost as much a part of daily life in Italy as the market and the parish church. Theater was performed in the streets and *piazze* of every town; some large cities had players performing almost every day. Religious processions traveled the streets in celebration of saints’ feast days and religious holidays. Despite the Council of Trent’s prohibition of theater in churches, religious performances were often held there—especially during Holy Week and Jubilee Years. Secular performances were also found throughout the city. *Commedia dell’arte* and other acting troupes set up make-shift stages wherever they could find a spot—in a piazza, under a portico, in an open field. Wealthy households hosted theatrical performances for their guests. These more refined performances could include both improvised performances by esteemed *commedia dell’arte* troupes such as the

Gelosi and the elaborate mechanized theatrical spectacles commissioned by the Medici.⁷³ Through his social circle, which traversed the upper and lower classes, Caravaggio had access to both street theater and dramas performed in his protectors' and patrons' households.

1.6 ORGANIZATION OF DISSERTATION

My first task is to document the points of correspondence between the imagery of Caravaggio's paintings and the various forms and content of popular theater. To recreate the world in which the artist lived, with its abundant theatrical performances, I classify these pictorial/theatrical correspondences into four categories—light, space, characterization, and action depicted. I use these themes to help define the specific types of theatrical devices employed by Caravaggio, identify sources that may have been used by both Caravaggio and the theater, characterize qualities that viewers considered unique to his works, and assess the paintings' success in communicating Counter-Reformation doctrine.

In Chapter 2, I discuss the theater, literature and broader culture of Milan, the region in which Caravaggio spent his youth, where he studied the fundamentals of painting and formed opinions on the role and persona of the artist. As my research explores the various regional influences on Caravaggio's work, I establish the socio-political context in which the arts, drama, and religion functioned in these areas—northern Italy, the Lazio region near Rome, and Spanish-controlled southern Italy.

⁷³James M. Saslow, *The Medici wedding of 1589: Florentine festival as Theatrum Mundi*. (New Haven : Yale University Press, c1996)

Milan was a territory of the Spanish Crown and was the religious center of Carlo Borromeo's archdiocese. I explore how these two forces helped shape the cultural milieu of Lombardy and the art world in which Caravaggio first studied painting. Milanese theater and public spectacle is discussed to show the role of theater in city life and performances that Caravaggio may have watched, or even participated in during his youth.

I examine Caravaggio's early education in both the *scuola di dottrina* and the studio of Simone Peterzano. Investigation of Caravaggio's early education requires a discussion of the wide variety of print media, much of it illustrated, that the artist would have seen. The popular stories and printed images could have been highly influential as the artist searched for inspiration for his compositions, settings, and characters. Just as the publishers chose particular scenes to enhance the reader's experience, the narrative moment that Caravaggio depicted is also important, the choice of imagery can shift the meaning of the narrative, emphasize different aspects of the story or different characters, and thereby alter the interpretation of the story.

Italian literature gave the artist a rich variety of narrative styles, some innovative and influential. One such text would have been *Orlando Furioso*, which was commonly read by schoolboys. Caravaggio undoubtedly knew this story; it was reprinted in many editions, episodes were performed on stage, and its characters were depicted on murals in elegant *palazzi*. The artist would also have seen it in the form of inexpensive books printed for popular consumption, with simpler images than those in luxury editions. These unpretentious images, nevertheless, communicated—with energetic force—the climactic events of the narrative. Compositional devices from such books may have served as models for the simple, direct compositions of Caravaggio's paintings. The streamlined character of these illustrations has a dramatic counterpart in the simple stage of the popular theater. The dramatic representation of

these texts on the popular stage would have given the artist additional sources upon which to draw, bringing the imagery of literary world to life before his eyes.

Caravaggio was exposed to the theatrical and literary world, in this early stage of his career, partly through the life-long protection of Costanza Colonna Sforza, the Marchesa di Caravaggio. As Caravaggio's family was neither wealthy nor prestigious, it was through the Colonna-Sforza family that he would have had his earliest exposure to court life and the discriminating tastes of elite patrons. Knowing current trends in painting was as important to the artist as mastering painting techniques. The Sforza-Colonna circles in Milan, Rome, and Naples provided Caravaggio with an opportunity to become familiar with the desires of elite patrons. Being sensitive to the preferences of art collectors (both Italian and Spanish) helped the aspiring artist create works to intrigue the art aficionado and win him prestigious commissions and fame—things the artist deeply desired.

Caravaggio's ideas about "fame" were shaped by his exposure to theater and literature in these early years. From what little we know of the painter (mostly through legal hearings and police reports), fame and reputation were strong motivators for Caravaggio. Rather than the popular notion that portrays Caravaggio as a tortured madman who could paint, I agree with David Stone's argument that Caravaggio aimed to create an artistic persona, one that would outlive him and become legend.⁷⁴ The stereotype of the "mad genius" was already popular by Caravaggio's day, presented in the biographies of great men, popular literature, and on stage. To understand more fully Michelangelo Merisi's construction of "Caravaggio, the Melancholic Artist," one must explore commonly-held *cinquecento* ideas about the persona of the "great artist." Contemporary writers often described the ideal painter in their treatises as having stable

⁷⁴David M. Stone, "Self and Myth in Caravaggio's *David and Goliath*," *Caravaggio: Realism, Rebellion, Reception*. Genevieve Warwick, ed. (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2006), 36-46.

personalities and refined manners, but biographies just as often described the masters as behaving quite strangely, with violent tempers, unusual habits, and fits of artistic frenzy. Caravaggio would have been familiar with both the treatises and the biographies, he may have used these writings and other forms of “artistic madness” found in literature and theater as fodder for his own self-fashioning—a way to assure that neither his art nor his life would be forgotten. He shaped his own persona, wrote his own role.

Chapter 3 explores Caravaggio’s world while he lived in Rome and discusses the political posturing of powerful nations such as France and Spain and the simple religious devotions of the city’s poor. The artist’s entry into Roman cultural life was probably facilitated by his affiliation with the Colonna family, which had a long history of arts patronage. The Colonna were also active in the Roman political scene and were often featured in prominent civic and religious spectacles such as the *China* procession.⁷⁵ Thus, Caravaggio’s relationship with this prominent Roman family placed him in the center of Roman cultural circles—those with a taste for both art and theater, and it is through these associations that the young painter learned of the interests of prospective patrons. By embracing these aspects of culture that these elites found intriguing, Caravaggio could shape his painting style to earn prestigious commissions, praise, and lasting fame.

Although Caravaggio claimed that he rejected the use of masterworks as models for his paintings, scholars have noted that references to Michelangelo Buonarroti can be found along with those from other artists. While these references to earlier generations of Italian artist cannot be ignored, scholars agree that he studied his contemporary world carefully to find subjects for his paintings and models for his figures. He seems to have been drawn to those things which

⁷⁵ Mario Gori Sassoli, “La cerimonia della China. Dal teatro delle corti al popolo festeggiante.” In *La Festa a Roma*, vol. 2, ed. Marcello Fagiolo (Torino: Umberto Allemandi & C, 1997),

engaged the public emotionally and drew praise from all segments of society. It was his appropriation of contemporary society that set him apart from other painters and made his work accessible to a broad audience. Emphasizing the aspect of his creative process that rejected tradition added to his distinctively rebellious “artistic persona.”

Because Caravaggio’s work is closely linked to contemporary Roman society, it is necessary to explore the quotidian life of the streets, churches, and *palazzi*. Rome was a cosmopolitan city—with pilgrims, artisans, prelates, merchants, and prostitutes from many different countries. A brief exploration of the demographics of the city shows that Caravaggio must have had contact with various foreign cultures; the presence of Spanish citizens was large, comprising around 25% of the Roman population.⁷⁶ This strong Iberian presence was difficult to miss, for the Spanish faction in Rome was politically active and sought to promote its cause through grand displays, often in the form of religious spectacle. Many of Caravaggio’s supporters, including the Colonna family and Ottavio Costa, were political allies of Spain and embraced many aspect of its culture. Through these associations and encounters with the Spanish living in the city, Caravaggio was exposed to Iberian culture and to their specific style of religiosity. Because many Spaniards bought Italian art to take home, being cognizant of their artistic preferences would have been an asset to a young painter trying to establish a painting career.

In addition to the artistic center of Europe, Rome was the center of the Catholic Church, and the city’s most important patrons of the arts were part of the religious community. While the narrative and symbolism of the paintings may have been chosen by the patron, Caravaggio needed to understand Counter-Reformation spirituality to meet the new dictates on the visual arts

⁷⁶ Thomas James Dandeleet, *Spanish Rome, 1500-1700* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001)

being penned by contemporary church leaders. This study looks at the Church's use of art and theater during this period to express the new religiosity reflected in writings like those of Pedro Malón de Chaide, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and Ignatius of Loyola, for example.

Caravaggio's patrons were both a source of income and ideas. Through these influential and cultured individuals, Caravaggio was exposed to current trends and innovations in painting, theater, literature, optics, and natural science. Therefore, a study of the artist's most important patrons and their interests in the arts and sciences are particularly relevant for my research. Many elite Roman households sponsored musical concerts, theatrical performances, and poetry readings. Cardinals Del Monte and Montalto frequently hosted musical concerts and poetry readings. Caravaggio may have attended these divertissements and seen the positive response. I posit that Caravaggio employed select elements from these entertainments to please his audience.

Because there are no known works of Caravaggio's that date from his Milanese period, it is only in Rome that direct comparisons can be made between his work and theatrical performances. Public processions, *commedia dell'arte* performances, *sacre rappresentazioni*, Jesuit drama, and dramas hosted by Roman elite houses were all available to him and could be a part of the quotidian life that the artist chose to capture in his paintings. I examine trends in theater and dramatic literature in Rome and make connections between such specific elements as stock characters, violent action, lighting effects, and dramatic setting in these dramatic forms and their counterparts in the paintings of Caravaggio.

While the young artist's bold style attracted both praise and criticism, his erratic and often violent behavior must also have kept his name in public conversation—and in police records. Costanza Colonna frequently helped him avoid arrest by arranging his escape to other regions of the peninsula—first Genoa and later to Spanish-controlled southern Italy. Chapter

Four begins in the south and is where Caravaggio's work changed from a polished Roman style, combining passages of realism with luscious painted surfaces, to his "late" style, psychologically darker and more roughly painted with a more restrained palette—at times almost monochromatic. To offer possible reasons for this change in Caravaggio's painting style, I describe the regional culture, its painters, religious practice, literature, and theater. All are part of the local popular culture that the artist may have drawn upon for his paintings. Caravaggio would have brought his successful style with him and adapted it to the regions in which he visited. Now Caravaggio, as a fugitive, was even more dependent on Costanza Colonna's family and friends for support. I explore these relationships, revealing trends in collecting and patronage among her circle that may have had some impact on Caravaggio's style.

As a prelude to Chapter 4, which focuses on Caravaggio's years as a fugitive in southern Italy, I discuss Spain's role shaping in Italian culture. In this section, I also discuss trends in Italian history and art historiography which may have suppressed the Spanish contributions to Italian culture for reasons of politics and national pride. This view of Italy's history had become the accepted version, one that is only now being rewritten to give a more nuanced view of what many had negatively perceived as a dark period.⁷⁷ After establishing the historical and cultural context for these biased historical accounts, I offer an alternate perspective that recognizes the significant influence of Spanish culture on the Italian Peninsula, particularly those regions directly under Iberian control. Because Caravaggio studied contemporary life and depicted it in his works, he may have been heavily influenced by Iberians and Spanish culture on the peninsula, particularly in southern Italy where their presence was strongest.

⁷⁷ Aurelio Musi, ed., *Alle origini di una nazione. Antispagnolismo e identità italiana*, (Milan: Guerini e Associati, 2003).

In Chapter 4, I also investigate the literature and theater to which Caravaggio was exposed while travelling in southern Italy. Naples, like other large Italian cities, had a thriving theatrical tradition, both secular theater companies such as the *commedia dell'arte* and religious dramas sponsored by churches and confraternities during holy days. The members of the Neapolitan Academy of the *Oziosi* included many prominent Neapolitans who seem to have had a particular interest in theater. One of its most famous members was Giambattista Della Porta; and another was Giambattista Marino, Caravaggio's friend. Giordano Bruno was a famous Neapolitan author who—like Giambattista Della Porta—featured the lower class in his only drama, *Il Candelaio*, in much the same way as Caravaggio did in his paintings.

Jesuit drama also had a strong following in southern Italy, with one of its most influential dramatists, Stefano Tuccio, located in Sicily. Tuccio's plays were popular, especially with the viceregal court. This popularity was not limited to the elite class and students of the college, but was shared among all classes. Word of his performances spread throughout Italy and the rest of Europe.⁷⁸ Caravaggio would almost certainly have seen some of these performances in Rome, for Pope Clement VIII (Ippolito Aldobrandini) requested that some be performed during the Jubilee Year of 1600, the year Caravaggio's career was launched in Rome.

Like Milan, Naples had a sculptural tradition that was linked to its theatrical tradition. The Neapolitan *presepe*, a sculpted scene of the Nativity (often in miniature), grew from a humble representation of the Holy family to a true work of art. These sculpted scenes, like the Milanese *Sacro Monte*, feature carefully executed realistic detail. The individual sculptures had skillfully-carved heads with expressive faces, bodies placed in lively poses, and accurate replications of contemporary fashions. The sculpted personages of these frozen dramas were

⁷⁸ William McCabe, S. J., *The Jesuit Theater*, ed. Louis J. Oldani, S.J. (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1983), 44.

drawn from daily city life: shopkeepers, street urchins, cripples, and assorted animals. The setting was also inspired by the urban environment: storefronts, homes, cobblestone streets, vendor carts, and foliage were carefully reproduced, merging the biblical world with contemporary Naples. Like the playwrights, the *presepe* artists drew upon the rougher side of Naples to give their art a realism that resonated with the world that they knew. They rejected the decorous work and visual language of the classicists who chose to feature great men as their tragic heroes. This more “modern” approach echoed the literary innovations found in Spanish literature and drama of the day.

Naples was home to Spaniards from all social classes, those associated with the viceregal court to military leaders, common soldiers, merchants, and artisans. The influx of Iberians into the Kingdom of Naples brought Spanish culture to the region, evident in Neapolitan literature, drama, and costume—even language. To study Spanish influence on *cinque-* and *seicento* art and literature properly, one must first explore Spanish tradition. I look at the Iberian tradition of polychrome statuary in churches (*retablos*) and the processional statuary group called *pasos*. I compare these Iberian models with their Italian counterparts, noting characteristics that resonate with Caravaggio’s art. Of particular interest in this section is 1) the use of lower class characters as critics of society and 2) the spirit of creative experimentation and innovation. The rules of poetics, which were carefully followed by European poets, dramatists, and painters to constructing a narrative, are freely broken by both Spaniards and Neapolitans to allow more artistic freedom to engage the audience.

This deliberate rejection of “classical” restraint in favor of “modern” expression is a feature that frequently appears in Spanish and Neapolitan drama and literature of this period. Caravaggio’s revolutionary art embraces some of the same features. The artist’s exposure to

Spanish culture throughout his life (his youth in Spanish Lombardy, his association with the pro-Spanish Colonna family, and his fugitive period in Spanish Naples and Sicily) gave him ample opportunity to study and appropriate elements from Iberian culture that could aid in the expressive nature of his paintings. This appropriation of Spanish culture as it existed on the Italian peninsula and as it was internalized by Spanish subjects such as Caravaggio might explain why his work was sought after by Spanish collectors and why it may have influenced such Spanish painters as Jusepe de Ribera (1591-1652), Diego Velázquez (1599 – 1660), and Francisco de Zurbarán (1598 –1664).⁷⁹

In Chapter 5, the conclusion of the dissertation, I review the established stylistic connections between Caravaggio's work and those of theater and dramatic literature found in Milan, Rome and southern Italy. I also discuss the role that art and theater played in the mission of the Catholic Church, citing fifteenth- and sixteenth-century ideas on learning and memory. Both the visual and performative arts complemented the Church's didactic mission by making the learning of Church doctrine entertaining and accessible to all social classes. To examine more closely the perceived didactic function of the visual arts, I look at models of memory, approaches to religious education, and the preaching styles of popular speakers, who, during this same period, increasingly used visual imagery and metaphor to move the audience. By exploring commonalities between these media, I discovered a type of "visual vernacular" that was adopted by artists, dramatists, and church leaders to communicate complex ideas to a broad audience effectively. Such striking visual images were thought to leave a lasting impression on the mind.

⁷⁹ Ribera is officially considered a follower of Caravaggio and had easy access to Caravaggio's works in Naples. Velázquez and Zurbarán, who were already influenced by the Spanish naturalist style in Spain, if they did not actually see original Caravaggio's or copies in Spain, would have certainly heard of the Italian painter's daring naturalistic style. By this time Caravaggio was one of the noteworthy artists of the previous generation, having died when they were both around 11 years old, the same age Caravaggio had entered Peterzano's studio to study painting.

If Caravaggio painted works that were memorable, they may be sought by Church leaders wanting imagery that could efficiently “preach” to the public. Memory was also important for fame. Caravaggio wanted both his work and his personality to be famous. He crafted an artistic personality, using the same models that he employed for his paintings—eccentric and exaggerated—so that he would not be forgotten. The positive reception of Caravaggio’s works today and his iconic fame would suggest that Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio succeeded in creating a body of work and an artistic persona that earned him lasting fame.

2.0 SPANISH LOMBARDY & MILAN

Although there are no known works by Caravaggio from his early years in Spanish Lombardy, this is where my study begins. Northern Italy is where Caravaggio must first have seen religious art and experienced public devotional practice and a variety of interesting forms of popular theater and related literature. Because these dramatic forms were popular across all social classes, the young artist could have seen their usefulness as models for his paintings. To follow my general thesis that Caravaggio appropriated specific elements from popular dramatic media, I explore the rich cultural heritage of Spanish Milan, particularly that of its various dramatic forms including religious street theater, secular performances sponsored by the Sforzas, the polychrome statuary of the *Sacro Monte*, and theatrical literature, including the popular adventure epics. I discuss each of these diverse dramatic forms, and then relate these to Caravaggio's painting and his self-constructed artistic persona.

Because Caravaggio's oeuvre includes many religious paintings, Milanese religious street theater is of particular importance, particularly the performances held during and after the archbishopric of Carlo Borromeo. Carlo Borromeo's interest in theatrical performance may have been piqued by his exposure to popular religious drama while in Rome and by his personal literary interests. The popularity of theater and its ability to move the public to piety evidently made a strong impression on the young Borromeo, for he frequently used dramatic devotions and processions during his tenure as archbishop of Milan. The Jesuits' use of theater in their schools

and colleges was also significant, for Borromeo actively encouraged the participation of school children in Milanese religious processions. The Milanese people's love of religious procession continued well after Borromeo's death in 1584, when innovative new forms of religious processions appear, featuring prominent participation by laity and religious symbols such as polychrome statuary.

Secular performances sponsored by the powerful Sforza family set many precedents in Milanese civic ritual that continued into Caravaggio's lifetime. The Sforza were patrons of the arts and were highly involved in the cultural life of the city. Caravaggio was connected to this powerful family through his life-long relationship with Costanza Colonna Sforza. Understanding the history of this family's patronage will shed some light on their motivations to support and protect young Caravaggio when he made his way to Rome to begin his painting career.

Because the Spanish Crown restored the Sforza to power, the family was closely linked to the Iberian gubernatorial court in Milan, the heart of the Milan's cultural life. Iberian soldiers, prelates, and merchants brought Spanish culture to the city. Complex cultural interaction between local and foreign residents is evident in the Milanese dialect, literature, and theatrical forms. I suggest that this cultural hybridization left a distinctive mark on Caravaggio's paintings because he employed the forms of popular culture to make his paintings more emotionally engaging to the public—a public that included many Spaniards and Italian who were allies of Spain.

Another northern Italian art form that appropriated theatrical forms was the *Sacro Monte*, a vast complex comprised of small chapels filled with polychrome statuary. The artists and sculptors involved with these theater-like chapels took special care to recreate the biblical scenes as realistically as possible, giving the statues real clothing, wigs of real hair, and lively poses.

According to written accounts, visitors considered the displays' naturalism to be spiritually moving. It is possible that Caravaggio visited this pilgrimage site, for it was only a short distance from Milan. If he did not see it personally, he certainly would have known about it; news of its inspirational chapels quickly spread throughout Europe, particularly in northern Italy, Spain, and Latin America.

Literature played an important role in theatrical performance, inspiring playwrights to craft dramas based on popular characters. In fact, many dramas were more literature than performance. Some were intended to be read and performed while others, "closet dramas," were only to be read. Many theatrical performances, such as the improvisational *commedia dell'arte*, were not written down in any detailed way, except for a brief outline of scenes called a *scenario*. As more people learned to read, literature was becoming a regular part of everyday life. Books and drama had become entertainments enjoyed by many social classes. Characters and episodes from literary works served as important sources for artists and playwrights.⁸⁰

While all genres of literature may have served as models (religious pamphlets, art prints, and illustrated texts) for artists, I argue that the adventure epic was particularly important to Caravaggio's "modern" approach to painting. Epic poems like *Orlando Furioso*, with its lively descriptions of violence and scenes from everyday life, inspired both theatrical performances and paintings. Caravaggio would have known the positive public reception of this much-debated bestseller and the fame of its author, Ludovico Ariosto. Because young artists were often advised to read treatises on poetics to inform their painting style, the "modern" model of Ariosto's revolutionary *Orlando Furioso* would have served the young Lombard painter well.

⁸⁰ On popular literature and theater, see: Robert Henke, *Performance and Literature in the Commedia dell'Arte* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Based on Caravaggio's own words regarding other painter's reputations in Rome, it seems he was aware of his own artistic reputation.⁸¹ Early exposure to such dramatic, literary, and pictorial arts helped shape his own opinions on the artist's profession, by defining which characteristics a masterpiece must possess, the personalities and working methods required of a master painter, and the means to establish a successful career. Caravaggio would learn some strategies of building a reputation from by looking at living artists in Milan such as his mentor Simone Peterzano. He could also read treatises and artists lives for information on the great painters of the past, whose character was said to have contributed as much to their career as their skillful handling the brush. A survey of these early art texts shows that many famous artists were portrayed as "troubled geniuses," driven with an almost uncontrollable passion, yet filled with darkness and melancholia. Caravaggio may have looked to such sources when developing his innovative painting style and dramatic "artistic persona," the "bad boy" image we know today.

2.1 THE SFORZA AND SPANISH USE OF DRAMATIC FORMS

I now will say much more about the roots of the above dramatic forms, and about the ways in which Caravaggio may have encountered them. I argue that many dramatic forms had a distinctive Spanish aesthetic, and had roots in Spanish culture. I assert that Caravaggio's exposure to theatrical performances and literature with a Spanish aesthetic was facilitated by his contact with wealthy hispanophile Milanese such as Costanza Colonna-Sforza and her family. Because Caravaggio was concerned with his social status, he may have wanted to appropriate the

⁸¹ On Caravaggio's libel trial, see; Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 160-63.

social importance of the Sforza Colonna family. This prominent Milanese family was part of a network of Italian elites that proudly identified with the Spanish faction. To pursue this argument, I will explore the cultural interests of the Colonna-Sforzas and the larger Spanish faction, their reading of Spanish literature, playing Spanish music, and introducing Spanish words into their dialect. Caravaggio's connections with hispanophiles such as Costanza Colonna-Sforza and her family, and the strong Iberian presence on the peninsula exposed him to Spanish culture such as the Milanese *entierro*, comedia de Santos, the large body of works by Lope de Vega. Moreover, the pro-Spanish Milanese elite, including especially the Colonna-Sforza, brought his work to the attention of Spanish and pro-Spanish families who appreciated aspects of Caravaggio's style that resonated with their Iberian aesthetic. This Iberian aesthetic, in turn, drew from Spanish model of Catholicism and counter-Reformation, including the Spanish Mystical tradition, which had a visceral, sensual quality, including both bodily pain and ecstasy, evident in both Caravaggio's work and popular theater.

2.1.1 Spanish Lombardy

To establish possible connections between Caravaggio's work and dramatic forms with both Spanish roots and a Spanish aesthetic, I explore the cultural environment of Spanish Lombardy. Here was the fertile soil in which the seeds of Caravaggio's career were planted. Caravaggio only knew the Duchy of Milan as a Spanish possession. For nearly 200 years, after the Peace of Câteau Cambrésis in 1559, over half of the Italian peninsula was under Spanish control. [Fig. 19] This treaty marked the beginning of a period of peace after 50 years of war between France and Spain as these nations battled for possession of northern Italy. Although this treaty brought a reprieve from the hardships of war, it "sealed the hegemony of Spain over Italy" and influenced

Italian politics for the next 150 years.⁸² Northern Italy was a necessary part of the Spanish Crown's plan to effectively control its distant territories, and Milan and Genoa were considered "the keys of Italy" (*le chiavi d' Italia*) due to their crucial roles in linking Spanish territories in northern and southern Europe.⁸³

Genoa was the main northern seaport, bringing goods and imperial troops. Milan was strategically positioned on the "Spanish Road" that linked the Spanish Netherlands to Rome and the empire's other territories in southern Italy. Milan also served as the staging ground for imperial troops heading northward to Flanders.⁸⁴ In 1581, the Venetian ambassador, Francesco Morosini wrote, Milan "can never be without feeling the results of war, seeing that it is the receptacle of all soldiers who serve His Catholic Majesty in Italy, in Flanders, or in Spain itself."⁸⁵ The Spanish transformed a major city landmark, the former Sforza ducal residence (*Castello Sforzesco*), into a soldier barracks with the capacity to house nearly 2000 Spanish soldiers.⁸⁶ Although an important part of the imperial war machine, Lombard forces were always in the minority to foreign soldiers (Spanish, Neapolitan, Swiss, and German) who were

⁸² Christopher F. Black, *Early Modern Italy: A Social History* (London: Routledge, 2001), 11. See also Domenico Sella, *Italy in the Seventeenth Century* (London and New York: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1997), 1. See also: John A. Davis, "General Editor's Preface," *Early Modern Italy 1550-1796*, ed. John Marino (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.), v-vi.

⁸³ Geoffrey Parker. *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road, 1567-1659 : the logistics of Spanish victory and defeat in the Low Countries' Wars*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁸⁴ Charles V was interested in securing Milan under Imperial control due to its importance as a communication link between other Spain and other territories of the Empire and was easily accessible from the port of Genoa. Gaining control of Milan and would make possible the expulsion of the French from the Italian peninsula and facilitate an alliance with the papacy. The Empire would then have control over much of Europe. Christine Suzanne Getz, *Music in the Collective Experience in Sixteenth-Century Milan* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), xiii. See also: John Lynch, *Spain 1516-1598: From Nation State to World Empire* (Oxford and Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 110-116. and Parker, 2004.

⁸⁵ *Relazioni di ambasciatori veneti al Senato*, ed. Luigi Firpo, 14 vols. (Turin: Bottega d'Erasmus, 1966-96), vol 8, *Spagna (1497-1598)* (1981), 757 and Claudio Donati, "Arms and the Nobility in Spanish Italy" in Dandeleit and Marino, 310-11.

⁸⁶ Official website, Castello Sforzesco. <http://www.milanocastello.it/ing/lungaFortezza.html>

constantly present in Lombard daily life during the century and a half of Spanish rule.⁸⁷ Later in the seventeenth century, as war in the Spanish Netherlands raged on, the Lombards grew weary of the Spanish presence in their land, but this was a time that Caravaggio would never see.

From the beginning of *l'età spagnola*, many wealthy Lombard families fostered close ties with the Spanish gubernatorial court in order to secure their prominent status under foreign rule. As the first century under Spanish rule was relatively prosperous, their privileged position would reap many benefits. The positive effect of this new era was evident in its population growth. By 1580, the population had increased to 100,000, making it one of the largest cities on the Italian peninsula, second only to Naples—another Iberian-controlled city. The economy of Spanish Lombardy grew along with the population surge. Spanish peace brought Milanese prosperity.

The Spanish Empire also benefitted from Lombardy's success, for it taxed its subjects heavily and enlisted Milanese men into its military. With regard to local governance, however, Spain ruled Milan without imposing too much force, allowing the Milanese to enjoy most of “their traditional powers and privileges.”⁸⁸ The widespread recovery of the last half of the sixteenth century fostered a surprisingly tolerant attitude among the Milanese toward their Iberian rulers. A Venetian ambassador reported, “As much a foreign regime can please a people used to living under native princes, the State [of Milan] lives not unwillingly under the Spaniards.”⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Romano Canosa, *La vita quotidiana a Milano in età spagnola* (Milano: Longanesi & Co., 1996), 133-144.

⁸⁸ P. Renée Baernstein, *A Convent Tale: A Century of Sisterhood in Milan*. (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 23. Also see: Dorino Tuniz and Germano Zaccheo, eds. *Carlo Bescapè sulle orme del Borromeo: Coscienza e azione pastorale in un vescovo di fine cinquecento* (Novara: Interlinea Edizioni, 1994), 112 and Domenico Sella, *Crisis and Continuity: The Economy of Spanish Lombardy in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979)

⁸⁹ Baernstein, 24. See also: M. Tabarrini, “Relazione inedita dello Stato di Milano di G.B. Guarini,” *Archivio storico italiano* ser. 3 vol. 5 (1867): 33; quoted in Domenico Sella, *Lo Stato di Milano in età spagnola* (Turin: Utet Libreria, 1987), 9.

Eventually this positive attitude changed, but during Caravaggio's lifetime many influential Milanese maintained close ties with the Spanish governor and identified themselves as subjects of Spain.⁹⁰ Sister Agata Sfondrati, niece of the Milanese Pope Gregory XIV, revealed the strength of her family's devotion to the Spanish Crown by proudly describing herself as being "more Spanish than Italian."⁹¹ These pro-Spanish Milanese families showed their allegiance to their foreign rulers by adopting Spanish customs, costume, literature, and even language.⁹² Such devotion to the Spanish Crown was not particular to the Sfondrati's family, but is characteristic of the family of Sister Agata's dear friend, Costanza Colonna Sforza—Caravaggio's protector.⁹³

2.1.2 The Sforza-Colonna family in Milan

Caravaggio's exposure to theatrical performances and literature was facilitated by wealthy hispanophile Milanese such as Costanza Colonna Sforza and her family. Costanza Colonna Sforza (1555-1626), the Marchesa di Caravaggio, was the one person with whom Caravaggio managed to maintain a close relationship throughout his short, turbulent life.⁹⁴ Her family came to his aid numerous times, either directly or through their large network of powerful friends. The Sforza-Colonna family figured prominently on the Italian political stage during the "età

⁹⁰ Baernstein, 4.

⁹¹ M. Tabarrini, "Relazione inedita dello Stato di Milano di G.B. Guarini," *Archivio storico italiano* ser. 3 vol. 5 (1867): 33, quoted in Domenico Sella, *Lo Stato di Milano in età spagnola* (Turin: Utet Libreria, 1987), 9; and in Baernstein, 24.

⁹² Black, 11. For the debate on Spanish hegemony in Italy see: Croce, *La Spagna* and Canosa, 1996.

⁹³ Letter from Paola Antonia Sfondrati to Provost of San Barnaba. *Archivio Storico dei Barnabiti* [Milan] c.g. fasc. 3 let. 26; quoted in Baernstein, 113 and 231. Paola Antonia Sfondrati was the godmother of Costanza Colonna's daughter (born 1572/3), Faustina. While in her early teens, Costanza's daughter was a boarder at the San Paolo convent in which the Sfondrati nuns were living.

⁹⁴ Giacomo Berra, *Il Giovane Caravaggio in Lombardia: Ricerche documentarie sui Merisi, gli Aratori e i marchesi di Caravaggio* (Firenze: Fondazione di Studi di Storia dell'Arte Roberto Longhi, 2005)

spagnola” and counted generals, admirals, dukes, princes, and viceroys among its ancestors.⁹⁵ Their power during the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries was closely tied to their long-standing allegiance to the Spanish Crown and the strong Iberian presence on the Italian peninsula. Given the Colonna’s identification with their Spanish sovereigns, they were quick to embrace Iberian culture.⁹⁶ Costanza’s father, brother, and son all spent considerable time at the Spanish court, allowing them ample opportunity to observe (and adopt) Iberian customs.⁹⁷ Elite Milanese such as the Sforza Colonna copied Spanish style of dress, read Spanish literature, played Spanish music, and made Spanish words part of the Milanese dialect.⁹⁸ The combined influence of Caravaggio’s personal rapport with hispanophiles such as Costanza’s family and the strong Iberian presence on the peninsula exposed him to Iberian culture and brought his work to the attention of Spanish and pro-Spanish families in Italy who appreciated a style that resonated with an Iberian aesthetic. To understand the cultural interests and patronage of these pro-Spanish families better, I will focus on the Sforza Colonnas.

Costanza Colonna was the daughter of Marco Antonio II Colonna (1535-1584), head of one of the oldest and most powerful families in Rome, the victorious admiral of the Battle of

⁹⁵ Berra, 28-69. Also see: Nicoletta Bazzano, *Marco Antonio Colonna* (Roma: Salerno Edatrice, 2003).

⁹⁶ Eduard A. Šafařík, with Cinzia Pujia, *Collezione dei dipinti Colonna: inventari 1611-1795*, ed., Anna Cera Sones, Munich: New Providence, NJ: K.G. Saur, 1996.

⁹⁷ Berra, 80.

⁹⁸ For a general (and rather biased) description of Spanish culture see: Croce, *La Spagna*. For Milanese costume see: Fritz Saxl, “Costumes and Festivals of Milanese Society under Spanish Rule,” *Proceedings of the British Academy 1937*, vol. XXIII (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 400-456. On Spanish literature in Milan, see: “Innanzitutto “Specchio d’Europa”: a Milano, prima *llave de Italia* e poi *corazón de la monarquía*, si stampo libri in spagnolo, libri di autori spagnoli tradotti in italiano, libri di autori italiani tradotti in spagnolo....” Chiara Continisio, “Don Ferrante riabilitato: note su libri e cultura nella Milano spagnola, città colta ed europea,” *Grandezza e Splendori della Lombardia spagnola. 1535-1701* (Milano: Skira, 2002), 110-11. For Spanish song books in Milan see: Giovanni Caravaggi, ed., *Cancioneros spagnoli a Milano* (Firenze: “La Nuova Italia” Editrice, 1989). On Spanish in the Milanese dialect, see: Croce, 151-174.

Lepanto (1571), and Viceroy of Sicily (1577-1584).⁹⁹ Of the prominent Italian families, the Colonna were perhaps the most loyal to the Spanish Crown. Charles V called on the Colonna countless times to aid him in his military campaigns and rewarded them generously with prestige, titles, and property.¹⁰⁰ The Sforza-Colonna family's political power and social connections worked to Caravaggio's advantage when he was in need of patrons in Rome, Naples, Malta, and Sicily. Moreover, in times of trouble, their powerful friends came to his aid, allowing him to take refuge under their protection—the most dramatic occasion being his flight from Rome in 1606 for the murder of Ranuccio Tomassoni.

Caravaggio's ties to the Colonna family have a long history, beginning with his maternal grandfather, Giovan Giacomo Aratori. He worked as an "agrimensor" (land surveyor) in Caravaggio and Milan and was hired by the Marchese di Caravaggio, Francesco Sforza (1550-1583).¹⁰¹ After the death of the Sforza, Giovan Giacomo took on a more important role within the Sforza Colonna household by managing the marchesa's property. Francesco Sforza's relationship with Caravaggio's parents (Fermo Merisi and Lucia Aratori) is confirmed by church records that list him as witness at their wedding in January of 1571. Fermo Merisi was a "muratore," a stone mason, who may have been in charge of some construction projects for Sforza, but this has not yet been confirmed.¹⁰² Documents show that Caravaggio's aunt Margarita was close to the Sforza-Colonna family as a *balia* (wetnurse) and was in Costanza Colonna-Sforza's employ for many years to help care for her young children and assist her

⁹⁹Costanza's mother was Felice Orsini of the Roman Orsini family (former rivals of the Colonna who, unlike the pro-Spanish Colonna, were aligned with the French faction in Italy). Nicoletta Bazzano, 51.

¹⁰⁰Dandele, 49, 133, 136.

¹⁰¹On Giovan Giacomo Aratori see: Berra, 125-149.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, 124.

during her many pregnancies.¹⁰³ The rapport between the two families continued, as Caravaggio's sister Caterina was later employed as a *balia*, this time for Costanza's grandchildren, the children of Muzio II Sforza Colonna (1576-1622) and Orsina Peretti (c. 1576-1621). Letters written by Caravaggio's aunt and brother testify to the deep respect the Aratori-Merisi family had for the marchesa. Caterina's affection was such that she named one of her daughters Costanza in her honor.¹⁰⁴

A relationship with a prominent family such as the Sforza Colonna, with extensive familial and social connections to the Roman, Neapolitan, and Spanish elite would be invaluable to a young artist such as Caravaggio.¹⁰⁵ Costanza Colonna not only helped Caravaggio establish a painting career in Rome, but repeatedly came to his aid when he ran into trouble with the authorities, fled Rome, entered the Knights of Malta, and acquired a papal pardon after living as a fugitive. While this aid was crucial to the young artist's career, I argue that Costanza provided more than just social connections.

Costanza's influential family had a long history of cultural patronage in the visual arts, literature, music, and drama. Through the Sforza-Colonna, Caravaggio was exposed to innovative thinkers who pushed the limits of their respective fields. This pioneering attitude may have help move Caravaggio toward a *seicento* avant-garde approach to painting that was labeled "modern" at that time. Contact with this pro-Spanish family may have introduced him to a side of Iberian culture that he would not have found through his chance encounters with the Spaniards on the streets. Many of the people that they knew had firsthand knowledge of the painting trends

¹⁰³ At the time of Francesco Sforza's death in 1583, Costanza Colonna Sforza had six children, three of the boys (Muzio, Fabrizio, and Ludovico Maria) and three girls (Faustina, Violante, and Giovanna). She had given birth to six other children, but these died prematurely. Berra, 69.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 140-142.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

on the Iberian Peninsula and could have advised Caravaggio on “Spanish taste” in painting. Given the number of Spanish in Rome who were purchasing art to take back to Spain, this would be valuable information indeed. I suggest that such information on Spanish artistic preferences and Caravaggio’s prolonged exposure to Iberian culture while in Lombardy, Rome, and southern Italy, left recognizable traces in his art, making his paintings more attractive to those who were similarly influenced by Spanish culture. Caravaggio’s sensitivity to local culture set his work apart from that of other Italian artists who instead chose to look to master painters as their primary models and adhered more closely to traditional painting practice.

The Sforza-Colonna family had a history of arts patronage and participation on the paternal side as well. The Marchese di Caravaggio, Francesco Sforza, was a descendant of the powerful Milanese Sforzas who were enthusiastic patrons of the arts.¹⁰⁶ Although the Sforza were replaced by governors representing the Spanish Crown, they continued to maintain an influential presence in Milanese political and cultural life. The Caravaggio branch of the Sforza was no exception. They were famous for their arts patronage and were often central figures in Milanese civic and religious spectacle. One occasion demonstrates the esteem they enjoyed among the pro-Spanish rulers of the city. Governor Ferrante Gonzaga, a staunch supporter of Spain, chose Francesco Sforza’s father, Muzio I Sforza (1531 – 1552), to be a featured challenger in a public joust held in honor of Philip II’s visit to Milan in 1548, a trip planned to introduce the future Spanish king to his Italian subjects.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ The Sforza family was firmly established on Milan’s ducal throne until 1499 when the French invaded Lombardy and seized Milan from Ludovico Sforza. In the interim, between the period of French rule and that of the Spanish governors, a Sforza (Francesco II) was again placed in power by the Iberians. The Spanish believed that the Milanese would more easily accept one of their own as the visible representative of the Spanish Crown.

¹⁰⁷ Saxl, “Costumes and Festivals,” 406-12.

The Sforza-Colonna continued this tradition of patronage and participation in Milanese visual, literary, and performing arts well into the *seicento*. Almost 50 years later, Muzio II Sforza (1576 – 1622), son of Francesco Sforza and Costanza Colonna, had become a central figure in Milanese artistic and literary circles and is known to have promoted drama, dance, and poetry in Lombardy.¹⁰⁸ In 1594, Muzio II founded the *Accademia degli Inquieti*, which counted famous writers, painters, and playwrights among its circle. Some of the academy's literary activity is published in Gherardo Borgogni's *Rime di diversi illustrissimi poeti* (Venice, 1599). In this collection, Muzio Sforza, the painter Ambrogio Ficino, the *commedia dell'arte* actress Isabella Andreini, and the singer Claudia Sessa were addressees its poems.¹⁰⁹ The activity of the *Inquieti* tended to focus more on literary and pictorial works than musical. Ambrogio Figino's works, which are known for their light effects and naturalism, are thought to have been sources for some of Caravaggio's paintings.¹¹⁰

Caravaggio's family knew the young Muzio well, for he was one of the children that Caravaggio's aunt, Margarita Aratori, nursed and was only 5 years younger than Caravaggio. Young Muzio's academy was officially founded in 1594, only 2 years after Caravaggio left for Rome in 1592 to start his painting career. The appearance of Figino-like elements in Caravaggio's later painting suggests that the young artist may have been familiar with the members of Muzio's cultural circle before the young Sforza had officially founded his academy. The year 1592 was also when Muzio II returned to Lombardy after spending six years at the

¹⁰⁸ Robert L. Kendrick, *The Sounds of Milan, 1585-1650* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 86 and Canosa, 271.

¹⁰⁹ Kendrick, 103.

¹¹⁰ Some scholars see similarities between Figino's *Martyrdom of St. Paul* and Caravaggio's *Beheading of St. John the Baptist* and Figino's *Madonna of the Snake* and Caravaggio's work by the same name. Moir, *Caravaggio*, 18.

Spanish court in Madrid.¹¹¹ Although Muzio and Caravaggio were together in Milan for only a short period (Muzio arrived in Milan early in 1591), there might have been some opportunity to for the two young men to discuss their shared interest in the arts.¹¹² Caravaggio may have learned about current artistic trends in Spain from Muzio before setting out to establish his own painting career. Recent scholarship suggests that Caravaggio may have travelled to Rome with Costanza's family.¹¹³ Muzio is known to have left for Rome in the middle of 1592, the same time that some scholars believe Caravaggio arrived in the Eternal City.

Muzio II Sforza married Orsina Peretti, who was the widow of Marc'Antonio III Colonna—Muzio's cousin. Orsina had her own connections to important literary figures in Milan such as the poet Angelo Grillo, whose innovations in poetic theory, found in his *Rime* of 1588, were highly influential in Milan. His innovations “consisted of the mixture of literary levels, a new immediacy and theatricality in sacred topics, unusual conceits, and a willingness to experiment with meter and diction.”¹¹⁴ Grillo dedicated his *Essequie di Christo celebrate co'l pianto di Maria Virgine, part 2* to Orsina.¹¹⁵ Grillo's innovative approach is similar to that of Caravaggio's revolutionary painting style. The Lombard artist is believed to have drawn from literary sources, mixed painting genres, and is noted for the bold, theatrical presentation of his subjects. He also interpreted biblical narratives in unusual ways and seems to have been constantly experimenting with his painting style. Caravaggio may have been encouraged by Grillo's success and innovative ideas.

¹¹¹ Helen Langdon, *Caravaggio: A Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), 28 and Berra, 78-80. Giovan Ambrogio Figino painted a portrait of the young Muzio before he left for Spain

¹¹² Berra, 80-81.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 245-258

¹¹⁴ Kendrick, 107.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

The Sforza Colonna family had a tradition of supporting innovative artists and writers. They were descendants of the famous poet Vittoria Colonna, who was a confidant of Michelangelo Buonarroti. Family members were also lauded in verse. Pietro Vinci dedicated his spiritual sonnets to Muzio's great aunt in 1580. Vinci had enjoyed the protection and support of Muzio's parents, Francesco and Costanza for some time. The Sforzas also had a long history of artistic patronage; their most prestigious being Leonardo da Vinci. The impact of Leonardo's careful study of nature had a profound influence on the region, making naturalism and carefully-rendered light effects a hallmark of Lombard painting—painting techniques that Caravaggio implemented with great success. Caravaggio shared Leonardo's interest in theater. However, the Florentine painter played a more active role in Milanese theatrical production, supplying the Sforza not only with paintings, but with theatrical scenery and costume designs as well. The Sforza made public spectacle a prominent part of their statecraft and spared no expense using it to enhance their public image.¹¹⁶

Muzio II Sforza continued this family tradition by supporting the arts throughout his life. In 1600, he is recorded as the prior of the Confraternity of S. Maria del Carmine.¹¹⁷ It was sponsored by the Carmelite church of S. Giovanni in Conca, located beside the marchesi di Caravaggio's palazzo. This confraternity “regularly sponsored a small annual procession in honor of Mary as giver of the Carmelite habit, which took place on the third Sunday of June.”¹¹⁸ Muzio II was the dedicatee for a procession in 1604 that featured “bells, street decorations, and a Mass at the church.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ For artistic patronage and political image in Milan see: Evelyn Welch, *Art and Authority in Renaissance Milan* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995).

¹¹⁷ Kendrick, 150

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

This procession must have been impressive for there is an unusually detailed description of its most interesting features. The account tells us that the city's *gonfalone* had been requisitioned to lead, followed by the confraternity's banner and then a group of young noblewomen, singing Marian *laude* and hymns. The prominent presence of townspeople in this religious drama parallels that within Caravaggio's paintings. Although Caravaggio never saw this particular procession because he was in Rome at this time, this procession's lay actors, symbols, and elaborate costume shows that the processional tradition that began in Milan while Caravaggio was studying there continued to be popular well into the following century.

This detailed account gives some valuable information on the types of street performances that Caravaggio would have seen in Rome and in southern Italy, for by time Caravaggio travelled south, this sort of procession had spread throughout Italy:

Next came an angel, a statue of the Virgin crushing the serpent, verses and emblems, and then a cherub [the soprano Giovanni Andrea Ferrari, hired from the Duomo] with blonde hair, dressed in silver and carrying a lute. He was accompanied by four musical ensembles, each portraying figures: a first of eight angels, then four prophets [David, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah], four martyrs, and six female virgin saints.¹²⁰

Although the entry lists female saints, all of the roles were played by adult men, as was typical for the period. The procession pamphlet was dedicated to Muzio Sforza, showing his central role in the daily ritual life of Milan, despite the fact that his home territory was in Caravaggio. Muzio II also used his patronage of the arts to foster his family's close ties with the Spanish representatives at the Milanese court. In 1612, Muzio commissioned Francesco to write music for a court entertainment commemorating the birth of the Spanish governor's (Juan

¹²⁰ Kendrick, 150

Hurtado de Mendoza), son.¹²¹ The ducal palace was a site for music and theater, a cultural world in which the Sforza Colonna family played a prominent role. Theatrical performances are documented at the Milanese gubernatorial court from the time of Margaret's entry to that of Maria Anna.¹²² Theatrical performances of all types were very much a part of Milanese life. Such accounts testify to the central role that literature and the performing arts played in the cultural life of the Sforza-Colonna family—in Milan, Rome, and southern Italy. This is the same family upon which Caravaggio increasingly depended for protection and whose social ties steadily provided important commissions to the artist throughout his career.

In past centuries, such appreciation of the literary and performing arts was common only among upper-class citizens such as the Sforza Colonna, but during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there was a marked increase in interest among the middle and lower class. This was largely due to the greater accessibility to printed texts for popular consumption, dramatic interpretations of literature performed by *commedia dell'arte* in urban piazzas, and the Catholic Church's frequent use of theatrical staging conventions for their public processions and devotions. It is within this interesting world of cultural hybridization and mixing of literary and artistic forms that we find Caravaggio beginning to develop a personal painting style. His bold, personal style was rooted in the rich cultural soil of northern Italy, where he spent his youth.

¹²¹ The lyrics by Francesco Lomazzo read: Fortunate boy,/ hear what tones/ you are sung by the Muses;/Look how every light/ dances and swings in your pure sight;/Grow you new Alcides/ Whom the benevolent heaven nestles, Plays and laughs,/ so at your smile/ Insurbia [Milanese Lombardy] becomes Paradise. Kendrick, 86.

¹²² *Ibid.*

2.2 MILAN: THE MODEL COUNTER-REFORMATION CITY

Most scholars perceive Caravaggio's work to be a product of the new post-tridentine spirituality. Carlo Borromeo was instrumental in the final sessions of the Council of Trent and strove to implement its directives within his Lombard homeland, attempting to transform Milan into a new "City of God." This was the world into which Caravaggio was born and developed as a young artist. Carlo Borromeo had strong opinions about the theater, appropriating some form for his public devotions while suppressing others. To understand more fully public devotion and religious spectacle in Borromeo's Lombardy, one must look at the forces that shaped the Milanese bishop and the Diocese of Milan, the most populous in Catholic Europe.¹²³ Borromeo also serves as the embodiment of Counter-reformation thought, this sort of religious fervor (although to a lesser degree) was common among church reformers of the period. As many of his colleagues looked to him for guidance, his influence on the peninsula was profound. His opinions on art, architecture, and theater would shape ecclesiastical decoration and ritual for decades.

When Carlo Borromeo's uncle, Giovanni Angelo de' Medici (from Milan), rose to the pontificate as Pius IV in 1560, he appointed Borromeo a cardinal-deacon and papal secretary of state. Shortly after, he was made administrator of the archbishopric of Milan.¹²⁴ Although this "saint" was later known for his ascetic lifestyle, Borromeo lived in splendor while living in

¹²³ Kenderick, 20

¹²⁴ Carlo was born at the Borromeo castle in the Lombard town of Arona on the shores of Lago Maggiore. As the son of Giberto II Borromeo, count of Arona, and Margherita de' Medici, he was part of the Lombard elite class. This privileged life, however, did not prevent young Carlo from having a profound concern for less fortunate and supporting local charities. In 1599, he graduated from the university in Pavia with a degree in civil and canon law. Gigliola Soldi Rondinini, "Carlo e Federico Borromeo: due cardinali principi nella Lombardia spagnola," *Carlo e Federico: La luce dei Borromeo nella Milano spagnola*, ed. Paolo Biscottini (Milano: Museo Diocesano di Milano, 2005), 45-52.

Rome, socializing with the Roman humanists and appreciating the city's rich cultural life. He enjoyed music and played the lute and violoncello. While living at the Vatican, he founded a literary group called the Academy of the Vatican Nights, which included both ecclesiastics and laymen. The members met nearly every evening, and many of their contributions are among Borromeo's works, published in *Noctes Vaticanae* (*Le Notti Vaticani* in Italian).¹²⁵ The members discussed moral doctrine, the art of oration, and memory exercises.¹²⁶ Such Roman literary gathering regularly featured poetry and dramatic productions.

Borromeo also attended literary gatherings in the palaces of other Roman intellectuals. He almost certainly frequented those at the Colonna residence, because he moved into one of the palaces in the Palazzo Colonna compound (located in Piazza Santi Apostoli). He was close to members of the Colonna family, both in Rome and in Milan. Later, after Borromeo returned to Lombardy, he served as the guardian and protector of young Costanza and help her settle into her new life in Milan as the bride of the Marchese di Caravaggio, Francesco Sforza.¹²⁷

By 1562, Borromeo's leisure time was consumed by the Council of Trent and pursuit of his ecclesiastical career. He was secretly ordained priest in 1563 and said his second Mass in his house (which was attached to *Il Gesù*) in an oratory where St. Ignatius had been accustomed to celebrate. Borromeo had close ties with the Jesuits, whom he would later invite to Milan to

¹²⁵ Carlo Bescapé. *Vita e opera di Carlo, arcivescovo di Milano Cardinale di S. Prassede* (Milano: Veneranda Fabbrica del Duomo, 1965), 29-31.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹²⁷ His sister Anna would eventually marry Costanza's brother Fabrizio in 1562. Philip II of Spain was happy Marc'Antonio II Colonna had arranged this union for it joined one of the families most loyal to the Spanish Crown to the Borromeos, the beloved relatives of Pope Pius IV. Berra, 35-44. The Borromeo/Colonna bond was taken very seriously. Later after Fabrizio's untimely death in 1580 death, Anna Borromeo was under Marc'Antonio II Colonna's protection and lived with him in Palermo while he served as viceroy of Sicily. Bazzano, 102-3. She lived only two years more, dying in Palermo in 1582. Bascapé, 33.

oversee the seminaries there, bringing with them their rich theatrical traditions. The Jesuits of Milan carried on the tradition of utilizing theater as a didactic tool.¹²⁸

At this time Carlo Borromeo's confessor was a Jesuit priest, Giovanni Battista Ribera, probably instructed him to read Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*. The text was popular with reform-minded church leaders such as St. Philip Neri, founder of the Oratorians. Some scholars suggest that this text may have influenced Caravaggio's work because it encourages the utilization of all the senses in spiritual devotion, instructing the believer to use mental imagery as an aid for prayer and spiritual meditation.¹²⁹ A survey of Borromeo's library shows that he had a particular interest in the writings of such Spanish mystics as Luis de Granada, il Beato di Avila (five titles), and Alonso de Orosco (four titles).¹³⁰ Throughout his life one sees the influence of the *Exercises* upon the his preaching and devotions. Borromeo emphasized both an embodied spirituality, relying heavily on sensual experience, and an active imagination that constructs mental situations and dialogs with biblical personages, much as a playwright would do, for the spiritual edification of the believer.¹³¹

Spiritual guidance and education were important missions for Carlo Borromeo, evident in his contributions to the Tridentine Catechism. Given the 80-year absence of a resident bishop, the education of his flock would not be an easy task. To set the clergy and Milanese public back on track, he used a firm guiding hand, introducing sweeping changes even before he arrived in

¹²⁸ On Milanese Jesuit Theater see: Michael A. Zampelli, *Teatri di formazione: Actio, parola e immagine nella scena gesuitica del Sei-Settecento a Milano* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2002).

¹²⁹ On Spiritual Exercises and Caravaggio, see: Franco Mormando, ed., *Saints and Sinners: Caravaggio & the Baroque Image*. Chestnut Hill, MA : McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College ; [Chicago] : Distributed by the University of Chicago Press, c1999.

¹³⁰ Canosa, 289.

¹³¹ Franco Buzzi and Danilo Zardin, eds., *Carlo Borromeo e l'opera della "Grande Riforma": Cultura, religione e arti del governo nella Milano del pieno Cinquecento* (Milano: Credito Artigiano, 1997), 49.

Milan.¹³² Borromeo's sweeping reforms went far beyond preaching and overseeing the religious orders. He set out to redesign religious architecture and church decoration. In his treatise on ecclesiastical art and architecture, *Instructiones fabricate et supellectilis ecclesiasticae* (1577), he advocated less elaborate church interiors and discussed divisions of space and "hierarchies of sacrality," separating the sacred space of the church (altar and choir area) from the secular areas where the public moved.¹³³ Carlo sought to emphasize the boundaries between secular and sacred space because it demonstrated the crucial intercessory role of the clergy, a role that was harshly criticized by the Protestants. Borromeo's far-reaching reforms extended to the collegiate churches, monasteries, and even the confraternities. This sacred spatial hierarchy affected church architecture, sacred art, and popular theater in Milan as well. No one escaped the archbishop's scrutiny.

Borromeo chose the Jesuits to aid him in his religious reform of the region. In 1564, thirty Jesuit fathers arrived in Milan to help with Borromeo's reform; three of these were to oversee the newly-opened seminary. The Jesuits frequently used the visual arts and theatrical performance as didactic tools within their churches, schools, and colleges.¹³⁴ Drama had already become a vital part of Jesuit life in other areas and continued in Milan for the next two centuries, making the Jesuits one of the major contributors to the city's theatrical history.¹³⁵ The Jesuits'

¹³² In 1564 in preparation of his return to Lombardy as archbishop, Borromeo sent deputies to carry out Charles' instructions by calling together a diocesan synod for the promulgation of the decrees of the Council of Trent, beginning with the clergy. Bescapé, 47-69.

¹³³ Following the Councils decrees suggesting less elaborate church interiors, Borromeo cleared the cathedral of ornate tombs, rich ornaments, banners, and arms. He divided the nave of the church into two compartments to separate the sexes at worship as also. Ryan Gregg, "The Sacro Monte of Varallo as a Physical Manifestation of the *Spiritual Exercises*," *Athanor*, XXII (2004), 50-51.

¹³⁴ The Jesuits' ministry "falls into four major categories suggested by the *Formula* and made explicit in other documents. The categories are: (1) various forms of ministry of the Word; (2) administration of the sacraments such as the Eucharist and confession; (3) certain works of mercy; and (4) outside the *Formula* itself, the schools." John W. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 80.

¹³⁵ For Jesuit Theater in Milan see: Annamaria Cascetta and Roberta Carpani, eds., *La scena della gloria: drammaturgia e spettacolo a Milano in età spagnola* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1995) and Giovanna Zanlonghi, "The

use of the arts to connect with the populace resonated with Borromeo, who (as we will see) employed theatrical methods in his own ministry—in the education of seminarians, children, and the general public. Because Caravaggio was a product of this education system, he would have watched or perhaps participated in some of these theatrically-inspired events.

Borromeo saw the education of the youth as essential to renew Milan's ailing spirit and founded the *scuole di dottrina cristiana* (schools of Christian doctrine) to teach reading and writing. Classes were held in churches throughout the diocese and used prayers and other religious writings as the texts from which to study. Boys and girls attended separate schools and were taught by the literate members of the congregation, often as acts of charity performed by wealthy citizens.¹³⁶ It may have been in the *scuola di dottrina* in Caravaggio, that the young painter first met his future protector, Costanza Colonna.¹³⁷

Borromeo's *scuole di dottrina* and the Jesuit colleges followed the advice given by Antonio Sebastiano Minturno in his *De poeta* (1559) "to teach, to delight, and to move."¹³⁸ It seems that Borromeo's employment of dramatic forms was successful, for the dramatizations

Jesuit Stage and Theatre in Milan." in John W. O'Malley, ed. *The Jesuits II: culture, sciences, and the arts, 1540-1773*, vol. 2. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 530-31.

¹³⁶ "Since some people in the late sixteenth century viewed the catechism as a mission from the high to the low, proponents held up for emulation members of the nobility who participated. Don Fernando of Toledo, an illustrious and rich cavalier, declined the cardinal's hat in order to devote himself to teaching Christian doctrine . . . In Brescia, many gentlemen, including 'leading ones,' taught Christian doctrine in the city and countryside; gentlemen of Milan and Naples did the same. Highborn ladies joined in the work. Leonora of Austria, the duchess of Mantua, founded a teacher-training institute to prepare ninety girls to teach in the Schools of Christian Doctrine. She visited the catechism schools of Mantua, exhorting the gentlewomen who accompanied her to support this Christian exercise. Noblewomen of Milan, Brescia, Parma, Piacenza, Venice, and Naples acted similarly. . . ." Paul F. Grendler, "Borromeo and the Schools of Christian Doctrine" in *Books and Schools in the Italian Renaissance*, 166. Also see: Ludovico Carbone, *Dello ammaestramento delli figliuoli nella dottrina Christiana*. (Venezia: Giovanni Guerigli, 1596), 129-132 and Paul F. Grendler, "The Schools of Christian Doctrine" *Schooling in Renaissance Italy* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 333-362.

¹³⁷ Berra, 169-73.

¹³⁸ Minturno, the bishop of Ugento, participated in the Council of Trent and was influential in the Council's writings on the literary and dramatic forms allowed by the newly reformed Church. His ideas were not new for there are similar concepts found in the writings of Horace and Cicero, ancient authors who were popular amongst sixteenth-century humanists. Marvin Carlson, *Theories of Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey, from the Greeks to the Present*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), 44.

enacted by school children were greatly appreciated by the Milanese public. In 1567, Gian Battista Casale, director of the *scuole di dottrina*, describes an event in which the boys of the scuole were dressed as angels “con alle et camise” (with wings and robes) to recreate of paradise on earth with the Father, Son, Holy Spirit, the Virgin Mary, and all the celestial court.”¹³⁹ A tract on religious education by Silvio Antoniano, *Dell’educazione Cristiana de’ figlioli* (1582) praises the utilization of theater in schools for its educative and recreational properties.¹⁴⁰

I suggest that because the *scuole di dottrina* and the Jesuit colleges aimed to engage their students through the senses, Caravaggio implemented a similar emotional element in his paintings. As early as the Middle Ages, the Church successfully used the theater as a didactic tool because religious leaders knew that evoking a strong emotional response made the public more receptive to the religious message. The natural outgrowth of this sensory approach to religious ministry and education was through theatrical performance. Thus, it is no coincidence that both the Jesuits and Borromeo looked to theater as a model for emotional engagement. Because Counter-Reformation leaders were looking to the writings of the early religious leaders for models, it seems logical that they would look to medieval methods of engaging the public. All of these performances—even the humble performances of the children in the *scuole*—were created to deliver potent messages, by modeling humility and piety, calling the public to penance, proclaiming civil authority, or displaying wealth and power.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ C. Marcora, *Il diario di Gian Battista Casale, operaio della Dottrina Cristiana (1554-1598)*, MSDM, XII, 1965, 243-44 quoted in Claudio Bernardi and Annamaria Cascetta “Dai ‘profani trupudi’ alla ‘religiosa magnificenza’: la ricostruzione del sistema cerimoniale nella Milano borromaica,” in *Carlo Borromeo e “opera della “grande riforma” Cultura, religione e arti del governo nella Milano del peino Cinquecento*, eds. Franco Buzzi and Danilo Zardin (Milano: Silvana Editoriale, 1997), 235.

¹⁴⁰ Bernardi and Cascetta, 233.

¹⁴¹ The dictates Council of Trent called for the free education of the masses, this charitable was considered a means of public persuasion by teaching Church doctrine to combat the threat of Protestantism. In many places this public education was taken further than merely teaching worshippers to memorize prayers and biblical stories, there was also a push to teach reading and writing to the lower classes. To achieve this, free public schools were established.

2.2.1 Borromeo's Ideas on Education and Drama

Young Michelangelo Merisi undoubtedly went to one of the *scuole di dottrina* while growing up in Caravaggio. In Milan, he may have also attended some form of vernacular school. In apprenticeship contracts, it was required that the master provide for both the secular and the religious education of their young apprentices. The young artists needed to be literate, know simple mathematics, and to be able to read enough Latin to read contracts and interact with their patrons.¹⁴²

Compared to his troubled adult life, Caravaggio's early educational years were probably pleasant. Following the directive to "teach, delight, and move," lessons at the *scuole di dottrina* were meant to be educational and fun.¹⁴³ It is said that during the formative years of the *scuole di dottrina Cristiana* in the early 16th century, children were given an apple if they participated in the lessons. Students learned reading and writing from pamphlets and books, some of them illustrated. To help internalize the information, the children played memory games and answered questions about biblical stories and church doctrine. To make these lessons more engaging, they sang, recited prayers and poetry, and performed small skits.¹⁴⁴

These *scuole di dottrina cristiana*, were located in the churches (boys in one church and girls in another) and were held on Sundays and holidays. Here, laymen and laywomen performed works of charity by teaching poor the fundamentals of Catholicism and some elementary education. The Council of Trent endorsed these schools and local bishops promoted them. Particularly important for the spread of these schools in the regions around Milan, Caravaggio's birth place, was Carlo Borromeo. It is estimated that in 1564 there were thirty-three Schools of Christian Doctrine where over 2,000 students were taught by 200 adults, and in 1599, through his support, the numbers rose to approximately 7,700 teachers taught 20,500 pupils. The students' ages ranged from 5/6 to 14/15 years.

Grendler, "The Schools of Christian Doctrine," in *Books and Schools*, 320-21.

¹⁴² Grendler, "What Piero Read in School" See also: Berra, 198-232.

¹⁴³ "Singing, processions, contests, and prizes were used to make the learning experience pleasurable." Grendler, "Borromeo and Schools of Christian Doctrine," 159.

¹⁴⁴ Bernardi and Cascetta, 233.

A high point for the pupils was participation in the annual feast day and Holy Week processions that traveled through the city streets. Entertaining for both observer and participant, these religious festivities were still didactic. Before assembling with the musicians and adult choruses to begin the procession, the students were required to listen to a two-hour lesson.¹⁴⁵ In later years, *tableaux vivants* were added to the solemn processions to make them more emotionally engaging. We cannot know if Caravaggio participated in these processions, but he certainly watched them. By the sixteenth century, public performance had become a regular part of daily life because it was an effective way to show civic pride and collective piety. Thus, the city's religious and gubernatorial authorities took great pains to keep street spectacles part of Milanese tradition.¹⁴⁶

2.2.2 History of Public Performance in Milan

Milanese public performance has a long history. Often these performances were propagandistic tools masked as popular entertainment. The dramas frequently placed secular rulers, biblical personages, common citizens, and uniformed soldiers together in a production that seemed to transcend temporal boundaries. Caravaggio's paintings, such as his *Calling of Saint Matthew* and *Crucifixion of Saint Andrew* have a similar mix of characters. [Figs. 20 & 21] My research shows that this type of hybridization was typical of popular performance, especially those connected to civic ritual. One characteristic of Milanese street drama is the presence of the armed soldier in these processions and festivals. This may be due to Milan's strategic position on the "Spanish Road" that linked Spanish Naples and Sicily with the Imperial territories in the

¹⁴⁵ Getz, 128.

¹⁴⁶ Getz, 31-40.

Spanish Netherlands. Because public performance provided opportunities to display political power, rulers employed the religious processions celebrating feast days of the Church calendar for their own benefit—prominent displays of power and piety. Such politically motivated plays are found as early as the 14th century. Documentation describing a Milanese “*Stella*” (star) play mentions Magi riding horseback through the streets of the city and Herod sitting near the columns of San Lorenzo.¹⁴⁷ The *stella* performance became an established Milanese tradition and was later found in other cities such as Florence where Medici family appropriated the “magi” performances of Epiphany as a means of self-promotion.

Although the Florentine procession is the most discussed today, it was probably the Milanese “*Stella*” that established a precedent for the use of “magi” plays for political purposes.¹⁴⁸ The Magi were important symbols for Milan because the Dominican monastery of Sant’Eustorgio, which had connections to the Visconti family, once contained the relics of the three Magi.¹⁴⁹ The powerful Sforza family promoted its image as ruler of Milan by laying out the processional route to traverse parts of the city significant to the family, making the world of the Sforza the setting for religious devotions and staged miracles.

These religious processions inspired renaissance painters before Caravaggio. The Milanese *Stella* was “precisely the liturgic *Stella* translated into an out-of-door *spectacle*, which

¹⁴⁷ E.K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903), 93. See also D’Ancona, *Origini*, vol. I (Rome: Bardi Editore, 1971), 97.

¹⁴⁸ The Florentine Magi were ‘upon great horses, surrounded by their attendants, each dressed in a different way; with a great number of mules and the greatest retinue...wearing crowns of gold; holding in their hands golden chalices with gold, frankincense, and myrrh; with the star going before them through the air; with trumpets sounding and horns going ahead; with apes, baboons, and diverse kinds of animals; and with the people making a remarkable tumult.’ Rab Hatfield, “Compagnia de’ Magi,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XXXIII, 1970, 113 and Rab Hatfield, Botticelli’s Uffizi “Adoration” : a study in pictorial content (Princeton, NJ : Princeton University Press, 1976) and Alessandro D’Ancona, *Origini del teatro italiano : libri tre con due appendici sulla rappresentazione drammatica del contado toscano e sul teatro mantovano nel sec. XVI* (Rome : Bardi Editore, 1971), 97f.

¹⁴⁹ Welch, 45-6.

in its turn becomes the model for many a Quattrocento painting.”¹⁵⁰ The Florentine Epiphany procession served as a source for Botticelli’s and Gentile da Fabriano’s “magi” paintings.¹⁵¹ [Figs. 22 & 23] Caravaggio’s observation of theater was not novel; there were precedents. It was his unflinching naturalism and emphasis on the common citizen that distinguished him from the others. Botticelli and Da Fabriano focused their attention on the rich fabrics and costumes of the Medici/Magi, while Caravaggio featured the barefooted pilgrim who often followed the processional route. [Fig. 17]

Milanese rulers also showed their wealth and cultural sophistication by hosting spectacles based on mythological or literary themes. Ludovico “*Il Moro*” Sforza continued Milanese theatrical tradition and sought the expertise of artists working in the city to design the scenery. Between 1482 and 1499, Leonardo da Vinci designed the scenery for several entries and performances, even designing a revolving stage for Angelo Poliziano’s *Orfeo* in the early 1490’s.¹⁵² Leonardo’s engineering skills and experimentation with light made him the perfect artist for this task. The artist had a strong following in Lombardy. His close study of nature and *sfumato* influenced Milanese painting tradition and is the source of the Lombard naturalism to which Caravaggio belongs. Leonardo’s other work in science, engineering, and the theater were also well known. Caravaggio would have learned of Leonardo’s activities in Milan while studying with Peterzano and possibly through his contact with Costanza Colonna Sforza, who married into the Sforza family who supported Leonardo and whose son, Muzio II, continued the tradition of Sforza theatrical patronage.

¹⁵⁰ Chambers , 93

¹⁵¹ Chambers continues by naming Botticelli’s *Magi* of the Uffizi and Gentile da Fabriano’s *Magi* with “the baboons done to the [from?] life.” *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Ronald W. Vince, *Renaissance Theatre: A Historiographical Handbook* (Westport, CA and London: Greenwood Press, 1984), 18. Leonardo’s sketch of the *Orfeo* play is reproduced in Arthur R. Blumenthal’s *Italian Renaissance Festival Designs* (Madison, WI: 1973) Also see: Marialuisa Angiolillo, *Leonardo: Feste e teatri* (Napoli: Società Editrice Napoletana, 1979).

Ludovico's second son, Francesco II Sforza, chose to unite Milan by creating a unified civic identity and creating a convincing princely image of himself.¹⁵³ To achieve this, he employed public spectacle because he "recognized the power of visual and aural stimuli to capture the collective spirit."¹⁵⁴ The locations of these ceremonies were the ducal chapels at Sant' Ambrogio in Vigevano (outside Milan), Santa Maria dell Scala, and the various ducal residences.¹⁵⁵ The use of multi-sensory media continued with the many gubernatorial and ecclesiastical ceremonies in later years. The Spanish governors used these same locations because they had become traditional sites of Milanese civic power. Santa Maria della Scala (known at that time as the Royal Ducal Chapel) became the center for the gubernatorial ceremonial.¹⁵⁶

From 1538 to 1546, the governor was Alfonso D'Avalos, Marchese del Vasto, a man with whose literary interests guided his constructing of public spectacle.¹⁵⁷ He reformed much of

¹⁵³ Although there was now a Milanese in charge, there was not instant peace. Milan was fraught with both political and economic instability. There were still French sympathizers in the duchy and the French were still encamped along the Ticino River waiting for another opportunity of regaining control of this key Italian city. The Sforza dynasty had not been popular with the aristocratic Milanese families who allied with the French and had continued to thrive during French occupation. Francesco was forced to look to the artisan classes for support. Getz, xiii. See also: Giorgio Chittolini, "Di alcuni aspetti della crisi dello stato Sforzesco" *Milano e Borgogna. Due stati principeschi tra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, eds. Jean-Marie Cauchies and Giorgio Chittolini (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 1990), 21-34 and Giorgio Chittolini, "La crisi dello stato milanese alla fine del Quattrocento" *Città, comunità e feudi negli stati dell'Italia centro-settentrionale XIV-XVI secolo* (Milano: Edizioni Unicopoli, 1996), 167-180.

¹⁵⁴ Getz, 4-5. The new duke was aware of the power of performance and the arts in cultivating an impressive political identity because he had seen the arts used in this manner at various European courts. While at the Habsburg court of Maximilian I, Francesco II was exposed to respected musicians, artists, and philosophers. While in Rome, Francesco was a patron of the arts and is known to have hosted musical performances in his residence there. Maximilian I's second wife was Bianca Maria Sforza (d.1510), daughter of Duke Galeazzo Maria Sforza of Milan. See also, *Sforzesco* 132 (Potenze estere: Roma 1513-1514), n. n. (25 novembre 1513), Archivio di Stato, Milano.

¹⁵⁵ The ducal ceremonial often employed a *tableau vivant* that "featured a veritable kaleidoscope of sensual stimuli, including persons, possessions, food, drink, speech, and music." Getz, 38-39. See also: Welch, 208-209

¹⁵⁶ Sant' Ambrogio, although still recognized as a ducal chapel under the protection of Charles V, was used by the court only when it was in residence in Vigevano. Getz, 40-42.

¹⁵⁷ Archival sources indicate that at least three letterati, Luca Contile, Pietro Aretino, and Alberto Albicante, were employed at the Milanese court during the D'Avalos' governorship. Maria was the subject of numerous poems and Alfonso was a poet. Beyond their interest in literature, the D'Avalos court was host to many musical performances and commissioned numerous musical pieces. There is a 1548 record of the establishment of a professional society for

the ceremonies held at Santa Maria della Scala, many of which would become established tradition.¹⁵⁸ Religious dramatic processions also figured prominently at the D'Avalos court, the culminating one being the solemn procession for the governor's funeral. A description gives a detailed account and conveys the splendor of this carefully-orchestrated event, an event that anticipates the *Entierro* religious procession (discussed later in the chapter), which most likely influenced the paintings of Caravaggio in the following century:

...led by 500 monastic poor, the cavalry on horseback dressed in brown with their lances 'torn to the ground,' and the guard of the *landsknechten* draped in brown mantels. Other cavalry divisions bearing lances, swords, rapiers, cudgels, and firearms, as well as two standards of the infantry and four standards of the cavalry, all of which were draped in brown or black, followed. The rear of the procession comprised the governor's riderless horse escorted by footmen, the trumpets and drummers dressed in black and brown, and finally the cadaver of the governor himself, who, incidentally, was attired in the red robes of the ordinaries of the Duomo, rather than military garb. A candlelight requiem mass in the Duomo.... For the duration of the mass, the cathedral was draped in brown cloth, and the body of the deceased surrounded by numerous crosses of wood and silver. The mass was attended by the officials and nobility of the court, as well as by all the friars of the local monasteries. The friars were charged with the responsibility

lutenists, string players, keyboardists, and bagpipers. The D'Avalos family interest in Catholic reform can be seen in its friendship with Girolamo Muzio, the controversial Bernardino Occhino, Alfonso's presence at the Diet of Worms in 1545, and Maria d'Aragona's commission of the vitae of St. Catherine (1541) and St. Thomas (1543) from Pietro Aretino. Although there were many venues for both secular and religious music, the D'Avalos court seemed to be singularly focused on the production of motet books by the Venetian Girolamo Scotto and later by Giovanni Antonio Castiglione in Milan. Getz, 42-43, and 59. "Maria's virtue and beauty were the subject of several *ottave rime* and *sonnetti* by Bernardo Cappello, Bernardino Matirano, Ferrante Caraffa, and Luigi Tansillo, and both Niccolò Franco and Pietro Aretino dedicated works to her. Moreover, Alfonso was himself a poet of modest reputation, and is perhaps best known for the texts "Corrette, o fiume" and "Anchor che col partire". According to payment records in the *Registri della Cancelleria dello Stato*, Aretino seems have been on the payroll since the days of Francesco Sforza II, but lived in Venice instead of Milan. *Ibid.*, 42. See also: F. Fiorentino, "Donna Maria d'Aragona, Marchesa del Vasto" *Nuova Antologia* 43 (1884), 212-229. The religious works written for her were: Franco's *Dialoghi dove si ragiona della bellezza* (1542), Aretino's *Vita di Caterina vergine e martire* (1541) and *Vita di San Tommaso beato* (1543).

¹⁵⁸ D'Avalos' body was moved from San Cristoforo sopra Naviglio in the Porta Ticinese to the Duomo via a grand procession. Detailed statutes were drawn up regarding the execution of divine offices and a daily high mass. Given the fact that the governor was much occupied with responsibilities of commander of Imperial forces, one cannot be sure if these came directly from Alfonso, or if they were possibly written by his spouse, Maria d'Aragona. Although Maria did not permanently transfer from Naples to Milan until 1543, Maria may have had some role to play in these revisions for she was an influential Catholic reformer who belonged to a social circle of religious thinkers such as Bernardino Occhino, Pietro Carnesecchi, and Galeazzo Florimonte. Getz, 42. See also: G. Alberigo, "Aragona, Maria d," *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* (Roma: Società Grafica Romana, 1961), III, 701.

of bearing many torches, which along with the candles used, communicated the status of the deceased through the relative opulence of their number.¹⁵⁹

The military (on foot and on horseback) displaying its weaponry and armor and dramatic lighting became common features of Milanese processions. This form anticipated an innovative Good Friday procession popular in Caravaggio's day in which the tomb of Christ was carried through Milan guarded by Spanish soldiers to emphasize Spain's role as protector of the Church, a dramatic form that possibly inspired the painter's frequent use of armed and uniformed men in his paintings.

Ferrante (Ferdinando I) Gonzaga (term 1546-1555), who shared his predecessor's military interests and a taste for the arts, designed civic spectacles in which literature and combat were combined to achieve an interesting dramatic effect.¹⁶⁰ One example is Ferrante's joust in honor of Philip II's visit to Milan in 1548. Of particular interest, is Gonzaga's choice of the Marchese di Caravaggio, Muzio I Sforza (1531 – 1552), Costanza Colonna's father-in-law, as a participant. His opponent was the Monsignor della Trinità. [Figs. 24 & 25] This event shows

¹⁵⁹ *Codice* N. 37 (Orazione per la morte di D. Alfonso D'Avalos, Marchese del Vasto, governatore di Milano, secolo XVI), fol. 12, Biblioteca Trivulziana ed Archivio Storico Civico, Milano, as quoted in Getz, 57-58. The manuscript is no longer available for consultation, but segments have been transcribed in G. Porro, *Catalogo dei Codici Manoscritti della Trivulziana* (Torino, 1884), 320.

¹⁶⁰ Ferrante, son of Isabella d'Este and Francesco II Gonzaga, had a particular interest in the performing arts and music, a taste that had been carefully cultivated at the Mantuan court. While Gonzaga was captain general of the Imperial army at Naples during the 1520's he employed singers and musicians at his home. Later in 1539, during his term as Viceroy of Sicily, he frequently wrote the Mantuan court in regard to the outfitting of a promising young musician who Ferrante recently employed. As a result of his interest in secular music, the ceremonial slipped into obscurity and the musical and performances at Santa Maria della Scala declined. It would not be revived until the 1560's when Carlo Borromeo as Archbishop of Milan would attend to the royal ducal chapel. Unlike his predecessor, the music written for Ferrante's court was often secular, but there were a few motets dedicated to his daughter Hippolita which were for important feasts such as the Nativity, Pro defunctis, Epiphany, Circumcision, and the Purification. Getz, 60-61. See also: *Gonzaga di Guastalla* 42/3, n.n., 23 aprile 1539, ASP and *Gonzaga di Guastalla* 42/3, n.n., 2 maggio 1539, Archivio di Stato, Parma.

again how the military was a prominent element in Milanese civic spectacle. It became part of the city's identity.

It is not surprising that Caravaggio used so many armed figures in his paintings, for the frequent appearance of armed soldiers in civic and religious spectacle was a visible allusion to imperial military power in Spanish Lombardy. The Milanese civic image was that of as a key city in the Spanish Crowns military machine. One written account describes display of military strength and skill poetically:

How many Bradamantes and Marphises
Were present to admire the knightly game;
How many hearts of young gallant lovers
Were filled with gladness and with tender joy;
Much pleasant laughter rose, and songs resounding
Showed all our cavaliers' sincere delight,
So that with perfect justice we may recall them
So many Gradassos and so many fine Ruggerios.¹⁶¹

In this poem, the spectators become the protagonists in *Orlando Furioso*, just as do the competitors in the joust. The games transported the viewers into the fictive world of knights and ladies. For the duration of the joust, Milan became the world of *Orlando Furioso*. The costumes and decorations of this event reflected the Spanish Crown's frequent employment of chivalric imagery in its statecraft and the recent popularity of Ariosto's epic poem.¹⁶² The poet reveals the broad popularity of chivalric themes among the Milanese, one that may have inspired young men wanting to be "fine Ruggerios" to become knights themselves.

¹⁶¹ Saxl, "Costumes and Festivals," 413.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 411-14.

Such romanticized views of medieval knights fueled the quest for the title of “cavaliere.” Caravaggio was no different. He seemed to be most comfortable with his sword at his side and seemed to take every opportunity to use it. Eventually he joined the Knights of Malta, but his continual fighting forced the order to expel him. After he left the order and was defrocked *in absentia*, he continued to refer to himself as “Fra,” to denote his status as a knight. Having a title and the right to carry a sword gave him prestige, adding an elevated social status to the “artistic persona” Caravaggio created through his words, deeds, and self-portraiture.

As we have seen in these above examples, Caravaggio was not unusual in his obsession with social status and titles. Men (and women) of means invested much time and money to maintain a social image of power and intellectual sophistication.¹⁶³ While portraiture was one of the most frequently used means of self-promotion, public spectacle was another. The aforementioned joust boasted of Milanese power and military prowess through romantic allusions to medieval lords and knights such as Charlemagne and Roland. Although wealth and skill on the battlefield were important for any ruler, in this age, projecting a pious image was equally important. To do this, rulers such as the Spanish governors appropriated religious spectacle to bolster their image and that of the Spanish Empire, self-proclaimed protectors of the Catholic Church.

¹⁶³ On early image-making and self representation see: Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980)

2.2.3 The Duomo, Center of Milanese Religious Drama

When Caravaggio was studying with Simone Peterzano in Milan, the studio was near the Duomo.¹⁶⁴ [Fig. 26] The cathedral, accompanying piazza and urban thoroughfare, the Corso di Porta Orientale, were at the heart of the city—its physical and religious center. Since the governor’s residence was nearby, this location had political significance as well. Thus, the Piazza del Duomo’s central location made it the perfect location for public performances, both religious and secular. It became a space contested for decades by gubernatorial and ecclesiastical authorities.¹⁶⁵ Public spectacle was part of Milanese life, whether hosted by religious leaders or the Spanish governors, and any event occurring in this location had important implications for all Milanese. As I discuss in the next sections, the Piazza del Duomo was a traditional site of religious ritual for religious drama, but Milanese secular rulers sometimes appropriated these performances to demonstrate their piety—a trend that continued in Caravaggio’s day.

While the Church had authority over spiritual matters and could organize processions to celebrate its many feasts, the governor had jurisdiction over the more practical aspects of Milanese life, such as the use of city space for civic spectacle. Seeing religious processions as opportunities to display their (and the Spanish Crown’s) devout faith, governors placed themselves and their courts at the head of processions. This was particularly true for the rites and processions associated with Holy Week, the most sacred time of the liturgical calendar.

¹⁶⁴ “Il Peterzano abitava nella casa del Corpus Domini situate nella parrocchia milanese di San Giorgio al Pozza Bianco in Porta Orientale.” Berra, 211. On Caravaggio’s apprenticeship, see: *Ibid.*, 198-232.

¹⁶⁵ Getz, 65. The Duomo, or Cathedral of Santa Maria Maggiore, was surrounded by the gubernatorial palace, the Archiepiscopal offices, Santa Tecla (now destroyed), and numerous shops. Cesare Cesarino, in his *Di Lucio Vitruvio Pollione de architectura libri dece*, identifies Milan as the model city; for it preserved easy access to all principal architectural spaces. Milan’s primary edifices were all located near one another at the city center.

When the Spanish court began to attend Holy Week services at San Gottardo in Corte, the chapel attached to the governor's residence in the Piazza del Duomo, the area around the Duomo became all the more significant for the governor as a space for public self-promotion. The court's religious observations included "a high mass and a candlelight procession of the blessed sacrament on Maundy Thursday."¹⁶⁶ Over the decades, the processional calendar expanded to include many events that the public could enjoy as either bystander or participant. Thus, the religious spectacles that the Spanish court held at the Duomo became a regular part of Milanese life—a glimpse of Iberian culture that Caravaggio would have certainly seen while living so near the cathedral.¹⁶⁷

Spanish authorities used public spectacle to promote unity and national pride among its subjects. Gianmarco Burigozzi, a Milanese merchant active in the city from 1500 to 1544, observed that "every single Imperial victory, catastrophe, or initiative between 1523 and 1544

¹⁶⁶ The transfer to San Gottardo in Corte occurred at some time between 1538 and 1629. There were other Holy Week observances as well: "a sung mass, a plainchant recitation of the Passion *in alternatim*, the singing of the Adoration of the Cross, and Vespers on Good Friday, and finally, the blessing of the paschal candle and a high mass on Holy Saturday. The Saturday high mass was sung in the Roman rite, and the visitors washed their eyes during the Gloria." Getz, 65.

¹⁶⁷ "The festal calendar observed at the Duomo during the mid-sixteenth century can be reconstructed from two surviving ceremoniali that can be dated to the years 1543 and 1562. These ceremoniali reveal that the primary feasts on the Duomo's calendar were usually celebrated either with two Vespers and a High Mass or via a procession. While the former practice was employed for the feasts of the Visitation, the Assumption, the Conception BVM [Blessed Virgin Mary], the Presentation BVM, the Epiphany, the Invention of the Cross, Santa Tecla, San Galdino, St. James, St. Jerome, St. Martin, St. Catherine, St. Jacob, and St. Agnes, the latter, which almost always included the singing of litanies and sometimes even culminated in a solemn Mass, was reserved for other selected feasts of particular local significance, including San Bassiano, the Purification BVM (with the Blessing of the Candles), Quadregesima, Palm Sunday, St. Gothard, St. Gregory, Corpus Christi, and the Dedication of the Church. Additionally, a solemn Mass served to commemorate the feasts of Saints Protasius and Gervaise, St. Joseph, All Saints, and the Midnight Vigil of the Nativity, the last of which features a select group of singers from the Duomo choir....By the time of Carlo Borromeo's 1577 pastoral visit to the Duomo, the feasts of Saints Peter and Paul, Saints Nazaro and Celso, the Assumption, and the First Session of the Provincial Council had been added to the processional calendar, and the processions held on the first two occasions typically culminated in a pontifical mass celebrated by Archbishop Carlo Borromeo himself." Getz, 97-98. Also see. *Metropolitana* IX-382 (Visite pastorali e documenti aggiunti 1562), Archivio Storico Diocesano, Milano (hereafter ASDM), *Metropolitana* LXXXII-456 (Visite pastorali e documenti aggiunti), q. 22, ASDM. These include a 'Liber festivatum processionum et annualium defunctorum variorum' from 1562 and an 'Annuale 1543' respectively. *Metropolitana* IV-377 (Visite pastorali e documenti aggiunti), q. 10, ASDM.

was marked by either a state mass or a civic procession, if not both, culminating at the Duomo.”¹⁶⁸ Spanish authorities mandated similar performances in other cities in the duchy such as Cremona, Pavia, Alessandria, Lodi, Tortona, Novara, Como, Vigevano, and Caravaggio. By drawing attention to pivotal moments in the life of the Spanish Empire, the Milanese people were made to feel united with the Iberians and feel pride as subjects of the Spanish Crown.¹⁶⁹ Such events would have made young Caravaggio aware of his status as a citizen of the Spanish Empire, whether living in the urban center of Milan or the small town of Caravaggio. Caravaggio saw similar use of spectacle as statecraft by the Iberians throughout his travels—in Rome, Naples, and Sicily.

Some Milanese religious processions evolved spontaneously from the fiery preaching of mendicant friars, with no official authorization. The tremendous popularity of religious penitential processions led to their frequent appearance in Milanese ritual life during Caravaggio’s lifetime. The earliest documented example occurred in 1529 when Tommaso Spagnolo promised good things for Milan if only the people would do penance. As a result of his impassioned plea, there were daily penitential processions for three consecutive days, Processors and flagellants, including 2,500 children dressed in white with garlands on their heads and 1200 barefoot men and women dressed in sackcloth, convened at the Duomo and processed

¹⁶⁸ Such celebrations served to turn public attention to events that otherwise might have gone unnoticed in a world in which privacy was a luxury and the dissemination of information was otherwise dependent largely upon the printing press.” Getz, 123.

¹⁶⁹ With the election of Pope Paul III in 1534, Francesco II Sforza ordered three days of processions and a Mass of the Holy Spirit in the Duomo and forwarded this decree to all other major cities in the Duchy. The ducal penchant for combining a general religious procession with a mass of the Holy Spirit in the Duomo remained standard throughout the sixteenth century, a pattern followed by the Spanish governors in later years. One account states that under the “Spanish governors,” the first of which was Don Consalvo-Fernando di Cordova, Duca di Sessa (1558-1564) all general processions commemorating events of state were convened at the Duomo, where a mass of the Holy Spirit was sung, and then a procession proceeded to either Sant’Ambrogio, San Celso, or San Simpliciano. Getz, 123-124. See also: *Sforzesco* 1451 (Milano città e ducato: 1534 settembre-1535 febbraio), n.n. 20 ottobre 1534, ASM. *Sforzesco* 1443 (Milano città e ducato: 1533 febbraio), n.n. 12, ASM.

about the city singing litanies and laude. Some participants carried crosses, while others flagellated themselves with small whips.¹⁷⁰ In these displays of extreme religiosity, the Milanese citizens were both spectators and participants.

Another example of Milanese participatory theater is the Corpus Christi procession, which became a major public event after Spagnolo's preaching of 1529. Unlike Spagnolo's spontaneous call to penitence, this was a carefully orchestrated affair. At 10:00 am, the procession left the piazza of the Duomo, led by the "poveri" of San Dionisio and San Martino. Various clergy, ordained singers, and liturgical symbol bearers followed as the group wound through the city's streets. In the final segment of the procession were the cross bearer, additional groups of singers, the ordinaries, the Archbishop, the Bishop, the members of the governor's family in ecclesiastical or academic robes followed by the prelates, the Senate, the magistrates, the remaining members of the governor's family, and finally—the populace.¹⁷¹ Although many processions were held during the day, there were others held at night to take advantage of the

¹⁷⁰ Two barefooted priests (one of whom carried a cross on his shoulders) accompanied those carrying the standard of Sant' Ambrogio and eight sacerdotess dressed in linen carried a tabernacle containing the Blessed Sacrament. At various strategic locations along the processional route, the crowd of penitents would stop, genuflect, say prayers, sing, and trumpets were sounded to re-enact Joshua's battle of Jericho. Getz, 125. See also: Marco Burigozzi, *Cronaca Milanese di Gianmarco Burigozzi merzaro dal 1500 al 1544* (Milan: Francesco Simone Tini, 1587), 487-488; reprinted in *Archivio storico italiano* III (1842), 421ff.

¹⁷¹ Other annual processions such as those for St. Stephen, St. Mark, San Vittore, Saints Protasius and Gervaisa, St. Ambrose, and Quadregesima originated at the Duomo, but they were not as elaborate as that for Corpus Christi. We know little about the feast other than what was written by Burigozzi. It seems to have been held for three days in succession inside the Duomo during the octave of Corpus Christi. By the 1540's the procession was moved outdoors and was only held on the Thursday of the octave. The processors departed from the Duomo at 8:30 and accompanied the Blessed Sacrament to Sant' Ambrogio and back to the Duomo. A strict processional protocol was adopted for this feast and retained throughout the seventeenth century. There were also the penitent orders, regular clergy, secular clergy, clergy of the Duomo, and then the notaries, the bearer of the miters, the bearers of the thurible and incense, and the members of the office of the Provision. Getz, 129-130. See also Fl-2-3 (Diarii ceremoniali), 47-49 (Visconti, Gaspare: Disposizioni C.C., number 852), BCM and *Codice* 1252 (Ceremoniale Spagnolo Milanese), 21r-24v, BTASCM.

dramatic torch lights. These nocturnal performances may have inspired Caravaggio's signature *chiaroscuro*, a discussion I will take up later in this chapter.¹⁷²

2.2.4 Carlo Borromeo and Theatrical Performance

Tommaso Spagnolo's impressive penitential zeal and love of public procession was surpassed by that of Carlo Borromeo. Like Spagnolo, Borromeo perceived the public procession as a useful means to move his flock to penance and distract them from less wholesome entertainments. This penchant for the theatrical is evident from his arrival in the city to his death in 1584. In 1565, his cavalcade entered Milan in processional form, looking more like a triumphant conqueror taking possession of the city than a humble servant of God. Carlo, wearing his cope and miter, sat on a white horse. The Spanish governor don Gabriel de' la Cueva, Duke of Albuquerque, chose to walk beside the archbishop as a sign of deference to the new spiritual leader of Milan.¹⁷³ Carlo took possession of his archdiocese and attempted to transform it into a Counter-reformation city, an example for the rest of the Catholic world. This grand public spectacle established his authority and set the standard for public devotion in subsequent decades. [Fig. 27]

¹⁷² The only other annual procession treated with the same importance as Corpus Christi was the three-day Ambrosian Litany (Triduane Liturgies). This observance was supposedly to ward off political and economic oppression. Although, the participants were only members of clergy, the heads of all the Milanese families were to cooperate and no work was to be done during these three days. This was a rather solemn event, for there was a fine for anyone living along the procession route that did not clear the processional space of "all objects, decorations, and embroidery, and any eating, drinking, or gaming at the event was subject of a fine of 25 scudi" It is interesting to note that the procession route did not include the two churches most frequently used by the governor, San Gottardo in Corte and the royal ducal chapel of Santa Maria della Scala. Christine Suzanne Getz, 129-132. See also FI-2-3 (Diarii cerimoniali), 47-49 (Visconti, Gaspare: Disposizioni C.C., number 852), BCM and *Codice* 1252 (Ceremoniale Spagnolo Milanese), 21r-24v, BTASCM; *Registro di Lettere Ducali* 1553-1562, 96v-97v, BTASCM and *Libro delle Litanie*, 4r-90r; and *Libro delle Litanie*, 4r-90r.

¹⁷³ Luigi Crivelli, "Carlo Borromeo," in *Carlo e Federico: La luce dei Borromeo nella Milano spagnola*, ed. Paolo Biscottini (Milano: Museo Diocesano di Milano, 2005), 68-9.

Carlo Borromeo remained a central figure in the ritual life of Milan for decades. He reformed Milanese spiritual life, making religious devotion as much public display and spectacle as it was private prayer and study. For the Milanese of Caravaggio's day, religious street theater was not just entertainment; it was a religious act of piety. Therefore, it would be natural for a painter, especially one such as Caravaggio who drew upon actual lived experience, to choose drama as a visual language to communicate Catholic doctrine and ideals.

Like Spagnolo, Borromeo used crisis as motivation for spontaneous penitential processions. Such was the case when the plague ravaged the duchy. Borromeo organized processions to ward off the plague and to celebrate the city's liberation from it. As in the past, secular authorities were eager to insert themselves into the religious observation and often coordinated court entertainments and religious processions into an impressive unified celebration. This was the case with the festivities marking the end of the plague in 1578, possibly a means for the governor to repair his damaged reputation after fleeing at the first signs of danger.¹⁷⁴ The procession started at the urban heart, the Duomo, and wound throughout the city, reportedly lasted a full ten hours. Although Milanese did not play a prominent part in the procession, as spectators they were cast in the role of the Israelites who rejoiced at their delivery from troubled times by singing a vernacular *lauda* based on a biblical canticle commemorating the crossing of the Red Sea.¹⁷⁵ This type of participatory continued in Milan well beyond Caravaggio's lifetime. This dual role of observer/participant is clearly seen in Caravaggio's

¹⁷⁴ Getz, 127 and 248.

¹⁷⁵ There were "three processions, one from the Duomo to San Sebastiano, one from the Duomo to Sant' Ambrogio, and one from the Duomo and back to the same, were organized for the week of 19 to 25 January. The clergy was required to attend all three, and the general population was exhorted to attend the third, which was held in conjunction with an officially sanctioned Forty Hours. During the week candles remained lit in every home in the city, fireworks and instrumental music resounded at court, and proclamations praising the governor, Borromeo, and the Commission of Health for their fine contributions were issued. Getz, 127, 248 (Urbano Monti: Delle cose piu notabili successe alla città de Milano, primaparte), 142-r-150r, BAM and 249(Urbano Monti: Delle cose piu notabili successe alla città de Milano, primaparte), 74r, BAM.

portrayal of himself as an observer within his *Capture of Christ* and *Martyrdom of Saint Matthew*. [Figs. 28 & 6]

While Borromeo was reviving the Milan's decrepit spiritual life through religious spectacle, he was also tackling the problem of clerical and lay education. He insisted that the religious be well educated, faithfully attend to their congregation's spiritual needs, and observe the rules of their order inside and outside the monasteries. He required laypeople to go to confession and attend Mass regularly, receive religious instruction, observe the liturgical feast days, and behave piously in public.¹⁷⁶ Borromeo prohibited balls, shortened the time of Carnival, suppressed popular entertainments and masques and even went so far as to prohibit playing cards. His reforms spared no one, not even the governor.

Many saw these sweeping reforms as excessive, especially the governors who often saw them as an encroachment upon their authority. Some tried to provoke the cardinal through blatant disobedience, often involving dramatic entertainments and festivities such as Carnival. On one occasion, Governor Luis de Requesens y Quiriga (1572-73) dared to host a theatrical festival at the governor's residence near the Duomo while Mass was being celebrated. This offense, after many previous disputes, was more than Borromeo could bear, so he excommunicated Requesens. In 1573, the governor was forced to go to Rome to beg the forgiveness of Pope Gregory XIII and be reinstated within the Church.¹⁷⁷ Although Borromeo's troubles with Milanese civic leaders continued, he commanded respect among the Milanese people after his acts of charity and spiritual guidance during the plague of 1576.

¹⁷⁶ Crivelli, 71-2.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 74.

As the disease ravaged northern Italy, Borromeo remained in the city to aid the sick and bury the dead. [Fig. 29] The governor, Antonio Gusman y Zuniga, marchese di Ayamonte, fled the city and sought refuge at Vigevano. Because the disease was viewed as punishment from God, many processions were held to call the people to penance and appeal to God for aid. Leading those processions was Borromeo, walking barefoot through the city. Adding to the dramatic scene, he wore a noose around his neck and gripped a huge crucifix tightly in his bony hands. [Fig. 30] Borromeo instructed priests to perform rites in the streets so the public could watch from their windows.¹⁷⁸ During this plague Caravaggio lost his grandfather, father, and uncle. He may have witnessed these processions and penitential rites as he and his family fled to the city of Caravaggio.¹⁷⁹ [Fig. 31] Although the painter was only five years old, he would have remembered these horrible sights. Later, he heard of Borromeo's courage and saintly leadership of the and would have remembered the processions and public rituals taking place in the streets.

Borromeo believed that the Milanese brought this tragedy on themselves with their rejection of his early reforms, the deserted churches, new public spectacles, games, and balls. Disputes over civic celebrations continued and the governors' desire for public spectacle, particularly the festivities related to Carnival, street theater, masquerade balls, and public jousts, again became a central issue.¹⁸⁰ These jurisdictional disputes often involved the pope and, on one occasion, Philip II of Spain. In a dispute with Borromeo over Carnival, Governor Ayamonte sent "Carnival Ambassadors" to Rome (ahead of Borromeo's arrival) to state his case for permitting public spectacles and other entertainments and to assert his authority on such public activities.

¹⁷⁸ Unfortunately, so little was known about the medicine that these very acts of penitence and devotion were contributing to its rapid and lethal spread. Nonetheless, one cannot ignore the fact that it was through the participatory nature of the theatrical street performance that the public felt it could best express its devotion. *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ Langdon, 18-19.

¹⁸⁰ For a brief description of Borromeo's troubles with secular spectacle and drama, see: Canosa, 245-247.

Pope Gregory XIII was unimpressed by the “ambassadors” and gave Borromeo his unwavering support. Although he approved all of the archbishop’s ordinances, he recommended that Borromeo be more flexible. Despite the pope’s wishes, Ayamonte disobeyed Borromeo and organized a carnival in the Piazza del Duomo. Not finding knights in Milan for the joust, Ayamonte went to Pavia. The Milanese people avoided this particular spectacle, rather than going against Borromeo’s wishes, but in later years, the public was not so timid. They defied Borromeo more than once by participating in public games and spectacles despite his warnings.

Caravaggio’s employment of theatrical stock characters and armed men in his paintings suggests that he shared the Milanese and Spanish love of Carnival, popular theater, and jousts. He might have seen some of these unauthorized games and festivities. In the years 1580, 1583, and 1584, groups of young noblemen sponsored a *mascherata a cavallo*. They even succeeded in drawing the gubernatorial court into the event by issuing a number of public challenges to which cavaliers from all over the city secretly responded. Caravaggio had just entered Peterzano’s studio when the event occurred in 1584. For a young man with a love of swords, daggers, and armor, the sight of the armed challengers in the streets left a strong impression and may have fed his desire to become a *cavaliere* and challenge others to sword fights.

News of the ongoing bickering between Borromeo and the Spanish governors eventually reached the court at Madrid. In 1580, Borromeo sent his faithful friend, the Barnabite Carlo Bascapè, to Spain to tell the king the truth of his Milanese reforms and pay his respects to the newly-nominated successor to Ayamonte, don Carlo d’Aragona, duca di Terranova, who did not

arrive in Milan until 1583 (1583-1592).¹⁸¹ Philip II, hoping to end the jurisdictional feuding between Milanese religious and civic authorities, instructed Borromeo to be more moderate in his approach, noting the archbishop's rigidity and stubbornness in trying to change not only the behaviors of individual citizens, but the public customs of the whole city. Acknowledging that Borromeo's intentions were good, Philip II suggested a different approach, one of mediation and patience.¹⁸² Bescapé's biography describes Borromeo as more tolerant and tender during his later years, and the archbishop gave in to the public's desire for more processions. With their increased frequency and extravagance, came increased popularity. Written accounts claim that nearly 400,000 people from all over the peninsula converged on Milan for one such procession.¹⁸³

2.2.5 The Laity in Religious and Secular Drama

Theater scholars often describe Borromeo as being against popular theater, citing his disputes with the governor as evidence, but this is not accurate. Laity did participate in processions and professional actors did perform within the city, but only within controlled circumstances. Borromeo's issues with theater seem to stem from his desire to separate the sacred from the secular. Thus, Borromeo could best control the performance if the public played the role of "crowd" or observer and only clergy took the roles of central characters. Although completely isolation of the viewer from the dramatic world was impossible, Borromeo believed the public

¹⁸¹ Crivelli, 76-7. Also see: Agostino Borromeo, "Carlo Bascapè nella storiografia" *Carlo Bascapè sulle orme del Borromeo: coscienza e azione pastorale in un vescovo di fine Cinquecento* (Novara: Interlinea : Diocesi di Novara, 1994), 148.

¹⁸²This is interesting advice coming from a man known for fanaticism and intolerance.

¹⁸³ Crivelli, 76-7.

should remain a passive audience. I submit that Caravaggio's work met Borromeo's Counter-Reformation criteria for popular theater. Borromeo wished to see the public engaged, achieving this through their senses (sight, sound, and movement) and through their participation. Caravaggio's paintings met both criteria by painting highly illusionistic images that featured figures in contemporary dress. In Caravaggio's career, however, Borromeo's control and fear of theatrical misinterpretation of doctrine and biblical narratives found parallels in Counter-Reformation attitudes concerning art. Caravaggio had religious paintings rejected due to indecorous figures and actions depicted in his work. Given the fact that a patron could simply refuse a painting that he did not like, it took the courage and genius of Caravaggio to include and engage the quotidian public in a more prominent manner and blur the boundaries between the secular and sacred that Borromeo strove so hard to preserve.

With popular drama, delineating the secular and sacred was difficult, for their success derived from the skillful conflation of these two worlds, thereby drawing the viewer into the fictional realm of the narrative.¹⁸⁴ Borromeo's caution and prohibition of townspeople playing central roles, testify to theater's ability to blur the boundaries of the real and fictional worlds. He feared that transporting the spectator into a narrative with lay actors taking key roles would threaten the authority of the clergy. Caravaggio also recognized theater's ability to engage its audience emotionally. Unlike Borromeo, who perceived religious drama as a threat, Caravaggio saw the popular theater as an opportunity and appropriated its conventions. He placed contemporary figures into the biblical narrative by giving women from the Bible the costumes of Roman ladies and male characters suits of Milanese armor or the tattered clothes of simple laborers. [Figs. 1, 13, 14, 21, 28, 8 & 10]

¹⁸⁴ On Borromeo's hierarchies of sacrality and northern Italian art, see: Gregg, 50-51.

Another reason for Borromeo's wariness of popular religious dramas was due to the ever-increasing inclusion of scenes featuring vulgar characters and situations added as a comic element to entertain the public. In 1584, the priests at Santamaria della Grazie organized the *Rappresentazione del Martirio dei SS. Giovanni e Paolo* which included profane episodes and buffoonery that "openly inspire deprivations of behavior" and scenes featuring a *negromante* (necromancer or sorcerer).¹⁸⁵ Borromeo intervened and had the questionable scenes removed and then informed Rome. Vatican officials told Borromeo that no intervention was necessary because a "drama" that had similar characters and situations was being performed without incident in Rome at that very time in the house of a cardinal and in the presence of other church officials.¹⁸⁶

Although Borromeo's condemnation of theatrical performance is frequently cited, there is evidence that he helped playing troupes attain permission to perform. This suggests that his attitude toward secular drama was more complex than commonly portrayed. These reports also confirm that professional players were active in the city and that Caravaggio had ample opportunity to have seen them before his trip to Rome. One account was written by Nicoló Barbieri, a member of the famous *Confidenti commedia dell'arte* troupe. Barbieri tells of an instance when Borromeo permitted secular drama in Milan and clarified his position on theatrical performance. This may also be evidence of Borromeo following Phillip II's advice to take more lenient attitude.

According to the *capocomico* (head actor) Adriano Valerini, in 1583, the *Gelosi* troupe had stopped in the city to perform at the invitation of governor Carlo d'Aragona, but were forced to leave because the governor had been advised by Milanese officials that the "acting of plays

¹⁸⁵ Bernardi and Cascetta, 234.

¹⁸⁶ Canosa, 73 and Bernardi and Cascetta, 234.

was a mortal sin.” The improvisational nature of the commedia dell’arte performances made the situation more difficult because there were no written scripts to be submitted for ecclesiastical approval. D’Aragona was then shown Borromeo’s writings on theater. The governor told the actors to take it up with Borromeo and resolve it with him, but admitted to the actors that “...as far as I am concerned I shall be happy to hear the company sometime, for I like it, but I have no wish to commit moral sin.”¹⁸⁷

After Borromeo read the scenarios, having the actors thoroughly describe each scene, and insisted that they promise not to add any obscenities or immoral acts, he gave them permission to perform their play in the piazza of Milan.¹⁸⁸ Borromeo then told them that, in fact, he did allow plays within his diocese. It seems that Borromeo, when criticizing secular theater, was mainly concerned with rough mendicant troops, not the refined actors of the caliber of the *Confidenti* and the *Gelosi* troupes.¹⁸⁹ After this clarification, the commedia dell’arte was a common sight in Milanese piazzas. [Fig. 32] Borromeo favored use of the theatrical methods to engage the public, but he was wary of improvisation that the Church could not control. Caravaggio’s “theatrical” paintings were in some ways improvisational because he employed innovative interpretations of biblical narrative to evoke an emotional response. The patrons, many of whom shared Borromeo’s fear of biblical misinterpretation and vulgar content, could check any improvisation in Caravaggio’s paintings simply by rejecting them, as they did several times. Caravaggio’s painting innovations reflect the theatrical forms of Counter-Reformation Milan under Borromeo, borrowing content from such religious dramatic forms in Milan and northern Italy as the *Entierro* processions, *tableau vivants*, and painted statuary.

¹⁸⁷ Barbieri, Niccolò, *La Supplica* [1634], chapter XXXVI, as quoted in Kenneth Richards and Laura Richards, *The Commedia dell’Arte: A Documentary History* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, Ltd.1990), 250.

¹⁸⁸ Bernardi and Cascetta, 233.

¹⁸⁹ Richards and Richards, 250 .

2.3 PROCESSIONS IN MILAN DURING CARAVAGGIO'S STAY

In the previous sections, I gave historical background for the Milanese theatrical forms that Caravaggio might have seen during his apprenticeship and may have influenced his work. On 6 April 1584, Caravaggio officially began a four-year-long apprenticeship with Simone Peterzano.¹⁹⁰ He had probably been living with his master for some time at the time of the contract signing, because it was common to have a trial period. This was a notable year for the city of Milan, because it marked the passing of the age of Carlo Borromeo. Caravaggio would have seen the grand funerary procession and public memorials as the city mourned its beloved archbishop. [Fig. 33]

After Borromeo's death, changes swept the diocese (some involving processions), which seem almost a public reaction to the deceased leader's tight control over Milanese life. Many of these innovations had characteristics common to popular theater, which allowed more expression and participation of the people and reflected familiar elements drawn from contemporary society. The procession's effective blend of the biblical and quotidian made them immediately popular with the Milanese and later spread to other regions. The broad appeal of these performances perhaps explains the appearance of similar features in Caravaggio's paintings.

In 1587 (only three years after the death of Borromeo), the *Entierro* was founded by the Barnabite order to mark its annual observation of Good Friday. [Fig. 34] This particular form of procession may have derived from an Iberian model due to its similarity to Spanish processions still performed today; the word "*entierro*," in fact, is Spanish for burial or entombment. It is possible that Borromeo's friend, Father Carlo Bascapè, (a Barnabite) brought back news of the

¹⁹⁰ The duration of this contract was only four years, a rather short period when compared with the more typical contract for five to seven years. Berra, 200.

Spanish processions when he returned from Madrid in 1581. The *Entierro* spread to regions outside Milan and was found in Novara, where Bascapè was bishop. [Fig. 35] The Milanese *Entierro* traveled from the church of St. Barnaba to the Piazza del Duomo.¹⁹¹ Caravaggio probably saw this spectacle, for his accommodations at the house of Peterzano were only a few blocks from the Duomo in what was then the parish of San Giorgio al Pozzo Bianco (now San Carlo al Corso).¹⁹²

The *Entierro* procession was accompanied by elaborate floats, music, and four enacted episodes illustrating Christ's passion: the Agony in the Garden, the *Ecce Homo*, the Cross, and the Sepulcher. The *Entierro* was innovative not only because it broke with tradition by employing both pictorial symbols and painted statuary in its *tableaux vivants*, but because it featured the active participation of laity as actors. This was a reversal of Carlo Borromeo's prohibition of laypeople's participation in religious processions beyond their role of onlooker or choir. The *Entierro's* use of laity and artistic imagery added to the visual interest and emotional impact of the procession. The military also participated, taking a prominent place in Milanese civic and religious spectacle as and symbolizing the empire's role as protector of the Catholic faith. Caravaggio may have seen the public's response to these innovations and was encouraged to utilize them in his own work. Beyond his frequent depiction of every day citizens, he often showed men with weapons and armor, a familiar site in city that served as the Spanish Empire's northern Italian military headquarters.

Documentary evidence describes the first *Entierro* vigil of 1587 as having a central *Ecce homo* tableau. In later years, the processions were "organized around four narratively and

¹⁹¹ Caravaggio's master Simone Petrzano in 1572-3 painted two paintings on the lives of Saints Paul and Barnabas, these were his first painting after his arrival in Milan.

¹⁹² Berra, 198.

processionally sequential scenes, each surrounded by torches: the Agony in the Garden, *Ecce Homo*, the Cross, and the Sepulchre.”¹⁹³ In the procession there were *Ecce homo* dialogues performed by two choirs. Each dialogue corresponded to the accompanying image of the procession. In the *Ecce homo* dialogue of this particular procession, there was a repeated questioning of the “Judaei.”¹⁹⁴ Here, the Milanese community, who responded to the questions as the Jewish people, acted as both witness of and participant in the world’s rejection of Christ.

The documentation for the 1588 vigil gives more detail and is said to have featured three crossbearers, two torch carriers and the carrier of the indulgence for the participants. The city’s *gonfalone* began the procession then a group of three men carrying torches and a musical ensemble. There followed Milanese men dressed in sackcloth, a person carrying the Magdalene’s ointment jar, and more penitents accompanied by torch bearers. The tableau featuring the Gethsemane narrative followed the city’s leaders, flanked by a second double-choir ensemble. Next, citizens carried symbols of the thirteen instruments of the Passion. Another two-choir ensemble accompanied the *Ecce homo*. The cross tableau was accompanied by a group of singers and a crowd of men in sackcloth. The final and most dramatic tableau featured Christ’s entombment, as was appropriate for the Good Friday devotion. This ensemble was comprised of a tomb containing a sculpted body of the dead Christ, which was surrounded by Spanish soldiers. Choirs flanked the scene and musicians dressed in sackcloth followed.¹⁹⁵ Torchlight was a

¹⁹³ Kendrick, 147.

¹⁹⁴“The use of the *Improperia*, and the repeated questioning of the “Judaei” in the *Ecce homo* dialogue, take on a more sinister hue, however, in light of the political efforts, reaching their culmination in these years, to banish Jews from the entire State of Milan.” *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ “The order for the later procession [1588] featured three crossbearers followed by two torch carriers and the carrier of the indulgence for those who participated. A first musical ensemble, led by an otherwise unidentified Alessandro (Nuvoloni?), was accompanied by three torches, close to the city’s *gonfalone*. There followed men in sackcloth, the Magdalene’s ointment jar, and more penitents and torches. A second, double-choir ensemble, led by Orazio (Nantermi), flanked the tableau of Gethsemane. Next were the thirteen instruments of the Passion, while another two-choir ensemble led by Giovanni Maria accompanied the *Ecce homo*; a fourth group guided by Orfeo

prominent feature, dramatically illuminating the features of the participants, emphasizing the carving of the sculptures, and glinting off the polished surfaces of the soldiers' armor and weaponry. [Fig. 36]

To reconstruct the Holy Sepulcher episode, I examine verbal descriptions of the *Entierro*, northern Italian sculptural groups, Spanish polychrome statuary, and photos of modern Holy Week processions. Written accounts describe this nocturnal procession as having choirs and groups of torch bearers accompanying each tableau. Illuminated only with flickering torchlight, these scenes dramatically emerged from the enveloping darkness and drew the public into the performance as active participants. The sculpture carried by the Milanese for the *Entierro* procession may have looked similar to Spanish and northern Italian examples. [Figs. 37 & 38] The written account says that around the body of Christ was a group of armed Imperial soldiers. Milan was a famous center for armor and weaponry manufacture. Most likely the foreign soldiers there would have used the armor that was available in northern Italy instead of having the armor shipped from Spain, which would be quite expensive. The armor may have been this Milanese model [Fig. 39] and is very similar to that which appears in Caravaggio's *Capture of Christ*. [Fig. 28] The realism of the polychromatic sculpture, the dramatic lighting, and the participatory nature of the performance all heightened the emotional impact of the scene.

Late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century images of the *Entierro* (from Milan, Bescape's diocese at Novara, and Prato) show later versions of the Milanese Good Friday procession. [Figs. 34, 35 & 36] Images from later centuries show the continued use of symbols, statuary, townspeople and clergy and the dramatic effect of torchlight in a nocturnal the procession. The

(again, presumably Vecchi) was placed near the cross, while more men in sackcloth, and a final ensemble (led by an Ercole) surrounded a tomb surrounded by Spanish soldiers. The musicians were also to be dressed in sackcloth..." Kendrick, 147-148.

emotional impact of the Milanese *Entierro* must have been sufficiently strong for this form to have continued for centuries and to have spread to other regions on the peninsula.

...the city night illuminated by the torches and the tableaux, protected from the crimes and uncertainty of the darkness by the governor's guards; the sheer number of the faithful following the Barnabites, with the silence broken only by the psalms chanted in *falsobordone* and the Reproaches....Once again, Milan became Jerusalem, the city of the Passion....¹⁹⁶

These dramatic forms possessed the qualities seen in Caravaggio's paintings, the dramatic spotlighting of central characters against a dark background, inclusion of common persons in the participatory performance, blurring of boundaries between the secular and sacred to engage viewers of all classes emotionally. We see more of these features in the fascinating painted statuary complexes north of Milan.

2.4 THE NORTHERN ITALIAN SACRO MONTE

The Sacro Monte at Varallo is another example of a public religious devotion using realistic detail to engage emotionally the viewer and thereby enriching their spiritual experience. [Fig. 40] Theatrical-style sets, frozen moments of climactic action, and characters dressed in contemporary costume heightened the expressiveness of the scene [Fig. 41] Catherine Puglisi mentioned this religious site when discussing Caravaggio's realism, but did not discuss the

¹⁹⁶ The stops in the churches used various Passion motets as points of reinforcement for the sermon and the affect of the night, but the processional polyphony reflected the tableaux (*Ecce homo*) and the emotional catharsis (*Miserere*) much more directly. Kendrick, 149-150.

motivations for the Sacro Monte's creation or its reception.¹⁹⁷ My discussion will shed light on the prevalent attitudes of the day and perhaps help one better understand Caravaggio's choice of painting style, the reception of his work, and its spread to other regions—in particular regions under Spanish control. The Sacro Monte was not an intellectual art inspired by the ancient Greeks or Romans; it was designed to communicate to the learned and the common person. Speaking from universal emotional experience, it utilized the same emotion-evoking techniques that Caravaggio employed in most of his works—conventions that were derived from popular theater.

The Sacro Monte was a pilgrimage site founded by a Franciscan friar named Bernardino Caimi in the late fifteenth century. Caimi had spent some years in the Holy Land as the rector of the Palestinian Holy Places and was an ambassador to the Spanish court. Upon his return to Italy, Caimi wished to recreate the *Sacri Luoghi* or “Holy Places” of the Bible such as the Stable at Bethlehem, the House of Nazareth, the Last Supper, Calvary, and the Holy Sepulcher so that those who could not make the long pilgrimage could enjoy spiritual renewal closer to home. At Varallo, Caimi carefully reproduced the layout of the holy sites at Jerusalem, even making the distance between the chapels reflect the actual distance between the original sites in the Holy Land. [Figs. 42 & 42] Thus, the pilgrim in northern Italy was walking the same number of steps as those in Palestine. He worked on approximately seven chapels from 1491 until his death in 1499. Gaudenzio Ferrari (c. 1471 – January 11, 1546), who first assisted Caimi, later decorated additional chapels with frescoes and polychrome statues, expanding the Sacro Monte after Caimi's death.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 34-35.

¹⁹⁸ William Hood, “The Sacro Monte of Varallo: Renaissance Art and Popular Religion,” *Monasticism and the Arts*, ed. Timothy Gregory Verdon (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 293.

As did the designers of the street dramas in Florence and Milan, Caïmi and later designers based the “staging” of his *Sacro Monte* chapels on conventions found in medieval liturgical drama such framing the sculpture groups by placing them in front or within architectural elements (similar to the modern proscenium arch), segmenting the narrative into its climatic moments/emblematic scenes, and using both characters dressed in contemporary clothing beside those wearing “ancient” or exotic foreign clothing to help the viewer relate to the biblical narrative.¹⁹⁹

The *Sacro Monte* designers’ appropriation of medieval forms parallels that of Counter-Reformation leaders, who looked to the Fathers of the Church and medieval spirituality to set the Church right after the Protestant crisis. They saw medieval religious theater’s popularity with the public as an entertainment worthy of revival, for the Church needed something to lift morale and educate the masses. Thus one sees a renewed interest in religious theater and processions during this period. The *Sacro Monte*’s widespread popularity is further evidence of theatrically-based entertainments’ effectiveness in engaging the public on an emotional and spiritual level. The Varallo sculpture complex attracted notable people, in particular, Carlo Borromeo who—with the help of many prominent Milanese families—became one of its most enthusiastic supporters.²⁰⁰

Having been impressed with the *Sacro Monte* on his trip in 1578, Borromeo promoted it among his contemporaries. Such praise made the *Sacro Monte* famous throughout Europe and inspired other sculpture groups such as the Presepio in Rome’s Santa Maria Maggiore, built by

¹⁹⁹ Paola Ventrone, “I Sacri Monti: Un Esempio di Teatro ‘Pietrificato’?” *La “Gerusalemme” di San Vivaldo ei sacri Monte in Europa*, ed. Sergio Gensini (Montaione: Pacini, 1989), 149-55. See also: Rudolf Wittkower, *Idea and Image: Studies in the Italian Renaissance* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 178.

²⁰⁰ Borromeo was a devout man and champion of the Counter-Reformation movement. The Catholic response to the “heresy” of Protestantism was particularly strong after the Council of Trent in which Borromeo was a leading figure. Wittkower, *Idea*, 175. See also: Hood, 297-299.

Sixtus V (Felice Peretti).²⁰¹ Borromeo and other Counter-Reformation leaders recognized the potential of the *Sacro Monte* as a means to preach the gospel to the believers of all classes.²⁰² Later, he returned to Varallo and decided to expand the *Sacro Monte* site by building some twenty new chapels, most of which illustrated the life of Christ. Due to these additions to the chapel complex and Borromeo's active promotion, the *Sacro Monte* became even more popular.²⁰³

The popularity of the *Sacro Monte* at Varallo inspired the construction of other "sacred mountain" complexes during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—many built in northern Italy, but others in Spain and Latin America, where the tradition of polychrome statuary had already emerged as a major art form. A comparison of *Ecce Homo*-themed statuary made for sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish church decoration and street processions shows that there are striking similarities between Iberian models and those made in northern Italy. [Figs. 44, 45 & 46] The sculpture of both nations uses realism as a means of engaging the viewer in much the same way as do Caravaggio's naturalistic paintings.

In the *Sacro Monte*'s dramatic devotional scenes, local character types, wearing contemporary clothing, appear among historical or biblical characters who wear classical or some other exotic costume to convey a sense of the antique or "otherness." [Figs. 47 & 48] As in popular theater, the mixture of fashion from incongruous time periods suggests an eternal time in which past and present co-exist. Contemporary clothing served as the visual link between the

²⁰¹ Peretti was connected to the Sforza Colonna family through the marriage of Muzio II Sforza and Orsina Peretti, his niece. On the Sistine Chapel in Santa Maria Maggiore see: Stephen F. Ostrow. *Art and Spirituality in Counter-Reformation Rome: The Sistine and Pauline Chapels in S. Maria Maggiore* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 39-49. On Costanza Colonna's connections to the Peretti family see: Berra, 88-89.

²⁰² He wanted to emphasize the life of Christ instead of the more "Marian" events as a reaction to Protestant criticisms of the cult of Mary. In 1592, he looked to architect Galeazzo Alessi to revise the layout of the site and begin building new chapels. Hood, 297-300.

²⁰³ *Ibid*, 300.

narrative world and that of the viewer.²⁰⁴ The *Sacro Monte* statues' real clothing, shining glass eyes, and wigs of real hair reflected the religious theater's emphasis on detailed depiction of real-life and its attempt to engage the contemporary viewer emotionally.²⁰⁵

These polychromatic sculptures did not depict generic figures, but were three-dimensional portraits of actors playing a role within a specific religious narrative. Often these figures wear contemporary clothing, like that of the Milanese people who watched/participated in the religious processions of the period. [Fig. 47] The sculptors of the *Sacro Monte* did not place their figures in static poses, rather used frozen moments of climactic action: dramatic scenes of martyrdom, the suffering of Christ's passion, and miracles of healing. The intensity of the scene was heightened to further engage the viewers' emotions, evoking sympathy for the oppressed and antipathy for the oppressor. Villainous personages were often represented as a Jew or a Roman soldier with grotesque, mask-like facial features.

These exaggerated physical characteristics were enhanced by the sharp side-lighting within the *Sacro Monte* chapels, a technique found in the theater of the day and later in Caravaggio's paintings as his signature *chiaroscuro*. Lighting, both natural and artificial, played a large role in the pilgrim's experience. Although some natural light filled the chapels through the proscenium-like opening at the front of the chapel and the small windows in its left and right sides, the chapels were dim. [Fig. 49] At certain times of the day, however, sunlight streamed through the side windows and illuminated the statues with dramatic side-lighting, heightening the sense of depth and realism of the sculpted arrangement. [Fig. 50] As the light moved across

²⁰⁴ Brockett, 177.

²⁰⁵ Neil MacGregor, *Seeing Salvation: Images of Christ in Art* (London: Yale University Press, 2000), 140-141.

the sculpted forms, the scene subtly changed and highlighted different aspects of the scene, allowing subtle reinterpretations of the narrative.

The flickering light filtering through the trees animated the polychrome figures, frozen in their dramatic gestures. If the emotive effect of the lighting was striking during the day, it was even more effective when viewed at night by flickering lamp light. In the evening shadows, the sculptures and pilgrims coexisted in a world enveloped in darkness. The earliest surviving account of a night-time visit is found in a letter dated September 29, 1507. The Milanese chancellor Germalmo Morone, describes a night-time visit to the Sacro Monte that “moved him to tears.”²⁰⁶

It seems that nocturnal visits were common because, during Carlo Borromeo’s last visit to the Sacro Monte, he spent the night in one of the chapels meditating and praying with his friend, the Jesuit Francesco Adorno. Borromeo’s Sacro Monte visit is depicted in *Premonition of Death at the Sacro Monte of Varallo* (located in Milan Cathedral) by “Fiammenghino” (Giovanni Battista Della Rovere). [Figs. 51 & 52] Borromeo is shown carrying a lantern while walking up a winding, moonlit path.²⁰⁷ The movement of the flickering flame gave the illusion that the figures were not fixed statuary, but capable of movement. The soft light obscured the hard, artificial quality of the sculpture in nocturnal shadows. The enveloping darkness united the world

²⁰⁶ Letter 65, *Miscellanea di storia italiana edita per cura della R. Deputazione di Storia Patria* 2 (1863): 148 quoted in Hood, 302.

²⁰⁷ Buzzi and Zardin, 98-99. Hood, 303. “And then he set himself to study, to prepare himself for confession, and to meditate... Every day he meditated on certain themes at certain hours; and at night he went to meditate at that chapel, and before those images, that he thought would be the most fruitful...In those first days the cardinal limited himself to six hours, partly by day, partly by night, of prayer and contemplation....It was truly a grace-filled sight, and full of devotion, to see that great prelate, without companion, carrying a little lantern under his cloak along the paths and at the summit, going by night to visit first one and then another of those chapels.... The fourth day after his arrival he made his confession with such devotion, remorse and tears, that his confessor was forced to weep.” In Carlo Bascapé’s *De vita et rebus gestis Caroli... Cardinalis* (1592) there is a description of Carlo Borromeo’s last trip to the Sacro Monte. This letter presents the ideal pilgrim’s visit to the Sacro Monte. The Cardinal devoted himself to the written meditation during the day and at night visited the chapels that illustrated the theme of that day’s readings.

of the devotee to that of the Sacro Monte; the viewer was both a participant and a witness.²⁰⁸ This dual witness/participant role is similar to that of the Milanese viewing the *Entierro* and Caravaggio in his self-portrait from the *Capture of Christ* in Dublin. [Fig. 28] As Judas kisses Christ to show he is the one to be taken by Roman soldiers, Caravaggio, on the far right, lifts his lantern to “illuminate” the scene. Caravaggio witness the nocturnal scene as did Borromeo when he visited the Sacro Monte at night; even their lanterns are similar. Caravaggio participates by playing the witness in his pictorial role on the canvas and acts as a witness by documenting the event through the act of painting.

Like a theatrical set designer, the artists of the Sacro Monte arranged both the exterior spaces and the spatial relationships inside—between the chapels’ architecture, the sculpture groups, interior frescoes, and the viewer. All were manipulated to maximize the visitor’s spiritual experience. The Sacro Monte’s architecture frames the sculpture groups like the proscenium arch of the theatrical stage. The architectural forms control the viewer’s gaze as ecclesiastical architecture did for medieval liturgical theater. Popular street theater also took advantage of urban architecture, its monuments and edifices, as framing devices for their open-air stages.²⁰⁹ Instead of framing an enacted scene, however, the Sacro Monte’s architecture isolates a frozen episode from the narrative. It is more like a three-dimensional painting, a sculpted *tableau vivant*, than a live drama. The Sacro Monte’s figures are arranged within the viewer’s line of sight so that they will be “read” in the appropriate manner. Caravaggio’s naturalism and his shallow pictorial space echo the Sacro Monte’s use of realistic detail and use of space to control the viewer’s experience and focus attention on the pertinent details of the narrative.

²⁰⁸ Hood, 305-8.

²⁰⁹ On Renaissance stages see: Christopher Cairns, ed. *Scenery, Set, and Staging in the Italian Renaissance: Studies in the Practice of Theatre*. (Lewiston : Edwin Mellen Press, c1996)

The Sacro Monte artists' manipulation of the spatial relationship between the visitor and the sculpted actors within the chapels changed considerably during the *cinque-* and *seicento*. There was less control when the chapel was first established, but it increased significantly throughout the century—especially under Borromeo's influence. In the early years, pilgrims were invited into the chapel and allowed to come into physical contact with the figures, to hold the infant Jesus, for example, in the Nativity or Adoration chapels. Although this “participatory drama” was engaging, the repeated handling of the sculpture damaged the work and was later prohibited.²¹⁰ The viewer was further removed from the scene after the edicts of the Council of Trent stipulated that there was to be no ambiguous representations of time or place in religious art, thereby assuring its historical and Biblical accuracy. To implement this at the Sacro Monte, Borromeo decided that the viewers needed to be completely removed from area in which the statues stood. He ordered the installation of metal or wooden grilles to delineate the boundary separating the sacred from the secular world. [Fig. 53] This segregation of devotional space emphasized the intercessory role of the clergy, who were always present with the pilgrims to lead the prayers and meditations and interpret the sculpted scenes for the laity. Allowing the pilgrim to visit the chapels alone was considered dangerous, for they could misinterpret the scenes and fall into some sort of heretical belief. This parallels Borromeo's prohibition of lay people performing major roles in the religious street processions, an attitude toward public participation in theater that was overturned just after Borromeo's death—as in the aforementioned *Entierro*.

Borromeo's fear of Protestant anti-clerical attitudes, forced him to assert the privileged place of the clergy within the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The rationale for this sort of controlled visual experience was put to paper in his treatise on ecclesiastical art and architecture,

²¹⁰ Alessandro Nova, “‘Popular’ Art in Renaissance Italy: Early Response to the Holy Mountain at Varallo,” *Reframing the Renaissance*, ed. Claire Farago (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 117.

Instructiones fabricate et suppellectilis ecclesiasticae (1577) in which he discussed divisions of space and “hierarchies of sacrality.”²¹¹ At the Sacro Monte, it was demonstrated by allowing only religious to enter the sacred realm of the interior chapels and move among the sculptures. Lay people were forced into the role of observer, viewing the scenes only through the designated openings. This viewer was forced to experience the scene from a predetermined location and planned line of sight, the type of visual control used by set designers for theatrical scenery.²¹² [Figs. 54 & 55] Although this sort of visual control seems counterintuitive for interaction with a sculpture group—its innate three-dimensionality demands that it be viewed from every angle—it finds a parallel in perspectival painting where the viewer is forced to use their imagination to enter the depicted narrative.

The space between the Sacro Monte pilgrim and the sculpted figures may have resulted in a surprising positive effect, one that actually enhanced its spiritual power by preventing the viewer from seeing the inconsistencies in the sculptures—the awkward wigs, rigid clothing, and chipped paint. When the pilgrim could only enter the chapel mentally, the chapels were less material, existing in the realm of imagination, meditation and memory.²¹³ These mental spaces were not restricted by physical limitations. They were free to be active participants in the scene and personally interact with the protagonists. This was a type of sensually-engaged meditation and prayer that paralleled the mental images promoted by the Spanish founder of the Jesuits, Ignatius of Loyola.²¹⁴

²¹¹ Gregg, 50-51.

²¹² Wittkower, *Idea*, 178.

²¹³ Gregg, 50-1.

²¹⁴ These impenetrable architectural spaces are almost 3-dimensional emblematic representations of the biblical narrative in which the viewer place their perceptions of the theatrically inspired scene. These simple outdoor chapels are a curious hybrid of the elaborately decorated Valencienne-style mansions, the sets of the procession wagons, the triumphal arches of the street theater, and the proscenium stages of court theaters built by the Baroque upper class citizens who funded construction and decoration of many chapels. On architecture as emblem see: Judi Loach,

The Jesuits' *Spiritual Exercises* instructed the devotees to place themselves in the presence of these biblical personages, facilitating a dynamic sensory image that would serve as a lasting mental imprint of the narrative and which then could be recalled after leaving the Sacro Monte. In this case the Sacro Monte provided the believer with a "memory image" of sorts that aided religious education like the children's skits performed at the *scuole di dottrina*. Borromeo recognized the communicative power of theatrical forms and perceived this power to be both a blessing and a danger. He manipulated these dramatic elements in the Sacro Monte chapels and in his own religious processions, using them to teach religious doctrine and to move his people to penance and spiritual renewal. I argue that Caravaggio, like Borromeo, saw the positive public reception to these theatrically-inspired forms and applied them to his own work to evoke the same type of emotional response and to earn broad praise from viewers of all classes. Caravaggio merged this dramatic approach with the naturalism and tenebrism of the Lombard painting school to develop a signature painting style that would set him apart from other painters who followed more traditional painting methods.

2.5 PAINTING IN MILAN

Milanese painters' influence on Caravaggio has been much discussed, and so I will not go into a lengthy discussion here. In fact, my argument is that painting is just one of many sources from which Caravaggio adopted features, including chiaroscuro and realism. Scholars are quick to

"Architecture and Emblematism: Issues in Interpretation," *Emblems and Art History*, vol. 1, Alison Adams, ed. (Glasgow: Glasgow Emblem Studies, 1996), 3.

point out that *chiaroscuro* and realism in Lombard painting predated Caravaggio.²¹⁵ Bold lighting effects can be seen in the work of the Campi brothers (Antonio and Vincenzo), Cremonese painters who had gained popularity in Milan for their straightforward, naturalistic portrayals of religious scenes.²¹⁶ They were selected by Giulia Sfrondrati to paint a fresco cycle on the newly-rebuilt vault in San Paolo.²¹⁷ To take one example from the fresco cycle, Antonio Campi's *Beheading of St. Paul* (1564) [Fig. 56] depicts a soldier hovering over the decapitated body of St. Paul in a way similar to Caravaggio's executioner in the *Beheading of St. John the Baptist* in Malta. [Fig. 7] Since Caravaggio depicted things he encountered in daily life, including paintings, it is possible that the Campi *Beheading* and other Milanese paintings later served as models for his work. I argue, however, that a more important source for Caravaggio was contemporary theater and real life situations he witnessed such as actual public executions. Two-dimensional imagery (prints, book illustrations, and paintings) may have suggested basic compositions, but the real or enacted scenes provided the artist with the level of fine detail, character types, and actions that he displayed in his paintings.

Other "echoes" of Milanese painting can be found in Caravaggio's work, but these Milanese influences were always interpreted by Caravaggio as if these northern Italian paintings were staged as a *tableau vivant* by an acting troupe. Caravaggio drew images from memory, reflecting the places and people he encountered. The young artist's master, Simone Peterzano painted a *Deposition of Christ* for the now-demolished "Veronica chapel" of Santa Maria della Scala in the Jesuit church of San Fedele. [Fig. 57] This painting may have been a source for

²¹⁵ On the influence of Leonardo and Caravaggio in Lombardy see: Andrea Bayer, ed. *Painters of Reality: The Legacy of Leonardo and Caravaggio in Lombardy*. (New Haven and London: Yale University of Art, 2004).

²¹⁶ For the Campi and devotional painting, see: Bram de Klerck, *The Brothers Camp: Images and Devotion. Religious Painting in Sixteenth-Century Lombardy*, trans. Andrew McCormick (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999).

²¹⁷ Baernstein, 126.

Caravaggio's *Entombment* painted for the Chiesa Nuova (now in the Vatican Museum).²¹⁸ [Fig. 58] San Fedele was also the original home of Ambrogio Figino's *Madonna of the Snake* (now in the church of Sant'Antonio Abate), which may have inspired Caravaggio's work of the same subject.²¹⁹ [Figs. 59 & 60] While Milanese paintings certainly served as sources for some of Caravaggio's imagery, the sights he encountered in a city alive with interesting people, theatrical performances, and other literary entertainments were much more influential in the development of his signature painting style. The city's streets and piazzas were full of an energy and life that no master work possessed. Other easily accessible pictorial sources from which Caravaggio and popular theater may have drawn inspiration were popular prints and the printed books and pamphlets found in Milan.²²⁰ These printed images bear a strong resemblance to the simple compositions and close-up action of Caravaggio's paintings and are bear some resemblance to contemporary images describing theatrical performance.

2.6 POPULAR PRINT MEDIA: DRAMATIC IMAGES FOR ALL

Popular theatrical performance and polychrome statuary could provide Caravaggio with models for his paintings—low-life characters, bold lighting, deep shadows, and particular types of narrative action. However, one thing these three-dimensional sources could not provide is a pictorial composition. This was something that only a two-dimensional representation could provide. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there was a rapid increase of printed publications, many with illustrations. As printed texts were becoming more accessible to

²¹⁸ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 24-5.

²¹⁹ Moir, 18.

²²⁰ Continisio, 107-116.

the general public, the demand for theatrical performances based on popular literature grew as well, influencing those performed on makeshift mountebank stages. Caravaggio had exposure to many different types of print media. Some of these were the deluxe publications with beautifully engraved illustrations. Others were printed with the general public in mind. Printed prayers, hymns, saints' lives, excerpts from popular adventure tales were a familiar part of Caravaggio's world, beginning as early as his primary education in Caravaggio and his apprenticeship in Milan. These simple images provided the artist with a large number of images with simple compositions designed to be easily understood and to help one remember complex narrative or concepts.

Literature was linked closely to theatrical practice in *cinque-* and *seicento* Milan. The popular stories were translated into live performance and the characters and situations on the popular stage were appropriated by authors. This, and the fact that dramas were published in written form and collected by theater enthusiasts makes print media another form of dramatic entertainment from which Caravaggio drew inspiration as he travelled the peninsula.

Caravaggio's first exposure to illustrated print media was during his early education in the *scuole di dottrina cristiana* at Caravaggio. These schools were supported by Borromeo, who sought to improve Milanese life through literacy. To meet the middle and lower classes' rising demand for reading material, Milanese and Venetian publishers printed less expensive volumes for popular consumption.²²¹ These economy versions were not as elaborate as the luxury

²²¹ Sixty per cent of the printed works produced during the 16th century can be considered part of the "popular press" category such as religious books (most of all histories and lives of saints, catechisms, books of hours and devotions, instructions to clerics, breviaries, bibles, and missals), adventure and cavallaresque poems, pleasant tales, travel accounts, and chronicles of various events. Editions of classical literature amounted to only 15% of total production. This rapid growth in the popular press reflected the increasing levels of literacy in the lower classes. There was always be a market for the deluxe versions but these were for a smaller group of refined and cultured readers. These were beautiful examples of the printer's skill but were not as profitable for the printing house. Therefore, the printer shifted its production to accommodate the growing popular market. Continisio, 107-10. On religious education of

editions, but they were also illustrated, albeit with images containing fewer figures, less distracting detail, and simplified compositions. Since the economy editions had fewer images, the illustrated events were often pivotal events in the narrative, arguments, battles, rescues, escapes, martyrdoms, etc. [Figs. 61 & 62] These images were created as an attractive supplement to the written text and useful aids for comprehension, especially for those who had little, or only elementary, reading skills.²²² The popular press' simple, uncluttered compositions, close-up focus on action, and minimal background find a parallel in Caravaggio's paintings which are famous for their large half-length figures, simplified narration, violent action, monochromatic backgrounds, and shallow pictorial space. Although Caravaggio's use of printed images is not a new idea, I choose to look beyond the art prints of Albrecht Dürer to the popular press.²²³ I present these printed images as possible sources for Caravaggio, because they provide means to translate the three-dimensional imagery derived from live theater and theatrically-inspired sculptural forms into a two-dimensional image that retains its dramatic intensity, narrative power, clarity, and popular reception by all.

Illustrated books and pamphlets were used in the *scuole di dottrina cristiana* to teach reading and religious doctrine by engaging the young reader's attention with bold prints of favorite scenes from the Bible or saints' lives. The images served as a sort of memory aid for the students' memorization of a biblical story or prayer.²²⁴ These were probably Caravaggio's first interaction with religious imagery beyond casually looking at altarpieces in local churches.

the public after Borromeo, see: Daniela Sironi, "L'educazione cristiana del popolo" *Carlo Bescapè sulle orme del Borromeo*, p. 261-269.

²²²On the Schools of Christian Doctrine see: Grendler, *Books and Schools in the Italian Renaissance*. (Aldershot, GB and Brookfield, VT: Ashgate (VARIORIUM), 1995), 158-71, 315-31. See section VIII "Schools, Seminaries, and Catechetical Instruction" (315-31); "The in Sixteenth-Century Italy" (319-331); "Borromeo and the Schools of Christian Doctrine" (158-171)

²²³ For Caravaggio's use of Dürer prints see: Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 216, 220, 113, 170.

²²⁴ Grendler, "Form and Function in Popular Books" in *Books and Schools in the Italian Renaissance* (Aldershot, UK and Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1995), 470-3.

Using these simple, bold images, the young painter tried to understand abstract theological ideas and events from Church history. To understand what impact Caravaggio's early education had on his artistic career, we must investigate the printed images depicting biblical narratives, popular literature, and theatrical performance that the artist saw while living in Spanish Lombardy.

Although the exact details of the *scuole di dottrina* in small town of Caravaggio are understudied, the *scuole* in Milan have received considerable attention. Because the Milanese schools served as a prototype for others in the region, I use it as a guide to reconstruct Caravaggio's primary education. In the *scuole di dottrina* at Milan, children first learned the alphabet, read the *Summario*, read and memorized both the *Interrogatorio and the Summario*, learned to write and to count, learned the significance of the sacraments, and disputed Church doctrine.²²⁵ Although these schools aimed to implant simple religious material through repetition and memorization, these lessons also were meant to be fun. Singing, processions, contests, dramatic skits, and prizes were all used to make school an entertaining experience.²²⁶ [Fig. 63] The student' texts, therefore, were also meant to engage the reader. This was accomplished by using bold illustrations, which added visual interest to the readings.

Caravaggio most likely went to the *scuole di dottrina* located in Caravaggio when he was young.²²⁷ Before going to Peterzano's studio, he had to have some ability to read and write. The

²²⁵ Grendler, *Books and Schools*, 158-171. and Grendler, *Church History* 53:3 (1984): 319-331.

²²⁶ School lasted for only two hours so the children would have free time to play. The books used to teach the lowest levels in the *scuole* were the *Summario*, a simple primer with the alphabet, the sign of the cross, simple Latin prayers and the lists of precepts like The Ten Commandments written in Italian; next, came the *Interrogatorio*, a question-and-answer catechism. Those who were fortunate enough to afford regular schools did not attend these humble religious classes, for private schools, often held in the homes of schoolmasters or homes of their clients, were the preferred form of education. However, both religious schools and vernacular schools saw a marked increase at this time due to the public's growing interest in literacy. Grendler, *Books and Schools*, 158-171.

²²⁷ Due to the premature death of Fermo Merisi, Caravaggio's mother may have decided to send him first to the free *scuole di dottrina* and later invest in a private education when he was older.

most economical education was that provided by the Catholic Church.²²⁸ After learning basic skills, he may have attended a private vernacular school, where he probably learned some Latin and studied classical and Italian literature, as was the custom during the Renaissance.²²⁹ Peterzano might have continued Caravaggio's enrollment in the *scuole di dottrina* at Milan, because it was necessary for any master to provide religious education for their apprentices.²³⁰ In his youth, the artist must have developed an interest in literature that continued into adulthood. He is known to have had books of his own; a dozen were among his belonging while living in Rome, and he socialized with writers such as Giambattista Marino.²³¹

Recent research on Venetian and Milanese schools helps determine the types of books Caravaggio would probably have read. In Italy during this time, there were two main types of private school: Latin schools, which followed a humanities curriculum (grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history and moral philosophy, based on Latin classics), and vernacular schools, which taught religious and secular vernacular literature, mathematics, simple accounting, and elementary Latin grammar—all that was needed to do enter business or trade.²³² Because Caravaggio chose to be an artist, he probably attended a vernacular school, which focused on the practical skills needed to conduct a business, instead of the Latin school, which focused on poetics and philosophy through the study of ancient and contemporary classics.²³³

²²⁸ Berra, 200.

²²⁹ Langdon, 20-21. On the education of artist during the renaissance, see: Paul F. Grendler, "What Piero Learned in School: Fifteenth-Century Vernacular Education," in *Renaissance Education Between Religion and Politics*. (Aldershot. UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), part IV, pp. 1-22.

²³⁰ While preparation for a profession was the main purpose of these vernacular schools, the students' religious education was not to be ignored. In the 1570's and 1580's, Borromeo insisted that all teachers in vernacular schools teach the catechism as part of the required religious curriculum, so at least some of the texts used in the *scuole di dottrina cristiana* would also have been used by the students in the private (both Latin and vernacular schools) as well. Paul F. Grendler. "What Zuanne Read in School: Vernacular Texts in Sixteenth Century Venetian Schools" *Books and Schools*, 41-54. Berra, 200.

²³¹ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 65 and Moffitt, 65-7.

²³² Grendler. "What Zuanne Read in School," 41-54.

²³³ Grendler. "What Piero Learned," 1-22 and Berra, 200.

The vernacular texts that Caravaggio most likely used were: 1) primers which taught the alphabet and simple prayers, the *Little Office of Our Lady*, and the Seven Psalms. 2) religious texts such as the popular *Flower of Virtue* with its imaginative approach to moral instruction, the *Epistole e Evangelii*, and various lives of the saints, possibly the widely-read Golden Legend, and the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis. 3) secular texts such as Antonio de Guevara's *La vita di Marco Aurelio* of 1542 (translated from Spanish) and other secular books considered escapist entertainment such as the so-called *libri di batagia*, which included chivalric romances such as Barberino's *I Reali di Francia* (in particular book IV *Buovo d'Antona*) and Ariosto's best-seller *Orlando Furioso*. While the simple illustration of the religious texts and pamphlets were important for their bold lines and tight pictorial compositions, I am most interested in the last category, because of the type of action depicted, their frequent representation on the popular stage, and their popularity with all classes.

By Caravaggio's day, chivalric romances had become such a part of daily Italian life that they were read not only by men and women, but even by youngsters in school:

And the vernacular schools taught the ever popular chivalric romances. They did not build character nor lead men to God, but gave pleasure through exciting stories of knights and ladies, adventures and battles. Chivalric romances appeared in the curriculum because readers loved them. They must have come as a welcome relief to children after the relentless moralizing of the *Fior di virtù* and saints' lives.²³⁴

Young students read both Barberino's popular romance, *Buovo d'Antona*, and Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, which entertained their readers with a blend of exciting adventure and realistic fantasy. A common feature of these chivalric tales was their drawing upon scenes from daily life to make the protagonists' world more accessible, a technique seen in popular

²³⁴ Grendler, "What Piero Learned," 476.

theater, the Sacro Monte, and Caravaggio's paintings as well. Caravaggio's inclusion of realistic details of contemporary costume in paintings such as his *Penitent Magdalene*, *Calling of Saint Matthew*, and *Madonna of Loreto* probably had a similar motivation, one shared with popular theater, of making the work more familiar and accessible to the common person.²³⁵ [Figs. 64, 20 & 17]

These vernacular texts were the “must reads” of early-modern popular culture and served as subjects for poetic imitations, paintings, and theater. Since the term “popular” is vague, I will investigate the various meanings of the term “popular” as relating to printed text and its accompanying illustrations. If Caravaggio did look to popular culture for his models, he may have looked to the wide-spread consumption of popular literature and theatrical representations of these stories to derive as formulas for his paintings—to make them similarly “popular” among a broad audience.

In Paul Grendler's *Form and Function in Popular Books* (1995), he classified Renaissance books according to three criteria. First, the text had to be easily understood by a non-expert reader, for during this time “popular” was synonymous with “common,” “plebian,” and even “vulgar.”²³⁶ Therefore, a “popular” book was one within easy grasp of those with little learning and of low social status, a characteristic seen in popular theater, encouraged by Counter-reformation leaders with regard to religious art, and found in Caravaggio's paintings.

There is a second meaning of “popular,” which refers to the broad appeal that a text might possess—one that might transcend social class. The third type of “popular” refers to a book that “responds to the beliefs, ideals, and perhaps inchoate feelings of the audience. The

²³⁵ Grendler observed that of the classics of Italian literature, only *Orlando Furioso* was read, not because it was considered a classic (a subject of considerable debate), but because it was a chivalric romance. Paul F. Grendler, “What Zuanne Read,” 50-52.

²³⁶ Grendler. “Form and Function in Popular Books” *Books and Schools*, 451-484.

readers empathize with the literary characters. A strong audience bond must be forged for a work of literature to become popular” in this way.²³⁷ Caravaggio’s paintings, popular street theater, and Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso* would all be classified as “popular,” these three criteria. Examples of some of the “popular” books for adults were: *Fior di virtù*, *The Imitation of Christ*, *The Little Office of Our Lady*, and often copiously illustrated chivalric romances such as *Guerin Meschino*, *I Reali di Francia*, *Danese Ugieri*, *Buovo d’Antona*, and the Renaissance best-seller—*Orlando Furioso*.²³⁸ The violence of the chivalric romances, the “books of battles,” did not offend the refined tastes of learned men or the delicate sensibilities of renaissance ladies; all classes considered these heroic tales exciting.²³⁹ The violence presented in these texts was not so different from the contemporary intrigues occurring in Italy at that time—assassinations, vendettas, and public executions.²⁴⁰

While these adventure stories enjoyed an almost universal popularity, some were concerned about the negative effect of violence on children. Tomasso Garzoni lamented that students chose to recite Ariosto rather than Ovid and then ran out of school “like devils unleashed.” One popular text, *Baldus*, a parody of chivalric romances, described its main

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸The chivalric romance fulfilled these criteria, being both accessible to the general public and eagerly read by all classes—men and women alike. According to Grendler’s study of 16th-century Venice, 33% of adult males and 13% of adult females were literate, and of these, most came from the upper class, but now the middle class began to have increased access to education. One could expect similar or even higher statistics in Milan (especially in the numbers of literate women and middle- and lower-class Milanese), due to the elementary education provided by Borromeo’s *scuole di dottrina*. The literate males in Venice included nobles, merchants, lawyers, doctors, some civil servants, master artisans, some shopkeepers, and the clergy. Grendler. “Form and Function,” 470-484.

²³⁹ Grendler. “Chivalric Romances in the Italian Renaissance,” *Books and Schools*, 84-85.

²⁴⁰ “*Buovo d’Antona* very successfully offers high adventure rooted in realistic fantasy. That is, the hero performs great deeds and wins against heavy odds, but no miraculous intervention saves him. Even the villains are human rather than diabolic; they are jealous, cruel, or nasty in human terms. Hair-raising escapes from peril occur throughout, but they are no more fantastic or unbelievable than some twentieth-century cloak-and-dagger action stories. The book stays within geographical reality; the hero goes back and forth through Europe and the Mediterranean world, often visiting real, and names, cities and countries. The everyday details of life in the romance come directly from contemporary Italian life, enhancing audience identification with hero and heroine.” Grendler. “What Zuanne Read, p. 52. See also: Grendler, “Chivalric Romances in the Italian Renaissance” *Books and Schools*, 59-102 and Grendler. “Italian Literature” *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300 - 1600*. (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 88-9.

character as being so obsessed by *Orlando Furioso* during his youth that he “pummeled his teachers, wrecked the schoolroom, and ran away to become a knight,” an ironic parallel to the violent life of Caravaggio himself, who seemed similarly obsessed with knighthood and had a penchant for aggression and violence.²⁴¹ Given the wide-spread popularity of these stories, Caravaggio may have thought that both the general public and Church leaders would accept the violence in his own life and in his paintings. Although some Counter-Reformation churchmen did condemn these “books of battles,” the vast majority of preachers and moralists did not seem overly concerned, probably realizing that the condemnation of these much-loved works would provoke intense opposition, something the Counter-Reformation Church was trying to avoid.²⁴²

One of the most widely-read—and most imitated—books of this era was Ludovico Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*, already considered a literary masterpiece shortly after its release in 1516.²⁴³ The *Furioso*’s universal popularity and “modern” style, with its experimental blending of genres, disregard for poetic convention, and elements drawn from contemporary culture, make this particular literary work relevant to my exploration of similar elements found in popular theater and Caravaggio’s innovative paintings. Both Ariosto and his *Furioso* had quickly become “household names,” a reputation that grew as fast as the number of literate adults on the peninsula, a type of broad public acclaim that Caravaggio respected and surely wanted for himself.²⁴⁴ Because the conventions of poetics were often applied to the visual arts, I look at Ariosto and *Orlando Furioso* as models for Caravaggio’s own career and artistic approach, first

²⁴¹ Grendler, *Ibid.*, 87.

²⁴² Grendler, *Ibid.*, 88-9.

²⁴³ As a result of its broad appeal, it saw more than 150 printings before the end of the century, making it the first popular best-seller. This chivalric poem told of combat and love, featured warriors and ladies, and conflicts between good and evil. The literary critics admired its artistry and ability to raise higher issues and the common person simply enjoyed its tales of adventure. Daniel Javitch, *Proclaiming a Classic: the Canonization of Orlando Furioso* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

²⁴⁴ This is according to his testimony in the liable case Giovanni Baglione brought against him in Rome. This will be discussed at length in the following chapter.

by looking at the many illustrated publications of *Furioso* and their possible influence on the painter's characterization and compositions and then at Ariosto as a celebrated—and controversial—personality to whom the painter may have looked for inspiration when launching his own career.

Caravaggio certainly knew *Orlando Furioso* and its colorful characters. This epic poem was the subject of many literary discussions and the model for many imitations. Even the illiterate would have been familiar with the *Furioso*, for songs recounted favorite episodes, excerpts were read aloud in public, and acting troupes represented its personages on stages in palazzos and piazzas across Italy.²⁴⁵ Ariosto's work also was the inspiration for paintings such as that depicting *Angelica and Medoro* by Caravaggio's mentor, Simone Peterzano. Indeed, *Orlando Furioso* was a "hot" commodity.

To meet such high demand (and from increasingly diverse social classes), publishers printed different versions—luxury editions for the wealthy collector and economy editions for the average reader.²⁴⁶ Caravaggio would have known the *Furioso* in all of these forms—painted, printed, and theatrical. When studying the texts printed for the general public, there are characteristics among the economy editions that set them apart from their deluxe counterparts—characteristics which are strikingly similar to illustrations depicting theatrical performance and Caravaggio's paintings.

When analyzing illustrated editions of romances such as the *Furioso*, I will be looking at their use of space, character types, and the type of actions portrayed. While the deluxe printed editions often had complex images with multiple episodes compressed onto a single page [Fig. 61], the images for the less expensive editions were simpler, often focusing the climactic event

²⁴⁵ Grendler, "Chivalric Romances" *Books and Schools*, 89. Grendler, *Popular Books*, Literature and commedia book

²⁴⁶ Grendler, "Form and Function," 452-4.

of the narrative. [Fig. 62] Although these images were intended to add visual appeal to the text, they were made to be easily understood at a glance and aid the novice reader. The background is simple, almost minimal, with the majority of the frame occupied by the main characters. These simple, bold images had a more intense (and long-lasting) emotional impact than their more elaborate counterparts and were more easily remembered. When examining these simple illustrations of romance novels such as *Danese Ugieri* and *Orlando Furioso*, one finds similarities to Caravaggio's bold style, particularly in the foreground of the more complex images, which would correspond to the area the Caravaggio painted with his close-up views of the scene. [Figs. 66, 6 & 67, 2] The artist's shallow, empty backgrounds, boldly rendered action, and close proximity to the figures are elements that one also finds in the dramatic productions of these popular adventure stories. It is possible that Caravaggio chose these simplified compositions to appeal to a similarly broad audience.

While an adolescent, Caravaggio may not have thought of the usefulness of these early models. He may have simply enjoyed them, as everyone else did, but later as he actively strove to create a dramatic personal style, he looked to the models of the world around him, a world that included these exciting adventure tales in both their printed and theatrical forms. These were early sources from which he would draw inspiration while working in Rome. But before he would be able to whole-heartedly engage in developing a bold, personal style, he would have to suppress his individualism to learn the fundamentals of painting under the watchful eye of Simone Peterzano.

The young's years in Milan at Peterzano's studio were important for learning the skills necessary to succeed as a painter and observing culture in a bustling Italian city. While known today merely as the mentor of Caravaggio, during the sixteenth century, Peterzano was

considered a respectable artist and disciple of Titian. The artist and theoretician Giovan Paolo Lomazzo admired Peterzano enough to include him in his treatise, *Idea del tempio della pittura* (Milan, 1590). Lomazzo listed Peterzano among great artists famous for their works' beautiful coloration and emotional expression, "To Titian, and Giorgione, and Antonio da Correggio, have succeeded Paolo Cagliari [Veronese], Tintoretto, the Palmas, Pordenone, the Bassani, Federico Barocci, and Simone Peterzano..."²⁴⁷ Beyond being taught the basic painting techniques required to succeed as a painter, Caravaggio would have learned the personal qualities expected of a master painter by watching his mentor, reading artists' lives, and treatises such as Lomazzo's.

A good reputation was an asset for any career, as seen above in Peterzano's case.²⁴⁸ Even at his early age Caravaggio would have begun to form his own opinions on what sort of artist he wanted to emulate. He would have looked not only to the reputations of contemporary artists, but also those of great artists of past for inspiration. Some of these artists lived refined lives similar to that of Alberti's ideal, but many others had complex personalities and were noted for their peculiarities. So prolific were these stories, that this became the standard public perception of master artists. Today, we see Caravaggio as one of these troubled masters, a man whose passionate life both was an asset and a detriment to his career. For many years scholars believed this was due to an unstable personality, but recently others propose that Caravaggio's consistently outrageous behavior was his attempt to fashion his own artistic persona. I suggest that Caravaggio, like a skilled playwright, created a dramatic role for himself by appropriating

²⁴⁷ E. Bacceschi and M. Calvesi, 'Simone Peterzano,' *I Pittori Bergamaschi, op. cit., IV, Il Cinquecento*, iv, 476, as quoted in in Langdon, 23. See also: Giovan Paolo Lomazzo, *Idea del tempio della pittura* [orig .pub. Milan, 1590], (Hildesheim: Olms, 1965). Gerald Martin Ackerman. *The structure of Lomazzo's treatise on painting*, unpublished doctoral thesis Princeton University, (Ann Arbor, Mich., University Microfilms, 1966).

²⁴⁸ Caravaggio's (or his mother's) choice of Peterzano was probably due to the painter's respected reputation among the Milanese cultural circle. Langdon, 22-23.

elements drawn from biographies of great past masters, contemporary writers and artists, literary masterpieces, and theatrical sources. This would be a means of creating a larger-than-life self-portrait that would outlive the man Michelangelo Merisi and become an iconic figure—the “Caravaggio” we know today.

2.7 SOURCES FOR CARAVAGGIO’S ARTISTIC PERSONA

...people in their earthly existence behave like actors on a stage. They are cast in tragedies or in comedies, some of them as princes and others as commoners or slaves. They wear a variety of strange and wonderful masks and are called to appear on-stage so that each may represent, as best he can, his appointed character. When the show is over, man is stripped of his borrowed costume and returned to his former, spiritual state. One earns praise or damnation according to the manner in which one has played his role.²⁴⁹

According to the dramatist Leone de’ Sommi, a person’s role in life was essentially their reputation. This conflation of personality and career was supported by the numerous treatises and artists’ lives (such as those of Lomazzo, Baglione, and Bellori), which pass judgment on artists’ accomplishments while revealing supposedly accurate details of their personal lives. Although these texts were written for a specific audience, the artist or art collector, the reputations of artists were widely known to the general population as well. Determined by the artist’s relative celebrity, their successes and failure became part of urban gossip and the city began to identify themselves with their resident artists. Because artists’ reputations became an issue of regional pride, literature of the period often would mention their names. For example, Ludovico Ariosto mentioned artists’ names, because these were familiar, “household” names.

²⁴⁹ Leone de’ Sommi, *Quattro dialoghi* (1565), as quoted in Levy, 173-174.

The wide circulation of his works makes his critical assessment of artists' accomplishments particularly important. In Canto 33 of *Orlando Furioso*, the author lists some of Italy's great artists:

. . . and those who have been in our days or now are, Leonardo, Andrea Mantegna, Gian Bellino, the two Dossi, and that one who carves equally well, Michel, more than mortal, angel divine; Bastiano, Rafael, Titian, who gives Cadoro no less honor than they do Venice and Urbino, and the others whose work is seen to be as such as one reads and believes of ancient times,

those whom we ourselves see as painters, and those who have been in high esteem for a thousand and a thousand years already, have with their brushes shown things that have happened, some on boards and some on walls....²⁵⁰

A similar list of respectable artists is found in the transcript of Caravaggio's 1603 libel trial in Rome, which sheds some light on his thoughts on artists' reputations and the art of painting.²⁵¹ According to Caravaggio, "A good painter knows his art . . . that is, how to paint well and to imitate natural things well."²⁵² Caravaggio continued by naming the painters in Rome who he considered most talented: the Cavalier d'Arpino, Federico Zuccaro, Cristoforo Roncalli, Annibale Caracci, and Antonio Tempesta.²⁵³ The list was an unusual mix, because

²⁵⁰ Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, vol. 2), Canto 33, verses 2-3, trans. Allan Gilbert (New York: S.F. Vanni, 1954, 572-3.

²⁵¹ For transcription see: Mia Cinotti and Gian Alberto Dell'Acqua. *Il Caravaggio e le sue grandi opera da San Luigi dei Francesi* (Milan, 1971), 154ff., FF 49-56.

²⁵² "...depingere bene et imitare bene le cose naturali." Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 161. As both scholars Röttgen and Moffitt point out, this type of imitation was much more than a slavish copying of props, but was a style of painting that had a long history originating in ancient Greece and Rome. Although it had a respectable precedent dating back to antiquity, this was a painting style that was not widely accepted by those at the art academies who generally favored a more classicizing style. Caravaggio's naturalism was seen as dangerous. On history of imitation in painting, see: Moffitt, 63-78 and Herwath Röttgen *Il Caravaggio: recherche e interpretazioni*. (Rome: Bulzoni, 1974), 248, n. 101.

²⁵³ "I think that I know almost all of the painters in Rome, and beginning with the good ones, I know Gioseffe [Cesari d'Arpino], il Caraccio, il Zuccherò, il Pomarancio [Cristofano Roncalli], il Gentileschi, Prospero [Orsi], Gio [van] Andrea [Donducci, il Mastelletta], Gio[vanni] Baglioni, Gismondo[Laire], and Giorgio [Hoefnagel] Todesco, il Tempesta, and others." These are the painters Caravaggio knew. Of these he names those he believed were good. This was a very short list including Cesari, Zuccaro, Roncalli, Annibale Caracci and later added Tempesta. He continued "The *valentuomini* are those who understand painting and judge as good painters those whom I consider

they were not adherents to any particular style. The common denominator appears to be their public reputation, for they were clearly the most famous painters in the city. For Caravaggio, it was merely the status of their commissions and their public recognition that determined their success; decorum and refined living carried no weight with this rebellious painter.²⁵⁴ Everyone in Rome knew their names; *this* is what mattered most to him.²⁵⁵

Caravaggio, as a skilled observer of contemporary life, was acutely aware of public opinion and common stereotypes pertaining to artists. Beyond these personal observations, Roman art critics and collectors, such as Del Monte and Vincenzo Giustiniani, would have shared stories and anecdotal information about famous artists with the young painter as they helped him establish his painting career.

To understand sources for Caravaggio's flamboyant personality complex personality and revolutionary painting style, I will explore 15th- and 16th-century descriptions of the "ideal artist" and compare those with well-known biographies of great artists. According to these "artists' lives" many of Italy's most beloved artists were described as having short tempers, odd grooming habits, antisocial behavior, and bizarre working methods. I argue that Caravaggio was aware of the importance of developing an artistic persona, appropriated certain behaviors and personality characteristics from these exaggerated tales to construct a larger-than-life artistic persona. Caravaggio was further encouraged to adopt this "artistic genius" role because of its frequent use in literature and theatrical performance, which often used episodes of temporary insanity to highlighting the protagonists' extreme passion and the

good or bad; but the bad and ignorant painters consider the ignorant ones like themselves to be good." Translation found in Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 161, n. 18.

²⁵⁴ The Cavalier d'Arpino was a favorite of the pope and had numerous prestigious papal commissions such as the transept of the Lateran and the figurative paintings in the dome of St. Peter's. Federico Zuccaro "represented tradition and authority despite his criticism of Caravaggio" and had recently received a gold chain from the Spanish king, Philip II for paintings executed in the Escorial. Vincenzo Giustiniani considered both Annibale and Caravaggio to be the best young painters in Rome. Roncalli painted for the Oratorians at the Chiesa Nuova and painted an altarpiece at St. Peter's. Tempesta painted frescoes in Palazzo Giustiniani. Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 161-2.

²⁵⁵ Hibbard notes that the common denominator for these artists is not a particular painting style, but popular success and critical acclaim.

actor's skill. This guise of madness gave them the opportunity to throw off social conventions and the "ideal" and totally immerse themselves in a world where the only limits were those of their own bravado and creativity.

2.7.1 The Myth of the Ideal Artist

Caravaggio would never be known as the personification of the "ideal artist," at least not according to the standards of renaissance academies. Artists such as Leon Battista Alberti's treatise would try to raise the social standing of artist, by comparing the art of painting with the more respected literary arts. His treatise, *On Painting* (1435) was deeply influenced by Roman treatises on rhetoric, especially Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*, because many viewed painting as a type of visual poetry.²⁵⁶ Thus, the classical laws of rhetoric and poetics were applied to painting as well.

For Alberti, there was more to a good painter than strict adherence to classical rules and well-honed technique; good character also was important.²⁵⁷ Alberti believed that the artist's work reflected his temperament. A painter who was in full control of his passions would paint figures with a similar control. He advised young painters that the "expressions, gestures and motions of the figures should be potent and declamatory, like those of an orator, but they should not be violent or extreme."²⁵⁸ Alberti continues by describing naïve artists who think "that those figures are most alive that throw their limbs about a great deal, they cast aside all dignity in

²⁵⁶ Kemp, Introduction to *On Painting* by Leon Battista Alberti (New York and London: Penguin Books, 1991), 19.

²⁵⁷ His treatise stressed the importance of proportion, beauty, and decorum and gives the reader complex systems to attain these desirable effects. Alberti was himself an archetype of the Renaissance 'universal man, and was "revered as a leader in the revival of the true Latin tongue of the ancients in a variety of literary modes, as a pioneer in the refinement of the Italian vernacular so that it might be fit to stand alongside Latin, as an authority on the arts and sciences and, above all, as a moral exemplar in word and deed." Leon Battista Alberti. *On Painting*. Martin Kemp, ed. (London: Penguin Classics, 1991), 1-2.

²⁵⁸ Kemp, Introduction, 15.

painting and copy the movements of actors. In consequence their works are not only devoid of beauty and grace, but are expressions of an extravagant artistic temperament.”²⁵⁹ Alberti warns, “An extravagant artistic talent, which begins painting in a furious transport of creative enthusiasm, will give rise to works that are devoid of dignity and deficient in finish.”²⁶⁰

Leonardo da Vinci, who was influenced by Alberti advised students to:

Observe decorum and note that it is not suitable, either with respect to place or action, for the lord to behave like the servant, nor should the infant behave like the adolescent but in a way similar to an old man, who can barely support himself. Do not make a rude peasant with an action which is rightly used for a noble man, nor the strong like the weak, nor the actions of a whore like those of an honest woman, nor males like females.²⁶¹

Once again, we see accurate representation of nature superseded by rules of decorum. Even when stating his thoughts on painting faces, he tells the young painter “to collect the good features from many beautiful faces... select your examples of beauty as I have said and commit them to memory.”²⁶² These ideal features were then to be used to create an idealized, mask-like face similar to the stock characters from popular theater. In this reality, refined people were always beautiful and the stupid were ugly. Proponents of classicism such as Bellori, who would harshly criticize naturalistic paintings styles such as that of Caravaggio, embraced writings that placed decorum in the premier position. Although Caravaggio chose to simplify many things such as his compositions and figures, he painted a world that was more psychologically complex than beautiful is good, and ugly is bad. Along with choosing a more “modern” approach to

²⁵⁹ Alberti, *On Painting*, 80

²⁶⁰ Kemp, Introduction, 15, n. 24.

²⁶¹ *Leonardo on Painting : an anthology of writings by Leonardo da Vinci with a selection of documents relating to his career as an artist*, trans. and eds. Martin Kemp and Margaret Walker (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 150.

²⁶² Kemp and Walker, 204.

painting, often by showing sacred figures in less than flattering ways (*Madonna of the Snake* and *Death of the Virgin*); he aggressively rejected the role of refined, decorous artist for a more unconventional and dangerous persona—the mad genius.

2.7.2 Popular Views of the Melancholic Genius

For centuries, art historians and critics have been fascinated with Caravaggio's tragic, brief life.²⁶³ Some suggest that the artist's early loss of three important father figures traumatized him, leaving him vulnerable to influence from the darker side of Lombard life--its hardened soldiers, unruly *bravi*, and gangs of brigands. Much of this is speculative for little is really known about Caravaggio's youth. Biographers such as Baglione and Bellori knew of the artist's unstable personality and unruly behavior of later years and imagined that he had to have had an equally troubled youth. For them Caravaggio's problems were symptoms of a generally depraved character that existed from birth. To support this, writers such as Mancini and Bellori claimed that he spent time in prison while he was still in Milan, an event foreshadowing his later clashes with authorities.²⁶⁴

Recent research on Caravaggio's youth reveals a rather ordinary life for the young painter and calls the "juvenile delinquent" portrait of Caravaggio into question.²⁶⁵ One must remember that these early authors' claims have proven false on a number of points and that these authors,

²⁶³For books taking a psychological perspective on Caravaggio and his art see: Luciano Berti, Pierandrea Lussana, and Graziella Magherini, *Richiamandoci il Caravaggio felice: L'apoteosi sua contemporanea e quella odierna* (Florence: NICOMP, c2004); Rudolf Wittkower and Margot Wittkower, *Born under Saturn – The Character and Conduct of Artists: A Documented History from Antiquity to the French Revolution* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1963); Puglisi, "Caravaggio's life;" Stone, "Self and Myth;" and Hibbard, *Caravaggio*.

²⁶⁴Giulio Mancini, *Alcune considerazioni appartenenti alla pittura come di diletto di un gentiluomo nobile e come introduzione a quello si deve dire in Considerazioni sulla pittura*, vol. 2, Adriana Marucchi and Luigi Salerno, eds. (Roma: 1956-7), quoted in Berra, 233.

²⁶⁵Berra, "Il Caravaggio in 'prigion'?", 233-244.

particularly Baglione and Bellori, held a negative opinion of Caravaggio and his daringly “modern” approach to painting—one that was considered quite dangerous to proponents of classicism. Thus, these stories served the classicist’s agenda—dark pictures come from a dark, unstable mind.

This description fits that of the melancholic. In the Wittkowers’ *Born Under Saturn* (1963), which explores the long-held stereotype of the melancholic artist, Caravaggio is found in the chapter called “Artists and the Law.”²⁶⁶ While this classification is understandable given the painter’s later problems with authorities, I would argue that Wittkower just as easily could have discussed Caravaggio in the “Genius, Madness, and Melancholy” chapter, which traces the “mad artist” stereotype back to classical Greece and Rome. To establish the prevalence of this stereotype during Caravaggio’s day, I examine evidence found in letters, court records, and artists’ lives.

Vasari’s *Lives* frequently mention artists’ odd habits and personal quirks. After discussing the oddities among the great Florentine artists of the sixteenth century, Vasari described a “new type of artist” that emerged “with distinct traits of personality,” one with striking similarities to descriptions of Caravaggio.²⁶⁷ “The approach of these artists to their work is characterized by furious activity alternating with creative pauses, their psychological make-up by agonized introspection; their temperament by a tendency to melancholy; and their social behaviour by a craving for solitude and by eccentricities of an endless variety.”²⁶⁸ Thus, Caravaggio’s “mad artist” persona had well-known precedents.

²⁶⁶ Wittkower and Wittkower, 1963.

²⁶⁷ Giorgio Vasari, *The lives of the painters, sculptors, and architects*, William Gaunt, ed. (London, Dent; New York, Dutton, 1963); Wittkower and Wittkower, 91.

²⁶⁸ Wittkower and Wittkower, 91.

Thus this “modern” type of artist who shunned tradition and decorum was not a new phenomenon and did attract faithful followers. Nonetheless, some critics were strongly opposed to experimental artists who rejected the classical model—the traditional approach of Italy’s academies. Critics such as historian Bellori and painter Nicolas Poussin passionately discussed the danger of this new revolutionary painting style; Poussin going as far as to claim that Caravaggio was born “to destroy painting.”²⁶⁹

The large number of such cautionary remarks regarding the eccentric artist proves the pervasiveness of this stereotype and the strong reaction against it by artistic “authorities.” Wittkower observed that “as early as the sixteenth century the non-conforming artist with his foibles and eccentricities was no longer ‘fashionable’. It was felt that artists should merge unobtrusively with the social and intellectual *élite*.”²⁷⁰ Caravaggio was not the type to blend in quietly. Caravaggio was one to provoke strong reaction and question authority. An artist’s schooling and sophistication were of no import to him; fame and public recognition were his measure of success. He wanted to grab the public’s attention and revolutionize painting. He seemed uninterested in following the academic model, choosing rather to embrace the publicly-held stereotype, an extravagant persona based on colorfully-written biographies of great artists. Often these accounts of outrageous behavior were presented as evidence of their unimaginable skill, a passionate frenzy of creativity that transcended mundane rules of decorum. Francisco de Hollanda wrote that Michelangelo complained of this prevalent phenomenon:

People spread a thousand pernicious lies about famous painters. They are strange, solitary, and unbearable, it is said, while in fact they are not different from other

²⁶⁹Louis Marin, *To Destroy Painting*, (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1995).

²⁷⁰ Wittkower and Wittkower, 91.

human beings. Only silly people believe that they are *fantasicos e fantesiosos*—eccentric and capricious.²⁷¹

Michelangelo was one of those artists whose reputation became legend. These stories would be of particular interest to Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, who looked to Buonarroti as both an example to follow and a challenge to surpass. Others also lamented the commonly-held stereotype of the eccentric artist. Giovan Battista Armenini (lived in Rome between 1550 and 1556) wrote in his *Dei veri precetti della pittura* (1587):

An awful habit has developed among common folk and even among the educated, to whom it seems natural that a painter of the highest distinction must show signs of some ugly and nefarious vice allied with a capricious and eccentric temperament, springing from his abstruse mind. And the worst is that many ignorant artists believe themselves to be very exceptional by affecting melancholy and eccentricity.²⁷²

This statement adds plausibility to my hypothesis that Caravaggio knew of this stereotype and possibly “acted” the role of melancholic artist to conform to public ideas concerning master artists and their larger-than-life reputations. Those who most strongly rejected this image of the eccentric artist were the academicians who also rejected naturalistic painting styles. These guardians of tradition wanted to replace this dangerous stereotype and replace it with a “new” image based on Alberti’s ideal, “the conforming, well-bred, rational philosopher-artist, who is

²⁷¹ Francisco de Hollanda, *Vier Gespräche über die Malerei*. Original text with translation. J. de Vasconcellos, ed. (Vienna, 1899), 21. As cited in: Wittkower and Wittkower, 91.

²⁷² Giovan Battista Armenini. *Dei veri precetti della pittura*. (1587) As cited in: Wittkower and Wittkower, 92.

richly endowed by nature with all the graces and virtues.”²⁷³ Wittkower describes these *seicento* criticisms as going beyond the Albertian model of the ideal artist by focusing on the artist’s morality to a much greater degree:

Such a shift was called for because the non-conforming artist appeared to have an unprincipled and depraved personality. By contrast, the lofty art of a Raphael could only result from a high-minded soul. This concept, moreover, was ultimately derived from the Neoplatonic belief, permeating Renaissance thought, that man’s soul is mirrored in his body, and as a corollary, the artist’s soul in his work. . . . According to this theory a depraved character cannot produce works of high order. This closely allied concept that the painter always paints himself (*ogni dipintore dipigne sè*), noted by Cosimo de’Medici and recorded by Politian, was often repeated in art-theoretical literature far into the eighteenth century and now has come back in modern psychological dress.²⁷⁴

This Neoplatonic belief was the inspiration for Bellori’s description of Caravaggio as a “dark man” who painted “dark pictures.” Caravaggio rejected the academic approach to painting and its “ideal painter,” instead he chose to embrace the myth of the mad genius, so popular in accounts of artists’ lives. I propose that the Lombard artist was particularly drawn to the biography of his namesake, Michelangelo Buonarroti, a man known for his great art and his “*terribilità*.”

2.7.3 Michelangelo’s “*Terribilità*” and Caravaggio’s Artistic Persona

Caravaggio scholars frequently discuss the role Buonarroti played as both an artistic inspiration and a challenge for the Lombard artist to surpass. We can be certain that Caravaggio was familiar with the anecdotal stories related to his namesake. In addition to the printed accounts,

²⁷³ Wittkower and Wittkower, 93.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 93-4.

Caravaggio may have heard stories from Costanza Colonna, who was related to the poet Vittoria Colonna, Michelangelo's friend and confidante. Some scholars, such as David Stone, believe that Caravaggio intentionally created a persona that emulated the rougher side of the Tuscan artist as part of his whole rejection of painting tradition.²⁷⁵ Michelangelo Buonarroti's artistic fury and unusual personality are described at length by the Wittkowers:

Michelangelo's demonic frenzy of creation; his almost unique power to express his ideas with equal force in sculpture, painting, architecture, as well as poetry; his utter devotion to the few friends he truly loved and his incapacity to be even perfunctorily civil to people he did not care for; his passion for beauty, expressed in many of his poems, and the total neglect of decorum in his personal appearance and daily life—all this puzzled his contemporaries as much as it did posterity. . . . Not a single one of the graces, the good looks, the gentleness which fate had reputedly showered on Raphael smoothed the ruggedness of Michelangelo's nature. He was ugly, rough in manner, over-sensitive, uncompromising. He certainly was an uncomfortable man to live with. Even when young, between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-five, he lived a solitary, squalid life in Rome, removed from social intercourse and from the glamour of the papal court, despite his almost unbelievable success as an artist.²⁷⁶

This excerpt and David Stone's recent essay is consistent with my suggestion that Caravaggio perceived his own life and artistic reputation as a sort of role to be played and manipulated. Embracing the "world as a stage" metaphor, Caravaggio created the perfect character, one that both suited his naturally rebellious personality and is based on past masters. Caravaggio may have believed that this self-fashioned myth would outlive the mortal man. He might be lauded in epic poetry as Michelangelo ("angel divine") was by Ariosto in *Orlando Furioso*, praise that one can still read today more than four hundred years after the sculptor's death. This was the kind of enduring fame the artist desired.

²⁷⁵ Stone, "Self and Myth," 36-46.

²⁷⁶ Wittkower and Wittkower, 72.

Imitating the Tuscan sculptor's "terribilità" would not have been too difficult, for, like the elder Michelangelo, Caravaggio was short-tempered, homely, and supposedly lived in squalor. He is said to have worn a fancy suit of clothes until it almost fell off his body.²⁷⁷ Bellori claimed, "Caravaggio's style corresponded to his physiognomy and appearance; he had a dark complexion and dark eyes, and his eyebrows and hair were black; this coloring was naturally reflected in his paintings. . . . driven by his own nature, he retreated to the dark style that is connected to his disturbed and contentious temperament."²⁷⁸ Caravaggio may have genuinely had a difficult personality, but he seems to have gone out of his way to flaunt it. He possibly could not help getting into to disagreements, but painting his self-portraits as the "bad guy" in numerous paintings shows a deliberate casting of himself in a negative role—a curious approach to personal myth-making.

2.7.4 Caravaggio's Self-Fashioning via Self-Portraiture

David Stone's recent survey of art critics' obsessions with Caravaggio's personality led him to conclude that the "construct of the 'Caravaggio *terribile*' was not invented by the artist's biographers, but by the artist himself." His mythical self "begins to take shape in the early secular works and continues in the mature religious paintings, where, interwoven with subtle and witty treatments of standard Catholic themes, he polemicizes his own artistic achievements and *ingegno*."²⁷⁹ Stone then uses Caravaggio's curious self portraits as evidence of the artist's deliberate self-fashioning:

²⁷⁷ Bellori as cited in Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, Appendix II, 373.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁹ Stone, "Self and Myth," 36.

Given that the artist several times portrayed himself in eyebrow-raising guises in his paintings, notably as a jaundiced Bacchus in the Borghese *Bacchino Malato* and the horrific, decapitated Goliath in the Borghese *David*, was it not Caravaggio who made Caravaggio the explicit—and self-abasing—subject of his own paintings?²⁸⁰

In these works the painter painted himself as the “god of self-gratification and drunken excess, and as the monstrous Philistine, whom Renaissance viewers associated with licentiousness and crude lust.”²⁸¹ Baglione’s description of the artist as a “satirical and arrogant man” might suggest that the artist flaunted his bad reputation by using his own unidealized face to represent “low types from mythology and the Bible.”²⁸² Although Stone agrees with Baldanucci and even Bellori that Caravaggio purposely embraced the theory of “ogni dipintore dipinge sé” (every painter paints himself), he challenges the reader to avoid the typical psychoanalytical reading of Caravaggio’s work that stresses the artist’s fixations on death and decapitation as evidence of a self-destructive nature. Stone considers Caravaggio’s unusual self-portraiture as “provocative, witty, poetic, and satirical; perhaps above all it is competitive, and seeks to show off Caravaggio’s control of a range of Cinque-cento art-theoretical commonplaces.” This would seem to be the case for one who was so conscious of the status of Rome’s best painters. Caravaggio undoubtedly wanted a secure place among them, and was even willing to tarnish his image to achieve notoriety, as in his late work, *David with the Head of Goliath*. [Fig. 2]

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 36-46.

Caravaggio was not the first to cast himself as one of the protagonists in the David and Goliath story. John Shearman discusses the many other artistic self-portraits using the David/Goliath narrative.²⁸³ Caravaggio would have known Giorgione's self-portrait as David from Vasari's *Lives*. Caravaggio took a unique approach to this idea by representing himself in the role of Goliath. Stone sees the Goliath/Caravaggio image as symbolic of the Lombard artist's own *terribilità* and a reference to "the other Michelangelo."²⁸⁴

Seicento viewers would have recognized Caravaggio's use of the David/Goliath theme and perhaps even his self-identification with the Tuscan artist's famous statue. The similarity of Buonarroti's portrait on the flayed skin of St. Bartholomew from the Sistine *Last Judgment* to Caravaggio's self-portrait as Goliath is also striking. Michelangelo's self-portrait as Holofernes from the pendentive representing *Judith* may also have inspired Caravaggio to show himself as the victim of violence. Stone believes that Caravaggio presented himself as a "Michelangelo modern" whose self-portrayal as Goliath and multiple references to Buonarroti were "demonstrations of the artist's fierce competitiveness and quest for originality or, as Agoston said of Buonarroti's self-portraits, ". . . a statement of the artist's power to transform biblical narrative into personal history, to transform rejection and self-pity into durable commemoration and oblique revenge."²⁸⁵

Caravaggio, like a playwright, created a dramatic artistic persona that was as irreverent as it was innovative to grab the attention of his audience—the *seicento* public. The artist was

²⁸³ John Shearman, *Only Connect. Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance*. (Princeton, NJ: National Gallery of Art/Princeton University Press, 1992)

²⁸⁴ For Michelangelo Buonarroti's influence on other artists see: Francis Ames-Lewis and Paul Joannides. *Reactions to the Master: Michelangelo's Effect on Art and Artists in the Sixteenth Century*. (Surrey, UK : Ashgate, 2003).

²⁸⁵ L. C. Agoston, "Sonnet, Sculpture, Death: The Mediums of Michelangelo's Self-Imaging," *Art History* 20, no. 4, 1997, 548.

determined to stand out from the rest of the painters in Rome through the boldness of his revolutionary painting style and the force of his violently passionate personality.

2.7.5 Caravaggio's "Divine Madness"

The artist's many street fights and criminal charges testify to his difficult nature and his self-designed role of "Caravaggio *terribile*." To art critics during his lifetime and in subsequent centuries, the artist was the embodiment of the artist Armenini cautioned against when he told young artists to avoid the "vice of madness."²⁸⁶ Unlike the English word "madness," the meaning of the Italian term *pazzia* was rather broad, describing a variety of mental states such as "a mythical picture of the creative man: inspired, rebellious, dedicated, obsessive, alienated, as well as neurotic."²⁸⁷ According to Wittkower, madness can be divided into three sub-categories: "first, Plato's *mania*, the sacred madness of enthusiasm and inspiration; secondly, insanity or mental disorders of various kinds; and thirdly, a rather vague reference to eccentric behavior."²⁸⁸

The Wittkowers saw these three definitions as insufficient to describe how past writers and the public saw the character and behavior of eccentric artists, for eccentricity and creativity had come to be associated with great artists. To understand the origins of this rather positive attitude toward madness, one must look to the ancient Greek physician, Hippocrates, and the four humors (blood, bile, phlegm, and black bile) which comprise human psyche. According to Hippocrates, a predominance of black bile was said to make one prone to melancholia. It was pseudo-Aristotle's *Problemata*, a text well known to Caravaggio's patrons, which made the link

²⁸⁶ Armenini, 236. As cited in: Wittkower and Wittkower, 101.

²⁸⁷ William Phillips, "Introduction: Art and Neurosis" in *Art and Psychoanalysis*. (New York : Criterion Books, 1957), xiv. As cited in: Wittkower and Wittkower, 101.

²⁸⁸ Wittkower and Wittkower, 101.

between genius and melancholia.²⁸⁹ Caravaggio's self-portrait of himself as the young, sick Bacchus can be seen as a depiction of this sort of "divine madness," typical of those prone to a melancholic temperament.²⁹⁰ Further linking this painting to melancholic genius, the *Problemata* also uses a wine analogy to explain the effects of melancholia and its effect on creativity:

. . . Wine taken in large quantity manifestly produces in men much the same characteristics which we attribute to the melancholic. . . One man is loquacious, another emotional, another is easily moved to tears; and this effect, too, wine has on some people. . . Some relapse into complete silence, especially those melancholics who are out of their minds, or ecstatic . . . Many [melancholics] are also subject to fits of exaltation and ecstasy, because its heat [of genius] is located near the seat of the intellect. This is how Sibyls and soothsayers arise, and all [others] that are divinely inspired; they become such not by illness but by a natural temperament. Maracus the Syracusan was actually a better poet when he was out of his mind.²⁹¹

Romans such as Aristotle, Cicero, and Seneca based their ideas on earlier Greek concepts on character and creativity. According to Cicero (*De oratore II*, 46): "I have often heard that no man can be a good poet, as they say is left recorded in the writings of both Democritus and Plato, that is without ardor of imagination, and the excitement belonging to something like frenzy."²⁹² According to modern scholars, however, it should be Horace who is credited with the post-classical topos for the "Poet's Divine Frenzy." Horace claimed to be the victim of such a

²⁸⁹ Aristotle. *Problemata*, XXX, p1. (English, 1927, VII, 953ff. Text in: Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl, *Dürer's 'Melancholia' I* (Leipzig-Berlin: 1923), 93ff. As cited in: Wittkower and Wittkower, 93.

²⁹⁰ Moffitt, 120-141.

²⁹¹ Pseudo-Aristotle. "Problemata XXX," as in Klibansky, Panofsky, Saxl, *ibid*, 18-19. quoted in Moffitt, 120-141.

²⁹² Cicero, *On Oratory and Orators*, ed. J.S. Watson (Carbondale: Illinois University Press, 1986), 136, as quoted in Moffitt, 120-141.

“divinely inspired *amabilis insania*” (“amiable madness”) in his poems “*Descende caelo*” and “*Caelo tonatem.*”²⁹³

The “classical epithet *divines*, originally only attached to a *writer*, the epic poet, was eventually translated into Italian, *divino.*”²⁹⁴ The author also points out that the first time this Italian term was applied to a visual artist was by Ariosto, while referring to Michelangelo Buonarroti in *Orlando Furioso*, a poem whose protagonist is a driven mad with passion. Caravaggio, who was familiar with both the *Furioso* and the myth of Buonarroti’s *terribilità*, may have wanted to appear similarly driven mad by his passion for painting. He may have also believed that if his self-fashioning was successful, his name and achievements might be lauded as “divine” by some future Ariosto.

Caravaggio would have known the many classical and renaissance examples of madness found in literary, theatrical, and artistic works. The unprecedented popularity of texts like *Orlando Furioso* (“Mad Orlando”) is just one example. The artist would have read descriptions of *pazzia* and enjoyed its illustrations of knights in the frenzy of battle and the mad Orlando in fits of rage. Caravaggio also would have seen paintings inspired by this popular epic. More striking, however, would have been the representation of madness and violence on stage. By the second half of the sixteenth century, *Orlando Furioso* was such a favorite that it played in “not only the court, but the university, the academy, the urban piazza, and even the country. Piazza vendors were performing and selling, for a reading public of widening social range, editions of extracts from the *Furioso*, sometimes even in Burgamask or Venetian dialect.”²⁹⁵ One known

²⁹³ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁴ Moffitt, 120-141.

²⁹⁵ Giuseppe Malatesta, *Della nuova poesia o vero delle difese del Furioso, dialogo del Signor Gioseppo Malatesta* (Verona: S. delle Donne, 1589), quoted in Javitch, *Proclaiming*, 14.

theatrical version was a *commedia dell'arte* scenario titled, “La gran pazzia di Orlando, opera reale”—a theatrical example of passion-driven madness.²⁹⁶

Ironically, it was often in these scenes of madness that actors and actresses displayed their thespian virtuosity.²⁹⁷ *La Pazzia d'Isabella* features the character Isabella, who upon hearing the false report that her lover is dead, “...becomes truly mad, tears apart her clothes all over, and like a mad woman runs out into the street.”²⁹⁸ This is similar to an earlier play called “La Pazzia,” which was performed by Isabella Andreini of the acclaimed Gelosi troupe for the 1589 wedding of Ferdinando de'Medici and Christina of Lorraine, an event that Cardinal Del Monte, Caravaggio's patron attended.²⁹⁹ In this scene, Isabella, believing her lover betrayed her, goes mad:

. . . knowing no remedy for her illness, she gave in to her pain. Vanquished by passion, overcome by rage, and completely beside herself, she ran like a madwoman throughout the city. She stopped everyone she met, speaking to passers-by in Spanish, Greek, Italian, and many other languages, but always nonsensically. . . .After that she began to imitate the dialects of her fellow actors. . . .she did this so naturally and with so many absurdities, that mere words cannot describe the worthiness and virtue of this woman. Finally, by the fiction of Magic, she returned to herself with the help of certain waters given to her to drink. Then, in an elegant and learned style, explaining the passions and travails of love that all undergo who find themselves trapped in similar nets, she ended the Comedy, demonstrating in the performance of her Madness her healthy and learned intellect.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁶ The scenario is presently located in Rome's Biblioteca Corsiniana – Manuscript Copy Coll. 45.6.5-6. Eric Nicholson, “Romance as Model: Early Female Performances of *Orlando Furioso* and *Gerusalemme liberata*,” in *Renaissance Transactions: Ariosto and Tasso*, ed. Valeria Finucci (Durham: Duke University, 1999), 255-56.

²⁹⁷ Robert Henke, *Performance and Literature in the Commedia dell'arte* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 101.

²⁹⁸ Flamimio Scala, *Il teatro delle favole rappresentative*, act 2, 393, as quoted in: Henke, 101

²⁹⁹ One scenario performed there included a fortune-telling gypsy that was very similar to the gypsy painted for Del Monte.

³⁰⁰ Henke, 103-4.

While the madness gave the actress allowance to do things that were normally unacceptable in polite society, it also gave her the opportunity to show her intellectual knowledge and passion for acting. Moffitt and Stone's hypotheses concerning Caravaggio's self-fashioning suggest that Caravaggio also used madness to demonstrate his passion for the visual arts. Just as Isabella Andreini assumed the role of the mad lover to show her acting skill, Caravaggio borrowed from literature, theater, and anecdotes from artists' lives to create his own mad artist persona. Caravaggio rejected the ideal artist model which called for emotional restraint and decorum, choosing rather a life that reflected his extreme passion for painting, a persona that was decidedly different from that of other painters working in Rome.

Using a style that his critics would claim reflected his unstable personality and depraved nature, Caravaggio revolutionized painting. He combined seemingly discordant genres—still life, genre, and religious history painting. This combination of genres also finds a precedent in the literary and theatrical arts. These arts also provide a proven formula for creating a masterpiece for all classes and a reputation as an innovator that would earn the artist lasting fame. To find a model for this we, once again, look to the author of the *Furioso*, Ludovico Ariosto.

2.7.6 Ariosto as a Model for a Young Painter

By Caravaggio's lifetime, Ariosto had achieved an unprecedented popularity with his bestselling epic poem, *Orlando Furioso*. Its characters were known to all, described in songs, poems, plays and paintings. The many public jousts, the thousands of volumes of *Orlando Furioso* that were published, and the numerous theatrical troupes which portrayed Ariosto's famous characters—all testify to Italy's "Orlando-mania" during the 16th and 17th centuries. Caravaggio, who wanted to

be counted among Italy's best painters, would have seen the fame bestowed on Ariosto as particularly desirable. Ariosto, who was first a playwright, applied his theatrical knowledge to his writings, by creating a world for his protagonists that was at once spectacular and familiar and that emotionally transported the reader into the scene. Although he enjoyed iconic status among the general public, literary circles hotly debated the literary value of his *Furioso*. In the 1580 edition of *Orlando Furioso* published by Horatio de' Gobbi, the anonymous commentator wrote:

[The *Furioso*] “. . . has so often been published by so many in so many forms; a work so well known by you, gentle readers, that there is not a person of whatsoever rank, great, middle, or small, not a learned person, nor someone of average learning, nor anyone ignorant but who can read, who does not derive pleasure and delight from this poem.”³⁰¹

Since playwrights, musicians, and artists often looked to literature for inspiration, Caravaggio's appropriation of forms and methods from the literary world would not have been unusual. On the contrary, it was encouraged as a sign of the artist's intellectual sophistication. The concept “*Ut Pictura Poesis*” (“As is painting so is poetry”), from Horace's *Ars Poetica*, was well known and was at the heart of the famous renaissance “*paragone*,” in which poets and artist defended the superior status of their respective disciplines.³⁰²

Caravaggio was aware of what the people liked and who they respected. Most scholars agree that he strove to surpass past masters such as Michelangelo. Following this logic and the knowledge that Caravaggio looked to other arts such as drama and literature for inspiration, I

³⁰¹ As quoted in: Javitch, *Proclaiming*, 5.

³⁰² Rensselaer W. Lee, *Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting*, 7th. ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1967); and Rensselaer W. Lee, *Names on Trees: Ariosto into Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977).

propose that Ariosto may have also been a useful model for the young painter. Just as the rules of poetics were applied to painting, the masters of the literary world could serve as models for painters. Artists such as Poussin, Testa, and Albani were all supporters of the “ancients” and looked to Tasso as a model poet and his poetics as a guide for composing decorous history paintings.³⁰³ Caravaggio’s work was of the opposite camp, the “moderns,” and he would have found Ariosto’s literary innovations useful in his paintings. By Caravaggio’s day, *Orlando Furioso* had become a favorite subject for literary debate between the “ancients,” self-proclaimed classicists, and “moderns,” thinkers who defied any real classification except for their experimental approach:

In fact, no vernacular work of poetry provoked as much discussion and commentary in the sixteenth century as did the *Furioso*. Much of this commentary accompanied the numerous midcentury editions of the poem constantly reissued by Venetian publishers. The work also generated an extraordinary series of critical responses. It came up repeatedly in the large body of theory that emerged in the second half of the cinquecento, and it was a central object of contention in several of the literary quarrels of the period.³⁰⁴

Even scientists such as Galileo Galilei were voicing their opinions on the ongoing Ariosto/Tasso debate. Jonathan Unglaub describes Galileo’s comparison poetry and painting, in which the scientist called the “modern” Ariosto a better “painter” than the “ancient’s” hero, Torquato Tasso:

Ariosto is exemplary – truly a poet who paints. In depicting Alcina and her magical island, Ariosto’s tropes are clear, commonplace and abundant. The litany of figurative attributes presents a palpable image of the comely enchantress and

³⁰³ Jonathan Unglaub, *Poussin and the Poetics of Painting: Pictorial Narrative and the Legacy of Tasso* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 8-12.

³⁰⁴ Javitch, *Proclaiming*, 3.

her lush ambiance to the mind's eye of the reader. The pictorial resonance of Alcina dazzles Galileo, much like Ludovico Dolce before him, who deemed Ariosto's verses the template for an painter aspiring to capture ideal female beauty. Their enthusiasm would later breed Lessing's contempt, not for Ariosto's poetry, but for its vaunted efficacy as a painting. By contrast, the paradoxical conceits on natural artifice and artificial artlessness that govern Tasso's account of Armida's garden and her beauty, however ingenious they may be, hardly furnish the imagination with precise images. Indeed, Galileo compares Tasso's pictorially deficient verse to an intarsia panel. Each conceit may be precious, witty, of provocative. Yet like sharply cut and differently painted wooden tesserae, the incisiveness of the individual figures prevents them from harmonizing into a unified image. Tasso's conceits are merely words, flat and lifeless. The clarity of Ariosto's language, the richness of his *enargeia*, allows for a transparent visualization of the object it describes. Galileo likens the pictorial effect of his verse to a vast painting, rendered in bold relief and brilliant color, with every element integrated within a unifying *sfumato*.³⁰⁵

The last sentence of this quote could be a description of Caravaggio's paintings' *chiaroscuro*—which sets the figures in bold relief; highlights important elements with bright light and color; and unifies the whole scene with a dark, shadowy background. Caravaggio may have known of Galileo's opinions on the debate through their mutual contact with the Del Monte circle in Rome, a hub of intellectual and artistic activity. Caravaggio, although not credited with being a learned painter like Poussin, was familiar with poetry. He was friends with the famous Neapolitan poet, Giambattista Marino (1569 -1625), who left his native Naples and arrived in Rome around 1600. Marino was in the service of Monsignor Melchiorre Crescenzi, who was also a poet.³⁰⁶ Giovanni Baglione accused him of writing derogatory verses at his libel trial. Although these are crude, recent analysis shows there was an attempt to mimic, or at least parody, popular

³⁰⁵Unglaub, 108-9.

³⁰⁶ While in Rome, he was in the service of Melchiorre Crescenzi and Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini, close friend of Cardinal del Monte. Crescenzi was the clerk of the papal chamber and "was a member of a cadet branch of the old and illustrious Crescenzi family who had been involved in the Contarelli Chapel [patrons of Caravaggio's Saint Matthew series in San Luigi dei Francesi]." Langdon, 193-4. In 1608, he left Rome to join the court of Duke Carlo Emanuele I in Turin. In 1615, he moved to Paris where he was a great success and returned to Naples where he died in 1625.

poetic forms.³⁰⁷ Caravaggio and Orazio Gentileschi's attempts to parody a popular literary form demonstrate that painters were aware of the poet's art. Artists also discussed the epic poem. Bellori's *Vite* describes an occasion in which the artist Annibale Carracci is asked what he thinks of Ariosto:

One day Annibale happened upon his friends' discussions on the subject of poetry, since is often the case, many wish to pass judgment on the arts they know nothing about, and with long arguments, critique who lauded Tasso, and who Ariosto. Annibale listened patiently to them without saying anything. When he was pressed to give his opinion, on which of the two poets he deemed the best, he responded that Raphael seemed to him to be the greatest painter there ever was.³⁰⁸

Although Annibale himself chose to avoid getting involved in the ongoing Ariosto/Tasso debate, this story does demonstrate that artistic circles did discuss poetry. Numerous *seicento* treatises and writings on painting such as those by Poussin and Bellori "encourage the painter to emulate the poet."³⁰⁹ These writers supported the "ancient" school, which strictly adhered to the rules of poetics for their paintings. Annibale, whose paintings blended elements found in both the "modern" and "ancient" camps, wisely chose not to pick sides in the seemingly endless debate over the canonic status of Italy's great works of literature. Daniel Javich's *Proclaiming a Classic: The Canonization of Orlando Furioso*, explores such debates as part of the process of a work's ascension to the canonical. Javich attributes the epic's popular appeal to "Ariosto's ability to adapt the old 'lowbrow' romances of the popular *cantastorie* into a 'higher' form of literature that incorporated classical poetic models, which conformed well, to the new linguistic

³⁰⁷ Anthony Colantuono, "Caravaggio's Literary Culture" in *Caravaggio; Realism, Rebellion, Reception*, ed. Genevieve Warwick (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2006), 57-68.

³⁰⁸ Bellori, *Vite*, 84. As cited in Unglaub, 157.

³⁰⁹ Unglaub, 19.

norms being established for a courtly and learned vernacular.”³¹⁰ The *Furioso* served very different agendas. While classicists criticized *Furioso* and used it as a “whipping boy” for their diatribe against rejection of tradition, the avant-garde praised it as a gem of literary innovation and modernity. The masses loved it, however, because it was entertaining. They had no concern for the rules of poetics.³¹¹

As in the case of reception and criticism of Caravaggio’s work, the proponents of neo-Aristotelian poetic standards (the “ancients”) had become so dominant among Italian literati that any work not adhering to the traditional formula for masterworks (pictorial or literary) could not be tolerated. These transgressors could not be considered as models for subsequent generations due to their dangerous nature, and thus, had to be knocked from their canonic position. In literary discourse, the classicists (“ancients”) viewed Tasso’s *Gerusalemme Liberata* (1581) as the first genuine vernacular epic poem and praised it for its adherence to poetic tradition. In the opposite camp, proponents of Ariosto’s style (the “moderns”) argued that the *Furioso* also followed the tradition of the great poems of antiquity such as Homer’s and Virgil’s epics and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. They also noted its moral value, for it contained allegories which illustrated the “virtues to be emulated and the vices to be shunned.”³¹² Although sharply criticized by academicians as flawed in its eclectic style, it seems that the general population sided with the “modern.” The many printed editions of the *Furioso*, its inclusion in the educational curriculum, and its frequent use as a literary, theatrical, and pictorial model serve as proof that it had indeed become a popular classic—despite the on-going criticism.

³¹⁰ Javitch, *Proclaiming*, 4.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 6.

Additional proof of its canonical status is evident in the appearance of Ariosto's name "alongside vernacular 'masters' such as Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Dante, as well as ancient authors such as Homer, Virgil, and Ovid" within *cinquecento* treatises and theories.³¹³ Despite their criticisms, even conservatives had to acknowledge that its form was derived from ancient poetry. It was the "moderns" who enthusiastically hailed it a masterpiece for its daring legitimization of the popular chivalric romance, thereby opening up a "new" genre—a reclassification that neoclassicists strongly opposed. As the ancient/modern argument among literati continued, the focus of the debate shifted from the epic's status to how it should be classified and how this work might impact future generations of poets. This debate is similar to that surrounding Caravaggio's work, where supporters of naturalism and classicism debated the worth of his paintings and their influence on young painters. In the case of the *Furioso*, the prolonged debate cemented its high status among vernacular literature, because public attention (good or bad) kept the book selling, and Ariosto's name at the forefront of literary discourse.³¹⁴ Caravaggio may have also believed that continued presence in public discourse, both positive and negative, if not bringing him more commissions, would at least assure that he would not be forgotten.

As seen in Caravaggio's work and popular theater, the *Furioso's* innovative hybrid form managed to be simple enough to please the common people, yet sophisticated enough "to make the wise man ponder."³¹⁵ Ariosto achieved this by including scenes drawn from contemporary life, and the mention of real people and places. In Canto 33, (the same one that lists well-known Italian painters), Ariosto tells of the French wars in Italy, a real event the details of which many

³¹³ Javitch, *Proclaiming*, 7.

³¹⁴ Some scholars believe that the large amount of criticism that *Furioso* received from the Aristotelians fed the interest in Ariosto's epic. Their criticism may have contributed to its canonic position. *Ibid.*, 20-21.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

contemporary readers would remember. These familiar details immediately engaged their viewer and transported them into the world of the protagonists. Ariosto's list of *quattrocento* and *seicento* artistic masters also served this purpose. Ariosto's revolutionary combination of high and low literary sources, exciting action, and vignettes drawn from contemporary life is the formula that made *Furioso* a classic and placed Ariosto among the great writers of vernacular literature—the kind of reputation and fame that Caravaggio desired. Although the artist looked to Michelangelo as a model, Caravaggio may have sought inspiration from the great men and women in the fields of literature and the theatrical performance.

Like Caravaggio's paintings, Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* has strong connections to theater. In it are explicit references to various theatrical forms: true theater, spectacles, feasts, games—all existing in the Ariosto's fictive world somewhere between fantasy and real life. Moreover, the situations and personages of the poem are presented in much the same way as those on stage.³¹⁶ The presence of these theatrical elements in Ariosto's work is understandable when one explores his biography, for he was first a playwright. In 1508, Ariosto's play *Cassaria* was performed, and the following year *I Suppositi*. By 1510, he had completed his third play, *il Negromonte*. It was not until 1516 that Ariosto published the first edition of *Orlando Furioso*.³¹⁷ Ariosto's theatrical production often was seen as merely a diverting prelude to his more serious work. Its value in literature studies oscillates between an example of renaissance love of the antique and a force in the construction of a new form of popular comic theater.³¹⁸ Ariosto's work looked to the past and the future, a keeper of theatrical tradition and an innovator of

³¹⁶ Marco Marangoni, *In forma di teatro: Elementi teatrali nell' Orlando Furioso*. (Roma: Carocci, 2002), 10. Also see: G. Rocca, *Elementi di teatro nell' Orlando Furioso*, in AA.VV., *L'ottava d'oro*, (Milano: Mondadori, 1933), 627-38; E. Marconi, "Teatralità dell Ariosto" in *Italianistica*, 3, 1974, 560-82.

³¹⁷ Marangoni, 14-15.

³¹⁸ Giuseppe Coluccia, *L'esperienza teatrale di Ludovico Ariosto* (Lecce: Piero Manni: 2001), 11.

theatrical practice. Ariosto's theatrical works would display elements of humanist erudition, while spectators could also see allusions to customs and characters from their own daily lives.³¹⁹

Ariosto's plays enjoyed enormous appeal in performance. Courtly audiences delighted in his use of lively, complex intrigue plots and his attention to spectacular elements, local color, and realistic contemporary details absent in earlier reworkings of Roman plays. At the same time, intellectuals associated at the university and academic environments would have appreciated his erudite allusions and challenge to classical comedy...³²⁰

This sort of emulation of past masters and bold innovation is also characteristic of Caravaggio's work. The artist appropriated the figures of Michelangelo and the color of Giorgione and merged elements from "lower" painting genres—the realism of still life and the immediacy of genre painting—all to dramatically tell a story typically reserved for the esteemed genre of religious history painting. Caravaggio may have also learned from Ariosto's narrative style, for the poet used his stage experience to make the epic come to life.

Frequently in *Furioso*, the "fourth wall"—that invisible barrier which separates the audience from the actor's world—is broken and the reader is addressed directly by the author, just as an actor might directly address the audience using an "aside," a device Shakespeare often employed.³²¹ The function of the aside is to let the audience know what a character is thinking. This narrative intimacy with the audience is important because it increases their involvement in the play by giving them vital information about the character's state of mind and the plot of the

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

³²⁰ Lisa Sampson, *Pastoral Drama in Early Modern Italy: The Making of a New Genre* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2006), 16

³²¹ Daniel Javitch, "Cantus interruptus in the 'Orlando Furioso,'" *Modern language notes*, 95 (1980), 66-80.

play. When directly addressed by a character on stage, the audience plays a participatory role in the drama, or in Ariosto's case—the narrative. A parallel in painting would be a close-up view of the action and object that appear to thrust out of the picture plane into the world of the viewer—two devices that Caravaggio frequently used.

In sum, Caravaggio's attitudes toward artists and art began to take shape while he lived in Spanish Lombardy and studied painting in Peterzano's studio in Milan. The young painter was aware of the great Italian painters of the past and present and wanted to be counted among them. To achieve such notoriety, he created an exaggerated artistic persona, following the traditional stereotype of the troubled melancholic artist to set himself apart from his contemporaries who emulated the "ideal artist" promoted by Alberti, Leonardo, and the classicists of Italy's painting academies. Caravaggio rejected this brand of classicism for an innovative "modern" approach which blended genres in much the same way as Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and popular theater did. Nicolas Poussin "could not abide Caravaggio and said that he had come into the world to destroy painting."³²² Caravaggio's classification as a "modern" is supported by Jonathan Unglaub's discussion on the ongoing Ariosto/Tasso debate:

"...Tasso's orthodox epic appeals to men of learning and judgment, who are equipped to appreciate its design and measure, not to mention its pedigree. The *Gerusalemme* was built on the bedrock of Aristotelian principle and ancient example, the *Furioso* on the shifting sands of sensual appeal, vulgar translations, and popular adulation."

³²² André Félibien, *Entretiens sur les vies et sur ouvrage des plus excellens peintres anciens et modernes: V & VI Entretiens* (Paris, 1679), repr. in Jacques Thuillier, *Nicolas Poussin* (Paris: Flammarion, 1994), 193. Also see: Unglaub, 12-23.

Poussin's attitude toward Caravaggio and his own philosophy on painting placed him with the "ancients" of the painting academies, further demonstrated by his pictorial interpretation of Tasso's poetics and the painter's use of the *Gerusalemme liberata* as the subject for a number of paintings.³²³ When Caravaggio embraced "lower" genres such as still life, which titillate the senses; genre painting, which celebrates the lower classes; and portraiture, which treats the person as a still-life subject, are blended with the more prestigious genre of history painting, he created a unique hybrid as Ariosto had done when he mixed literary genres. Caravaggio's works are the pictorial equivalent of "modern" literature; he created a visual vernacular that could be appreciated by all classes.

Caravaggio's eclecticism created a bold, "modern" painting style which spoke to all classes and brought him critical attention (both positive and negative) and numerous impressive commissions. Further alienating classicists such as Poussin, was Caravaggio's outrageous artistic persona that set him apart from other painters as and made him something of a marvel, warranting memorialization by such poets as Marzio Milesi, Gaspare Murtola, and Giambattista Marino as was Michelangelo ("il divino"/ il terribile) Buonarroti by Ariosto. Bellori reported that at Caravaggio's funeral Marino honored his friend's memory with this verse:

Death and Nature made a cruel plot against you,
Michele;
Nature was afraid
Your hand would surpass it in every image
You created, not painted.
Death burned with indignation,
Because however many more
His scythe would cut down in life,
Your brush created even more.³²⁴

³²³ Unglaub, 12-23, 110-114, and 198-223.

³²⁴ *Fecer crudel congiura*

Caravaggio wanted to be counted among the great men of Italian culture like his maestro namesake and the innovative Ludovico Ariosto. Given the recent explosion in Caravaggio research over the past century, and his story widely represented on stage and screen, it would seem that Caravaggio's plan worked.

*Michele a' danni tuoi Morte e Natura;
Questa restar temea
Da la tua mano in ogni imagin vinta,
Ch'era da te creata, e non dipinta;
Quella di sdegno ardea,
Perché con larga usura,
Quante la falce sua genti struggea,
Tante il pennello tuo ne rifacea.* Bellori, *Vite*, 212, as translated in Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 371.

3.0 COUNTER-REFORMATION ROME

Following Caravaggio's footsteps, my research moves south to the Eternal City, where the young artist establishes a successful painting career. Here, he applies the lessons learned in Milan and draws from the thriving cultural life in this cosmopolitan city. This was an excellent opportunity for budding artists, because the Catholic Church was eagerly hiring artists to decorate its newly-renovated and newly-built churches. This imagery reflected the heightened religious energy of a Counter-Reformation Church that had found its direction and chose to employ all the arts—painting, sculpture, literature, and drama—to further its cause against the heretic and infidel. Both the Church and private collectors supported the many artists who traveled to find work in Rome. These art lovers provided the opportunity for artists to explore new genres of painting and experimental painting techniques. These culturally astute individuals also enthusiastically supported the arts and participated in cultural circles that commissioned works of art, literature, and drama.

Beyond the official patronage of the arts by the religious institutions and wealthy elites, there was the city itself, the stage upon which the individual played out their role—priest, musician, artisan, laborer, gypsy, actor, beggar, pilgrim, prostitute—all readily available for an artist like Caravaggio who considered the stuff of everyday life as worthy painting subjects, even within the most solemn of religious narratives. Caravaggio's world was that of the spectator, and

he used these common experiences as a conduit through which he would emotionally connect with viewer and communicate using a familiar visual language drawn from the streets.

3.1 CARAVAGGIO HEADS TO ROME

Soon after liquidating his inheritance in May, the young painter left the region of Caravaggio sometime after 1 June 1592. Although documentation confirming his arrival in Rome is dated autumn of 1594 or 1595, it is possible that Caravaggio arrived well before.³²⁵ The painter's activities after leaving Lombardy remain a mystery and have inspired numerous theories regarding the artist's whereabouts.³²⁶ I agree with Berra's suggestion that Caravaggio did not visit Venice after he sold his inheritance, as Bellori said. I suggest that Caravaggio could have visited Venice at another time, perhaps while studying with Peterzano, who was from Bergamo (then part of the Venetian Republic) and studied with Titian; or he may have gone after leaving Peterzano's studio around 1588. I agree with Berra that the painter probably left for Rome in 1592, under the protection of Costanza Colonna Sforza, the Marchesa di Caravaggio, because this would have been the safest and least expensive way to travel to Rome.³²⁷

³²⁵ Caravaggio and the painter Prospero Orsi are listed among the list of "fratelli" who attended the orations for the "quaranta hore." The 1594/5 date is known only indirectly through the indexing of the document, which unfortunately is not dated. More secure dating of the artist's early years in Rome appears only in July 1597, in an interrogation for a judiciary inquest in which he was involved, the first of many such appearances before Roman authorities. Berra, 245.

³²⁶ Other scholars have suggested that Caravaggio may have gone to Rome with his younger brother Giovan Battista or went to meet his uncle Ludovico Merisi, a priest who lived in Rome. Documentation, however, disproves both of these theories, for neither man was in Rome at the time of Caravaggio's arrival. His brother Giovanna Battista was still in Caravaggio and would remain there until January 1596 and his uncle Ludovico was in Milan in June of 1592 acting as "Canonico Collegiatae Ecclesiae Sancti Babylae Mediolani." *Ibid*, 249.

³²⁷ According to Bellori, "... he fled from Milan to Venice, where he came to enjoy the colors of Giorgione, which he then imitated." Bellori, *Le vite*, as quoted in Hibbard, 361. Berra found evidence of some "Caravaggini" in Venice who were in the position to have helped the young painter find provisional accommodations in Venice, Bartolomeo Merisi (not a relative of the painter) and Bernardino Prata, who had business dealings with Ludovico Merisi, who was related to Caravaggio. Thus, it is possible Caravaggio could have gone there, but Berra doubts this. *Ibid*, 248. I believe that it is possible Caravaggio went

Berra's recent research places Costanza Colonna as a more central figure in Caravaggio's life than previously believed. She may have helped Caravaggio get started in Rome by finding him a place to live and helping him establish connections with Rome's elite cultural circles. With the recent discovery of Caravaggio's birth certificate in Milan, this calls into question the artist's motivation for identifying himself with the town of Caravaggio. I argue that his adoption of the name "Caravaggio" was to link himself with the Marchesa di Caravaggio, Costanza Colonna Sforza, rather than to associate himself with the town.³²⁸ This would mark him as the subject of the Marchesa di Caravaggio and testify to his family's long association with the Sforza-Colonna family, his only real connection to nobility.³²⁹

Berra believes that Caravaggio's aunt Margherita Aratori, who was then in Costanza's employ as a nurse (*balia*), may have informed the marchesa of Caravaggio's plans and possibly

to Venice after he left Peterzano's studio and before he left Lombardy in 1592. Berra found evidence of a number of "Caravaggini" living in Rome at that time who could have aided the young painter. It is also possible that Caravaggio was assisted by members of the Archconfraternity of Santissima Trinità dei Pellegrini or the confraternity of Caravaggini, San Giuseppe, of which his own uncle Ludovico was chaplain. *Ibid*, 251.

³²⁸While this relationship was important for Caravaggio's initial establishment in Rome, it was even more crucial to his artistic survival during his years as a fugitive in southern Italy. The news of Caravaggio's birth certificate being found in Milan appears in "Caravaggio da Milano. Clamorosa scoperta nell'Archivio Diocesano milanese: tra i registri della parrocchia di Santo Stefano è stato ritrovato l'atto di battesimo di Michelangelo Merisi. È la prova, a lungo cercata invano dagli studiosi, che il pittore nacque non nel paese del Bergamasco da cui prese il nome, ma nel capoluogo lombardo e qui fu battezzato il 30 settembre 1571, giorno successivo alla nascita - A trovare l'annotazione è stato Vittorio Pirami." http://www.caravaggioamilano.it/pdf/atto_nascita.pdf. Panza Pierluigi, "Milano «ribattezza» Caravaggio «Merisi nacque a Santo Stefano»," *Corriere della Sera* (26 febbraio 2007) , 5 accessed online at:

http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2007/febbraio/26/Milano_ribattezza_Caravaggio_Merisi_nacque_co_6_070226001.shtml (on March 13, 2010).

³²⁹Documentary evidence shows that as of 20 May 1592, the Marchesa was still living in her Milanese palazzo near the Carmelite church of San Giovanni in Conca (now in ruins), but after that date she had made the trip to Rome. In a letter of April 1592, Costanza tells her brother Cardinal Ascanio Colonna, who was then living the Piazza Colonna in Piazza Santi Apostoli, of her plans to live in Rome and her need of accommodations for some of her "figli" and "donne di fiducia." Costanza probably left around May 20th, the last documented day in Milan, going first to her property at Galliate and then to Genoa, continuing the journey to Civitavecchia (near Rome) by sea. By boat that leg of the journey would be no longer than a day. Genoa was frequently used as a departure point for the Colonna family to go to Rome, Naples, Sicily, or Spain. Berra, 251-2.

may the trip to Rome herself to help care for the Marchesa's children.³³⁰ Since Costanza arrived before Caravaggio, she would have had the opportunity to make preparatory arrangements.³³¹ Berra believes it would have been too costly and dangerous for the young painter to travel to Rome alone, so travelling as one of Costanza's "figli di fiducia" would have been a logical choice.³³²

In the same letter, Costanza requested accommodations outside the Colonna palace for some of her entourage. It is possible that Caravaggio was given one of these rooms. According to Mancini's account, Caravaggio's first residence was with Pandolfo Pucci da Recanati, who would later be connected to the Colonna family through marital ties to the family of Pope Sixtus V (Felice Peretti Montalto). It seems that Caravaggio was dissatisfied with his accommodations, for he gave Pucci the nickname "Monsignor Insalata" due to his meager meals and frugal lifestyle. Although this living arrangement was not ideal, it provided the young painter with a roof over his head and an opportunity to establish himself in a new city.³³³

While not the most hospitable host, Pucci was a man of some importance and was in the position to introduce Caravaggio to prospective patrons. He was the *maestro di casa* of Camilla Peretti (sister of Sixtus V) and aunt of Cardinal Alessandro Peretti Montalto, an enthusiastic

³³⁰ In a letter written to Costanza in 1601, Margherita speaks of "those most holy churches of Rome," giving the impression that she had personally seen these churches on a previous visit. Costanza stayed in Rome for approximately a year, until June 1593. Proof of the return trip is found in a letter written to her brother cardinal Ascanio from the duke of Urbino Francesco Maria II Della Rovere, which is dated June 6, 1593 and mentions that the marchesa stopped by Pesaro on her way back to Lombardy. She arrived at Caravaggio a week later on June 14. From Caravaggio, the marchesa went to her palazzo in Milan. It seems that she preferred to live in her palazzo in Milan rather than the one in Caravaggio, because from that day on she is almost always in Milan. Berra, 250-4

³³¹ *Ibid*, 250-51.

³³² *Ibid*, 256.

³³³ Costanza seems to have been quite concerned for her subjects living in Rome and some years before had send their names to Carlo Borromeo, so he could have someone check up on them. Therefore, it would be logical that she would be similarly concerned with the young painter and would have tried to set him up with someone she personally knew. Pandolfo Pucci was the *maestro di casa* of Camilla Peretti (sister of Pope Sixtus Peretti). Camilla's daughter, Orsina Peretti Damasceni, was the widow of Marco Antonio III Colonna (Costanza's nephew died in 1595) who later married Muzio II Sforza, Costanza's first-born son, in 1597. *Ibid*, 256-7

patron of the arts who had Caravaggio's friend, Prospero Orsi, in his employ at this time.³³⁴ Pucci's friends may have seen Caravaggio's paintings at Pucci's home, because in addition to doing "unpleasant" chores for Pucci, Caravaggio painted some devotional works as partial payment for his room.³³⁵ These works may have been the first executed by the young painter in the city.

Cardinal Montalto was part of the Aldobrandini/Del Monte social circle which later played a central role in Caravaggio's career. Costanza Colonna and Pucci were also acquainted with Ottavio Costa, who became an important early patron of Caravaggio. Thus, it is possible that the works Caravaggio executed while enduring his "miserable" living arrangements with Monsignor Insalata may have helped bring the young painter to the attention of Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte, one of Caravaggio's most important early patrons. Had the artist not been so proud to do odd jobs for the prelate and left the Pucci residence and set out on his own, he may have achieved success earlier. Costanza was back in Milan and could not help him relocate, so these were difficult years. Although Caravaggio was no longer living with Pucci, word of the artist may have spread among Pucci's acquaintances like Del Monte, who was eager to find new artistic talent. When news of Caravaggio's work at Giuseppe Cesari's studio reached Del Monte, the cardinal was interested enough to seek out the young painter and welcome him in his home. Caravaggio finally had the social contacts he needed to attract the attention of the elite class, major players in a city which scholars have described as the "theater" of the Catholic world.

³³⁴He was also the "benefitiato e camerlengo del capitolo di San Pietro." Maria Christina Terzaghi, *Caravaggio Annibale Carracci Guido Reni: Tra le ricevute del banco Herrera & Costa* (Roma: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 2007), 278, n. 18.

³³⁵ These paintings were reported to be in Recanti by the time of Mancini's manuscript was written. Giulio Mancini, *Considerazioni sulla pittura*, (c.1617-21) in Howard Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 347.

3.2 ROME: URBAN SPACE AS THEATER

...in the brief span of about three-quarters of a century, from Sixtus V to Alexander VII, Rome was transformed. The Holy City, which saw itself as the theatrical setting where the spectacle of modern life and related productive activity would be acted out, was transformed, physically reorganized and restructured in a specifically planned building programme to render it a worthy setting for the unfolding of the spectacle offered by a range of public and private events that were as highly representative as they were substantially unproductive. Here already is the 'theatre city' which lives by its own spectacle, or rather by the spectacle that it can provide, above all, through its impressive and magnificent new modern appearance.³³⁶

At the time Caravaggio arrived, Rome was a bustling city striving to reclaim its former glory before the crises earlier in that century, the Sack of Rome and the Protestant Reformation. As both the seat of the Catholic Church and the capitol city of the Papal States, Rome was a cosmopolitan city, with ambassadors, prelates, and pilgrims arriving from all over Europe.³³⁷ This was especially true during the Holy Jubilee Years (Holy Years), held every twenty five years, when the city was alive with processions, public devotions, and hoards of pilgrims entering the city to take in the sights and earn extra indulgences as a spiritual reward for their journey to the Eternal City. One of the most popular Holy Years to date was that of 1600, when the numbers of residents and pilgrims in Rome swelled to 110,000, an increase of 21% over the average of the previous two Jubilee years.³³⁸ The first Holy Year of the *seicento* showed Rome as a glorious city of faith and culture, seemingly undaunted by the crises of the previous century.

³³⁶ Luigi Spezzaferro, "Baroque Rome: a 'Modern City' in *Rome * Amsterdam: Two Growing Cities in Seventeenth-Century Europe*, Peeter van Kessel and Elisa Schulte, eds. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1997), 7.

³³⁷ On foreigners in Rome, see: Eugenio Sonnino, "The Population in Baroque Rome" in *Rome * Amsterdam*, 52; Laurie Nussdorfer, "Politics and People of Rome" in *Rome * Amsterdam: Two Growing Cities in Seventeenth-Century Europe*, Peeter van Kessel and Elisa Schulte, eds. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1997), 146-155; "Netherlanders in Early Baroque Rome" also in *Rome * Amsterdam*, 235-247; and Dandele, 109-159.

³³⁸ Sonnino, 54.

This was the period of Catholic renewal and reform. If Milan was Carlo Borromeo's model for the spiritually revived Counter-Reformation city, Rome was the Church's model for Counter-Reformation urban renewal and expansion. As the center of the Catholic Church and destination of thousands of pilgrims, the city's appearance reflected heavily on the perceived state of the faith and the Papal States as a worldly power. Renovation of early Christian basilicas and construction of new churches was a visible sign of the Church's resiliency and a bold refutation of Protestant criticism of papal extravagance and the display of religious imagery in churches. Since the Church maintained that carefully composed religious art was spiritually edifying to all classes, it spared no expense when transforming the once dilapidated capitol into a new City of God.

In addition to being the center of the Catholic Church with many national churches, Rome was a major world market and seat of the Papal States, attracting politicians, religious officials, and merchants from all over the world.³³⁹ These foreign officials became part of Rome's elite social circles and participated in a complex cultural exchange. When these expatriates returned to their homeland, they brought Italian painting, literature, and humanist ideals with them and left their impression on the Italian Peninsula by introducing Iberian culture to the cosmopolitan culture of *cinque-* and *seicento* Rome. The Eternal City not only attracted the wealthy and powerful, but the lower classes as well. As the center of the Church, it was the center for Catholic charity, giving aid to God's humble poor. Looking for work or the opportunity to study ancient monuments and attend art academies, immigrants from France,

³³⁹ Luigi Spezzaferro, "Baroque Rome: a 'Modern City' in *Rome * Amsterdam: Two Growing Cities in Seventeenth-Century Europe*, Peeter van Kessel and Elisa Schulte, eds. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1997), 2. See also: Luigi Spezzaferro, "La Roma di Sisto V," in *Storia dell'arte italiana*, 12, Turin, 1983, 365-405.

Germany, the Netherlands, and Spain were familiar sights.³⁴⁰ Of all the countries in Europe, however, it was the influence of the Iberians that was most evident. Recent research has shown the symbiotic relationship that existed between the Iberian kings and the Papacy.³⁴¹ Spain needed the Church's support to implement the reforms that it wanted and the Papal States needed the Spanish to protect its interests from the threat of Protestant heretics in the north and the Turkish infidels who attacked from the sea.³⁴²

A strong Spanish presence was also evident in the religious life of the Catholic Church as it struggled to implement reform after the Protestant Reformation. The Spanish contingent at the Council of Trent wielded considerable influence, reshaping the Church to fit their more conservative model. Evidence of their influence is the 1588 canonization of the first Counter-Reformation saint—the Spanish Franciscan Diego of Alcalá. Of the twenty-seven new saints that were added to the Roman calendar between 1588 and 1690, thirteen were Spanish and two others were from realms of the Spanish Empire.³⁴³ In 1622, along with the canonization of Philip Neri (founder of the Oratorian Order in Rome), there were four Spanish saints, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Francis Xavier and St. Isidore the Farmer. Thomas Dandeleit

³⁴⁰ Spanish presence in Rome was particularly strong during this period, reaching its peak during the 1590's. "Rome was transformed as it was drawn into the orbit of Spain. It became Spanish Rome. In the period of Italian history known as the age of the Spanish preponderance, the Papal State was a vital player in the Spanish Empire. Although it formally remained an autonomous monarchy, by the middle of the sixteenth century the Spanish monarchs looked upon it as a part of their own state. Rome became the center of Spain's Italian diplomacy and international imperial politics." Dandeleit, 6.

³⁴¹ Rome as the established seat of authority and center of the Spanish imperial religion, tried to shape Spanish policy on both a local and a global scale, while seeking for increasingly more aid. Spain would comply and sent money and soldiers in response to Papal needs. The Spanish crown then demanded preferential treatment from Rome, both within the Christian world and within Rome itself. *Ibid*, 5-6.

³⁴² For an in-depth study of the Spanish hegemony in Rome see: *Ibid*, 11; and Michael J. Levin, *Agents of Empire: Spanish Ambassadors in Sixteenth-Century Italy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

³⁴³ Dandeleit, 11. Also see Peter Burke, *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 49.

sees the canonization of so many Spanish saints during the seventeenth century as evidence of the Catholic Church taking on a Spanish face.³⁴⁴

3.3 SPANISH MYSTICISM AND CARAVAGGIO'S PAINTINGS

Iberian influence on the Church is evident in the popularity of Spanish author among religious leaders and the general public. Seeing the growing interest in Spanish mysticism, Caravaggio may have employed these ideas in his religious paintings. I suggest that the artist's work resembles both the naturalistic sculpture of religious processions and the imagery associated with Spanish mysticism. Teresa of Avila's writings described contact with the Divine in very sensual terms. John of the Cross's "Dark Night of the Soul" (introduced to Rome around 1600) challenged devotees to consider spiritual darkness as state for spiritual transformation.³⁴⁵ St. Ignatius of Loyola urged believers to employ all of their senses to construct a mental space where one could communicate with Christ, the Virgin, and saints.³⁴⁶

Another lesser known mystic was Pedro Malón de Chaide, a popular author of prose and poetry during the second half of the sixteenth century. His *Conversion of the Magdalene* (1592)

³⁴⁴ Although Spanish power waned during the *settecento*, their saints remained celebrated heroes of the Catholic Faith. "It [Rome] was also the center of Spanish imperial religion. The Spanish monarchs relied upon the papacy to support their ecclesiastical agenda throughout the empire. In turn, they fashioned themselves as faithful defenders of papal authority. Spanish absolutism and papal absolutism went hand in hand, and the Catholic Reformation of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, spearheaded by the papacy and the Spanish monarchy, took on a distinctively Spanish face. In Rome, Spanish churchmen, charities, and saints increased in number and visibility, while in Iberia and other parts of the empire a Catholicism emerged that shared more with traditional universal Catholicism than with any local Catholicism." Dandele, 6. For Spanish influence in Italian religious practice and devotion, see: James S. Amelang "Italy and Spain: Culture and Religion" in Dandele and Marino, 450-51.

³⁴⁵ Moffitt, 23-4; Maria Rzepińska, "Tenebrism in Baroque Painting and Its Ideological Background" *Artibus et Historiae*, vol. 7, no. 13 (1986), 91-112.

³⁴⁶ Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, trans. Anthony Mottola (New York and London: Image/Doubleday, 1989).

was a “popular book, composed to be put in the hands of the vulgar” as a counter-attraction to the profane works of fiction then so much in vogue.³⁴⁷ In his prologue he writes, “A little girl who can hardly walk will have a *Diana* in her pocket.... [this book was written to] amend the great harm which many of these books do.”³⁴⁸

Its supreme attractions are in the mystical spirit which inspires it, in its warmth and colour, and the ardour with which it relates and interprets the tenderest, most human and most moving of narratives. These have won for it, and rightly, a place in the affections of Spain.³⁴⁹

In this text, Magdalene ponders her sinful life and decides to see Christ as he eats with the Pharisee, who “will murmur at your penitence.” The Magdalene responds:

Ah, I see myself and am ashamed by none. My God and the angels see me; what matter is it to me that men see me also? Already they know me for an enemy of God and a sinner; let them know me as a mourner and a penitent. [The poet asks Magdalene] But at least, if thou goest, wilt thou not go as a rich and noble woman? Dress that hair, confine it with a filet of rich gold, entwine it with eastern pearls, make for thyself ear-rings with two fine emeralds. Wear a golden necklace of finely-wrought enamel....Wear a gown of brocaded satin with ornaments of gold, a satin and lace dress which shall be resplendent at a hundred paces' distance....For thus do women of our day deck themselves when they go to hear Mass, with more colours on their faces than in the rainbow, and thus they go to adore Him who is spat upon, scourged, stripped, crowned with thorns and nailed to a cross, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God.³⁵⁰

After extensively discussing the hypocrisy of such dress in a church where one sees art depicting the tortured bodies of the martyred saints, the author continues:

³⁴⁷ His first edition was published in 1592 (two years after his death in Alcalá in 1590) with later editions in 1598 and 1603) and in Barcelona in 1598. Edgar Allison Peers, *Spanish Mysticism: A preliminary survey* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1924), 30.

³⁴⁸ Pedro Malón de Chaide, *Conversion of the Magdalene* (1592) as quoted in Edgar Allison Peers. *Spanish Mysticism: A preliminary survey* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1924), 30.

³⁴⁹ Peers, 31.

³⁵⁰ Malón de Chaide, *Conversion*, 121-2.

No other adornment or trappings would the Magdalen have with which to appear before God, save the adornment of her soul: with this she is on fire and as it were a furnace of love. Ah, that one could have seen this holy woman in the street, so self forgetful that she took not so much as a towel wherewith to wipe the feet of the Lord of Glory! With none of her former display does she go, nor has she the train of attendants she was wont to have, nor does she tarry in the streets to be gazed upon. Rather with eyes cast down to the ground, and her heart fixed on her Lord and her great Good, shedding tears so that she scarcely sees through which she is passing, she goes in haste with great anxiety....³⁵¹

Caravaggio painted two paintings of the Magdalene early in his career, the *Penitent Magdalene* (1595/96) and the *Conversion of Magdalene* (1598/99). [Figs. 64 & 68] In the first painting, one can sense the woman's heavy heart as she ponders her life of luxury and sin, dressed in the very clothes that Pedro Malón de Chaide takes such care to describe. He asks the reader to "behold the woman" and then describes her appearance in detail, but her attire is not some exotic ancient costume, but that of contemporary Europe. The gems, pearls, exquisite fabrics of Malón de Chaide's Magdalene are all present in Caravaggio's painting, along with the downcast eyes and the tears. Malón de Chaide connects to the reader by emphasizing familiar physical details to which they could easily relate—*cinquecento* ladies' costumes. Caravaggio did the same by carefully depicting his Magdalene in the attire common to upper-class prostitutes of the period.

Saints Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross both told of instances when religious art played a central role in their spiritual experience. A painting associated with John of the Cross is depicted in the "Miracle of Segovia," a print by Antoine Wiericx. [Fig. 69] The painting uses a

³⁵¹ *Ibid*, 123.

compositional device similar to that of *Christ Carrying the Cross* by Luis de Morales. [Fig. 70] This “dramatic close-up” intensifies the relationship between painted subject and viewer, thereby heightening the emotional impact and spiritual power of the scene. Morale’s simplified background is in sharp contrast with his obsessive depiction of Christ’s robe and gaunt face.

Morales’ painting is a Spanish mannerist reinterpretation of Sebastiano del Piombo’s *Cristo Portacroce*, whose deep Venetian coloring, simple composition, and depiction of emotional intensity found many imitators in Spain, such as that by Manuel Dionis. [Figs. 71 & 72] These works capture the emotional force and physical presence of Spanish polychrome sculpture in much the same way as Caravaggio’s paintings do. Caravaggio would have known of Sebastiano’s work because Sebastiano del Piombo was active for a large portion of his career in Rome. In 1511-1512, Del Piombo was in Rome aiding Baldassare Peruzzi painting mythological scenes in the lunettes of the Sala di Galatea in the Villa Farnesina. Sebastiano’s *Cristo Portacroce* echoes that of his mentor Giovanni Bellini, which is located today in Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum and painted sometime around 1505-1510. [Fig. 73]

Because Venetian paintings were highly sought after in Spain, Sebastiano del Piombo had numerous Spanish collectors and imitators. There is documentation that four of Del Piombo’s painting arrived in Spain in 1527. Iberian painters such as Luis de Morales and Dionis were inspired by these Italian works, making copies that clearly owed much to the original, but also gave the image their own personal interpretation. [Fig. 70 & 72] These Iberian artists and collections would have been known by Caravaggio through his association with the pro-Spanish faction in Rome. As we shall see in the following chapter, Caravaggio’s bold painting style resonated with a painting style that had already gained popularity on the Iberian Peninsula and

suiting the new artistic taste for simple, expressive paintings borne from Counter-Reformation, a religiosity guided by Spanish reformers and mystics.

One might argue that Caravaggio simply looked to Sebastiano's work while in Rome, but a comparison of Morales' and Caravaggio's *Ecce Homo* paintings suggests otherwise. [Figs. 74 & 46] While the similarity of the artists' simple, dark backgrounds and carefully-studied facial expressions and gestures are striking, it is the similarity between Pilate's costumes that is most remarkable. I argue that the source of Pilate's costume and mask-like facial expression is most likely the *commedia dell'arte* characters *Pantalone* and *il Dottore*, which will be discussed at length later in this chapter. [Figs. 113, 114, 115, & 116] I note that Caravaggio's choice of costume for Pilate varies significantly from those of other painters of the period, who chose rather to show Pilate in an exotic turban. [Figs. 75 & 76]

3.4 THE SPANISH FACTION IN ROME

As strong as Iberian presence was on the peninsula, there were those who opposed the growing influence of the Spanish Crown in affairs on the Italian peninsula. Although Cardinal Del Monte (related to the French Bourbons) strongly opposed the election of Ippolito Aldobrandini, the Spanish faction's favored candidate, after Aldobrandini won, he had to put his personal politics aside. Del Monte needed to maintain a good rapport with the papacy for the sake of his protector, Ferdinando de' Medici. The Duke of Tuscany was himself half Spanish and was in frequent contact with his relatives in Spain and made a considerable effort to maintain amicable ties to the Spanish Crown, with frequent exchanges of courtiers between the Tuscan and Spanish courts.

Del Monte often procured items of interest for his protector, because the Duke sent numerous gifts to powerful officials at the court in Madrid, some of which I will discuss in later chapters.

In Milan, we saw how Iberian culture had permeated that of the Lombards, especially the upper class, leaving traces in their music, literature, language, costume, religious devotions, and popular theater.³⁵² As we move south toward Caravaggio's final destination in southern Italy, we will see that the hispanization of the peninsula was especially strong in pro-Spanish Italian families such as the Colonna. This Iberian influence was not limited to these elite hispanophiles; it can be seen by many facets of Italian life—in the religion, the politics, and the arts—especially in regions governed by Spain such as the Kingdoms of Naples and Sicily.³⁵³

I propose that since Caravaggio looked to the events and people in his surroundings for inspiration, the local cultures he encountered were reflected in his paintings.³⁵⁴ He was exposed to Iberian culture in Lombardy as a subject of the Spanish Crown and through his close association with the pro-Spanish Italians such as Costanza Colonna Sforza. Later, his sensitivity to quotidian Roman life, with its prominent Spanish faction, hispanized spirituality, and large numbers of Iberian immigrants left its mark on the paintings of Caravaggio.

Tens of thousands of Spaniards subsequently traveled to Rome and made it their home. Ambassadors, soldiers, courtiers, priests, and painters, they were the new

³⁵² Croce, *La Spagna*; Saxl, "Costumes and Festivals," 400-456.

³⁵³ "Thus the great-grandson of Ferdinand and Isabella, Philip II, became the most powerful monarch of the sixteenth century and the major foreign patron of Rome. His image, carved in marble and bronze, painted in oil and fresco, took its place in the churches and palaces of the city. While Roman humanists, musicians, and theologians dedicated their works to the Spanish monarch, the king sent increasing amounts of Spanish gold to help rebuild churches, such as the new Saint Peter's, Santa Maria Maggiore, San Pietro in Montorio, and many more." Dandeleit, 6-7.

³⁵⁴ Spanish could be found in all neighborhoods in Rome. Their greatest concentration (c. 25%) in the rione of Campo Marzio was also the neighborhood of the Deza palace. Another 26% lived in the adjacent rioni of Ponte, Parione, and San Eustachio, where the Ambassador's palace, Fonseca palace, and church of Santiago were located. The Iberian areas of Castile, Aragon, and Portugal were well represented. Toledo, Zamora, Seville, Burgos, Barcelona, and Cardova were the cities that had the largest contingents. *Ibid*, 158.

players in town, the most powerful foreign faction and crucial to Spanish imperial politics and political culture....they too reshaped the politics, economy, culture, and urban landscape of Rome in large ways and small. By the late sixteenth century, at least one source had them comprising nearly a third of the city's population.³⁵⁵

The Eternal City, with its ancient ruins and many prospective patrons, saw the arrival of musicians, architects, painters, and sculptors from all over Europe.³⁵⁶ Young Caravaggio was among them, eager to begin his painting career. For a young artist, strong connections to important families and prospective patrons were vital for a successful career. One's social status was generally a factor in an artist's ability to forge a career, whether it was political, ecclesiastical, or artistic. The social circles with which the artist associated determined the types of patrons they might expect. There are various types of relationships to consider when determining the spheres of influence operating in Caravaggio's life while in Rome.³⁵⁷ The first of these categories is "kinship," which deals directly with the influence of a person's family.

The rise to power and social status requires the mobilization of an extended family group acting together towards a common goal. Initially, this may mean that all efforts must be concentrated on the advancement of a single member of the family, to the exclusion of others. In the end, though, the success of the operation amply repays all involved for the sacrifices that they have made.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁵ "The large Spanish presence did not go unnoticed. Travelers' accounts often mention the large numbers of Spanish in the Eternal City Michel de Montaigne (Dec 2, 1580) rented rooms in Rome from a Spaniard, opposite Santa Lucia della Tinta. Montaigne also describes "the Spanish pomp" where they fired a salvo of guns at the Castle of S. Angelo, and the ambassador was escorted to the palace by the Pope's trumpeters, drummers, and archers." Dandeleit, 9. See also: Michel de Montaigne. *The Travel Journal*, trans. Donald M. Frame (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1983), 72 and 91.

³⁵⁶ Tomas Luís della Vittoria – famous musician who came to Rome to study with Palestrina and direct the choir in the Spanish church of Santiago (aka San Giacomo degli Spagnoli) in the Piazza Navona. See: Dandeleit, 9-10. He also wrote music that was played at the Roman Oratory and Chiesa Nuova of Saint Philip Neri. For Spanish Painters in Rome there is some documentation on Domenico Trizeno – (active 1581) little-known painter from Valladolid who did a painting for San Pietro in Montorio. (Archivio Storico Capitolino, Rome: Notai, vol 872, f. 239r.) His other clients were Jerónimo Francés Spagnolo and Señor Aguilar. Among his possessions were sketches made from works by Michelangelo, Raphael, and Titian. See also: *Ibid*, 154.

³⁵⁷ Renata Ago, "The Family in Rome: Structure and Relationships," in *Rome * Amsterdam*, 86.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid*.

Although the Merisi family's situation was less than ideal, they may have followed this pattern. Even with the deaths of Caravaggio's father, grandfather, and uncle, his mother Lucia Aratori, managed to get enough money to give him an education and an apprenticeship in the studio of Simone Peterzano's studio, a well-respected artist. Caravaggio's uncle, Ludovico Merisi, who had arrived in Rome some six months before the artist, could have set up some social contacts for his nephew but returned to Milan by June 1592.³⁵⁹ Thus, the Merisi/Aratori contacts in Rome were limited. Of Caravaggio's immediate family, it may have been the young painter's aunt Margherita, with her close ties to the Marchesa di Caravaggio, who played the largest role in establishing the artist's painting career. Caravaggio's adopted "family" was the Colonna-Sforza, whose long history in Rome had made them powerful allies and provided Caravaggio valuable social connections to some of the most elite circles in the city.

3.4.1 The Colonna Family in Rome

The Colonna family was one of the most ancient in Rome, established there during late twelfth century. Almost every important event in the city from the thirteenth to the nineteenth centuries involved the Colonna in some way.³⁶⁰ Noteworthy in early Roman history were their rivalry with the Orsini, their opposition to the pope, and their allegiance with the imperial faction in the

³⁵⁹ He returned to take the post of "Canonico Collegiatae Ecclesiae Sancti Babylae Mediolani." Berra, 249.

³⁶⁰ The Colonna family, originally from the principality of Colonna in the Alban hills near Rome, used strategic advancement within the Church to facilitate the family's move within the city. Anthony Majanlahti, *The Families Who Made Rome*. (London: Chatto & Windus, 2005), 29. Although the Colonna saw a long line of cardinals, it was not until 1417 that Oddone Colonna (1368-1431) was elected pope under the name of Martin V (pontificate 1417-1431). His election marked the end of the Great Schism and saw the Holy See returned to Rome in 1419, and a subsequent ecclesiastical building boom that would gain pace in following centuries. To help rebuild the ailing city he urged "cardinals and patricians to invest, for the good of their souls, in founding or maintaining family chapels in Roman churches," *Ibid*, 35. The Colonna family also used advancement in the military to win favor among Europe's rulers, such as Fabrizio I Colonna (c. 1450 – 1520) who fought for many prominent men, shifting allegiances when it best served him: Innocent VIII Cibò, the king of Naples, Charles VIII of France (the rival of the king of Naples), and finally Charles V of Spain. Due to their loyalty to the Spanish Crown, the Colonna were given prestigious titles and property near Naples. *Ibid*, 37.

Middle Ages.³⁶¹ Colonna power and influence assured a prominent place in Roman civic/religious spectacle. The Colonna's use of pomp, civic and religious spectacle was typical among Roman elites, who vied for a central role in the city's political/social/religious spectacle to earn prestige for their houses. The Colonna's active use of spectacle and their social prominence likely made an impression on Caravaggio, since he associated with this family for most of his adult life.

The Colonna family used ecclesiastical and military advancement to strengthen their political position on the peninsula. Throughout their history, the family shifted allegiances when convenient, but finally in the sixteenth century, decided to serve Charles V of Spain. Due to their loyalty to the Spanish Crown, the Colonna were given prestigious titles and property near Naples. As the Great Constables (*Grandi Conestabili*) of Naples, they played a central role in the annual *Chinea* festivities in which the white horse of tribute (the *chinea*) was conveyed from the viceroy of Naples to the pope.³⁶² As far as public relations for the Spanish Crown, the feudal tribute paid to the pope along with the *chinea* (7,000 gold ducats) was the most important financial contribution from Spain to Rome, and the Colonna were at the center of these festivities.³⁶³ The *Chinea* event symbolically showed Spanish fidelity and obedience to the pope. It also demonstrates the Iberians' frequent use of public spectacle for image-making in the Eternal City and other regions on the Italian peninsula.³⁶⁴

A 1578 account of the *Chinea* states that after Pope Gregory XIII said Mass, he waited for the prized white horse, which was led in a impressive procession through the city to the Vatican, headed by the Grand Constable of Naples (a male member of the Colonna family), the

³⁶¹ *Ibid*, 29.

³⁶² *Ibid*, 37.

³⁶³ Sassoli, 42-55. See also: Dandelelet, 78.

³⁶⁴ Dandelelet, 78.

Spanish ambassador, all the nobility in Rome, and the “Spanish nation” living within the city.³⁶⁵ This event gained importance and extravagance from its early beginnings in the 1550’s and lasted 145 years. For the first century, the festivities accompanying the procession were located at the Palazzo Colonna complex near Piazza Santi Apostoli. Although the exact day and location (i.e. the Sala Regia or St. Peter’s) changed, the general structure of the ceremony was codified early in the sixteenth century and remained largely unchanged.³⁶⁶ The *Chinea* grew to such importance that during the *seicento* and *settecento*, illustrated booklets of the event were published. [Figs. 77 & 78]

Because the general format of the event remained consistent throughout the centuries and no real documentation survives that describes the early *Chinea*, I look to the later descriptions of the event for clues to the appearance of earlier years’ festivities when the Colonna were the featured participants. In 1722, the cavalcade began at the Palazzo Colonna in SS. Apostoli, with a final destination of St. Peter’s. The *Chinea* was a beautiful and gentle creature ornately decorated with gold and silver trappings. The “ambasciatore straordinario,” Fabrizio Colonna, was dressed vaguely “all’Imperiale” with gold and black fabric covered in gold lace. His helmet, sword, buckles, and shoes were studded with diamonds. Following him were carriages carrying prelates from the Roman court and other notables in the city and cavalieri on horseback. This public spectacle, while designed to satisfy the necessary official “pomp” for such solemn occasions and to entertain the public, was above all, a demonstration of the Church’s authority over temporal powers, and, for the Colonna, reaffirmation of their prominence within Roman and Neapolitan public, political, and religious spheres.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁶ Later in the late 17th and 18th centuries, this would switch to other families such as the Barberini (1663) and Farnese, after the Kingdom of Naples shifted from Hapsburg to Bourbon rule. But after 1722 the location for the *Chinea* festivities would be either as S.S. Apostoli (the Colonna) or at piazza Farnese. Sassoli, 42-55.

As early as the *cinquecento*, *Chinea* festivities were held at the Colonna palace such as music, food and wine, and fireworks that the public often was able to enjoy. Although there are no known images of these early *feste* and few written descriptions, mythological and Roman imperial imagery were often used in the *Chinea*.³⁶⁷ Ancient motifs were employed in the entries of Charles V and Philip II when they visited Italian cities. The papal solemn processions to take possession of the Eternal City also employed an ancient theme. The symbols of pagan Rome were now being employed by Christian princes, emperors, and even the Church itself. These “Romans” were not wearing the togas and armor of the ancient world; they wore contemporary garb, thereby transporting themselves (and the viewer) back in time. This follows the pattern seen in the Milanese *Entierro* and in Caravaggio’s paintings which depict “Romans” in *cinque-* and *seicento* armor and military uniforms. [Figs. 28 & 21]

Costanza Colonna’s father, Marco Antonio II Colonna, as the Third Grand Constable of Naples, was often the featured protagonist for the *Chinea*. He was a prominent figure in Roman spectacle, due not only to the political role his family played on the peninsula, but his own achievements. Marc’Antonio II reached a level of prestige not enjoyed by other Colonna, representing “the final degree of familial glory of the Colonna; even more than Martin V, the family pope, he is the emblematic family member.”³⁶⁸

For a member of a family famous for battling the papacy and allying with the Spanish king, such respect might seem surprising, especially in the City of the Popes. Marc’ Antonio had decided that it was time to make peace with papal Rome and make friends with former enemies,

³⁶⁷ We do know that after Maffeo Barberini’s 1663 *Chinea*, there were fireworks displays in Piazza di Spagna (location of the Spanish ambassador’s home). The first evening the piazza was decorated as a seaport in which one entered by way of the ancient wonder, the Colossus of Rhodes. In the piazza/seaport was a ship set to sail into the port under arch made by the famous colossus. The piazza was filled with carriages and people eager to see the pyrotechnic display. The following day the piazza was converted into the setting or the “favola d’Orfeo,” when he played his lyre to daringly search the dark caverns of the underworld for his beloved Euridice. Sassoli, 44.

³⁶⁸ Majanlahti, 37.

by serving the pope and ending the feuding with the Orsini family. In return for Marc' Antonio's loyalty to the papacy, the status of the family seat of Paliano was elevated to that of principate in 1569.³⁶⁹ This honor pales in comparison, however, to that which Colonna would receive after his victory as a naval commander against the Ottoman Turks at the Battle of Lepanto on 7 October 1571.³⁷⁰

Ottoman expansion in the Mediterranean threatened the Italian and Iberian peninsulas. To combat this menace, Pius V founded a Holy League, made up of Venetian, Spanish, and papal fleets. The League was placed under the control of the Charles V's illegitimate son, Don Juan of Austria, the Venetian fleet was led by Sebastiano Venier (future Doge 1577-8), and Marc' Antonio II commanded the papal galleys. This victory showed that the Turks were not invincible and was thought to be a sign that their luck was changing. This pivotal battle was celebrated for years to come, because it came to represent the victorious Church, whether battling the Muslim infidel or the Protestant "heretic." Representations of the Virgin of the Rosary were associated with these celebrations because the battle occurred on her feast day and whose intercession assured victory for the Catholic Church.³⁷¹ Some scholars assert that Caravaggio's *Madonna of the Rosary*, possibly commissioned by a member of the Colonna family, commemorates this event and *may* contain a portrait of Marc' Antonio II at the lower left.³⁷² [Fig. 13]

Marc' Antonio's victory and the subsequent honors bestowed upon him earned much respect for his house, not only in the eyes of the Roman people, but the many international visitors in attendance as well. While the celebrations commemorating the Lepanto victory held during Caravaggio's lifetime will be discussed later in this chapter, a brief description of the

³⁶⁹ Majanlahti, 37.

³⁷⁰ Berra, 34.

³⁷¹ Majanlahti, 39.

³⁷² Berra, 310-14.

festivities surrounding Marc' Antonio's victorious return to Rome on 4 December, 1571 will help inform our reading of later Lepanto-themed celebrations.

As in the entries of other important officials and the *Chinea*, there were allusions to Imperial Rome. Marc' Antonio entered the city in a triumphal procession, like that represented on the Arch of Titus in the Roman Forum. [Figs. 79, 80, 81, & 82] The procession originated from the Colonna fief of Marino, on the coast, and followed the Tiber to Rome.³⁷³ From the church of San Sebastiano, on the Appian Way, the procession entered the city at Porta Capena. It passed the Baths of Caracalla, went under the triumphant arches of Constantine and Titus, and then to the monastery of Santa Maria in Aracoeli, a landmark that was located at the very centre of the old Roman Empire.³⁷⁴ Upon reaching its final destination, Pope Pius V "greeted Colonna rapturously, even to the extent of kissing his feet, an unheard-of honour."³⁷⁵ The whole city celebrated and saw this victory as a sign of better times ahead:

...Colonna rode, unarmed, on a white horse. He was escorted by a glittering cortegé of five thousand people, and 170 liveried and chained Turkish prisoners were driven before him. Before them the standard of the sultan was trailed in the dust. The procession pressed forward through tumultuous applause. 'Here from every part,' wrote an observer, 'his name rang out. Everyone rushed to the street, clapping their hands. Crowds of people thronged together, crying out, while trumpets serenaded him. He was greeted from far and near, by people gesturing, shouting, waving caps and banner.' Ringed by twenty-five Cardinals, Colonna crossed the Tiber at Ponte Sant'Angelo, and then rode to St Peter's and the Vatican Palace, where Pope Pius V received him in the Sala Regia.³⁷⁶

³⁷³ Majanlahti, 39.

³⁷⁴ Langdon, 9.

³⁷⁵ Langdon, 9 and Majanlahti, 39.

³⁷⁶ Langdon, 9. Padre Guglielmotti, as quoted in P. Colonna, *I Colonna dalle Origini all'Inizio del Secolo XIX*. (Rome, 1927), 235.

The church was decorated with captured Turkish flags and bore the inscription: “The gratitude which, in their pagan folly, the Ancients offered to their idols, the Christian conqueror, who ascends the Aracoeli, now gives, with pious devotion, to the true God, to Christ the Redeemer, and to His most glorious Mother.”³⁷⁷ The city streets were decorated with captured Turkish banners and standards. Ephemeral art and architecture, triumphal arches and paintings of notable episodes and people from the battle, were designed especially for the event.³⁷⁸ In this event, the parallel victories for the pope as both temporal and religious leader also were emphasized. The warrior not only protected Christian lands, but also the faith. The Turks, with their exotic dress and customs, were strange but fascinating and represented in these spectacles both the marauding pirate of the sea and the infidel.

The Holy League’s victory, especially that of their Roman son Marc’ Antonio Colonna, showed that the Catholic Church had found its strength and was more than ready to meet its enemies, whether Muslim or Protestant. Although there is little record of the appearance of the *Chinea*, the similarities between later *Chinea* and the cavalcade for Marc’ Antonio’s entry show a common processional style, one that emulates the entries of ancient Rome, shows military uniforms along with Church officials (as was the case for the Milanese *Entierro*), and aims to entertain the populace with lavish display of wealth and power. The immense popularity of such spectacle and events that featured gentlemen and *cavalieri* would have impressed Caravaggio, who desired to be a knight to earn public respect and who measured artists’ success by their popularity and by the prestige of their commissions.

The Colonna family not only participated in popular theatrical events such as the *Chinea* and other civic spectacles, it also promoted and contributed to the dramatic and literary arts. In

³⁷⁷ Majanlahti, 39.

³⁷⁸ Majanlahti, 39.

the fourteenth century, Stefano Colonna supported the early humanist poet Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch), but in the sixteenth century, the family produced its own poet of its own, Vittoria Colonna (1492-1547), Marc' Antonio II's aunt. Vittoria was in contact with both literary and artistic circles—a cultural interest that continued in future generations such as Muzio II Sforza Colonna's *Accademia degli Inquieti*.

Although Vittoria Colonna was close friends with learned men such as Baldassare Castiglione (1478-1529) and Ludovico Ariosto, her most famous friendship is that with her friend and spiritual companion, Michelangelo Buonarroti.³⁷⁹ Vittoria was part of the *spirituali* circle of religious reformers (which included Cardinal Gaspero Contarini, Cardinal Reginald Pole, and Father Gian Matteo Giberti) who sought a more interior faith, which moved away from outward ritual and toward simple sincere acts of charity and deep emotional feeling.³⁸⁰ They had access to Protestant writings, the doctrines preached by Juan de Valdès in Naples (greatly influenced by Erasmus), and publications such as *Il Beneficio di Cristo*, which brought Calvinism to Italy.³⁸¹

Valdés' statement that "True Christianity is not understood by doctrine but by experience" was considered dangerous heresy and was later condemned. Valdés never faced the inquisitors, because he died in Naples before the Roman Inquisition could review his teachings. Although officially condemned, Valdés' teachings continued to influence *seicento* spirituality. The visceral quality of religious devotion found in the works of the Spanish mystics, so popular in Rome during Caravaggio's lifetime, echoes Valdés' experiential approach to faith. Later in the century, these internalized expressions of faith reemerged in the words of the Spaniard Miguel de

³⁷⁹ Howard Hibbard, *Michelangelo*, ed.2 (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1974), 255.

³⁸⁰ Majanlahti, 37 and Peter Partner, *Renaissance Rome 1500-1559: A Portrait of a Society* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press 1976), 215.

³⁸¹ Partner, 217.

Molinos (*Dux spiritualis*, 1675), which served as the foundation for the Quietism, condemned by Innocent XI in 1687.³⁸²

Another group with whom Vittoria associated was the newly-formed Capuchin order. Both she and her brother Ascanio (Costanza's grandfather) supported the Capuchins located in Rome, who had recently broken away from the main Franciscan order. Having powerful supporters like the Colonna helped the Capuchin establish themselves in the city. The Colonna supported one of the Capuchins' most powerful and popular preachers, Bernardino Occhino (from Siena), who gave his first sermon in Rome during Lent in 1534. Occhino became so popular amongst all classes (cardinals, nobles, and common people) that San Lorenzo in Damasco was filled with people—some were forced to sit in the roof.³⁸³ Peter Partner describes this dynamic preacher:

Occhino had the traditional appearance of a medieval friar, with a long fair beard; he had the most musical and commanding voice. He preached for two hours, and ended in tears, together with most of his audience. He preached not only affecting moral sermons on the Gospels, but denunciations of corruption in the most high places of the Church. This did not prevent his being the most sought-after preacher in Italy.³⁸⁴

In several ways Occhino's style was similar to Caravaggio's. Occhino's style was dramatic, evoking a strong emotional response from his audience. His sermons were more than just a preacher teaching the public about the Gospels and Church doctrine, he performed for them. His heightened passion and emotionalism served as an example of impassioned devotion. His popularity with all classes demonstrates that the populace loved a style that emotionally

³⁸² "Quietism," Catholic Encyclopedia Online, <http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=9787>; accessed 2/26/2010.

³⁸³ Partner, 215-17.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 215.

moved them regardless of the message's challenging content. The Counter-Reformation Church wanted to evoke a similar emotional response in its sermons, devotions, processions, and religious art.

Later, Vittoria left Rome for Colonna properties in Naples, to visit her cousin Giulia Gonzaga (protector of the Neapolitan *Spirituali*) and the leader of their movement, Valdès.³⁸⁵ Michelangelo Buonarroti visited Vittoria in Naples and remained close to her until her death in 1547. The influence of the *spirituali* can be seen in his late poetry and art.³⁸⁶ His poem "Vivo al peccato, a me morendo vivo" is such a work:

Dying spiritually, I live in my lower and sinful self; my life goes on not on my behalf, but on that of my sin. My health is given from heaven; my sickness is caused by own unbridled will, of whose control I am deprived.³⁸⁷

A later poem, "Ben sarien dolce le preghiere mie," (Wordsworth translation) goes even further to echo *spirituali* views on saving grace:

The prayers I make will then be sweet indeed, If though the spirit give by which I pray: My unassisted heart is barren clay, Which of its native self can nothing feed: Of good and pious works Thou art the seed, Which quickens only where Thou say'st it may; Unless Thou show to us Thine own true way, No man find it.³⁸⁸

³⁸⁵ Romeo De Maio, *Michelangelo e la Controriforma* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1978), 424, 440.

³⁸⁶ For Michelangelo's art and Vittoria Colonna, see Alexander Nagel, "Gifts for Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna," *The Art Bulletin* v79 n4 (Dec 1997) 647-69 and Alexander Nagel, *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000).

³⁸⁷ Partner, 219.

³⁸⁸ Partner, 219.

Author Peter Partner believes that the Michelangelo frescoes in the Capella Paolina (1542-1550) in the Vatican display the influence of *spirituali* ideology. [Figs. 83 & 85] These works were started just as the hopes of the movement to influence the Roman Church were crushed. That year Bernardino Ochino and other “spiritual” leaders were forced to flee Italy for the Protestant territories in the north. The Roman Inquisition was underway, led by Cardinal Giovanni Pietro Carafa. Both of Michelangelo’s frescoes testify to God’s saving grace when man is “utterly inadequate to protect his personality from self-destruction.”³⁸⁹

Art history scholars see these same Buonarroti frescoes as having influenced Caravaggio’s paintings of the same subjects.³⁹⁰ [Figs. 84 & 86] Through his connections to the Colonna and possible exposure to Vittoria Colonna’s poetry, Caravaggio may have been familiar with *spirituali* beliefs on grace and faith. Caravaggio’s Lombardy, so close to the Protestants north of the Alps, was exposed to Calvinist thought through the texts and visitors that entered the region from the north. The Lombard artist would certainly have known Michelangelo’s paintings in the Cappella Paolina, which emphasize the helplessness of humanity. It is also notable that, in these works, one sees the shift from the sensuous beauty of the Sistine frescoes to the less idealized imagery of Michelangelo’s later years. Caravaggio’s *Crucifixion of St. Peter* and *Conversion of St. Paul* echo Michelangelo’s frescoes, but the Lombard artist’s compositions are much simpler. There is no beautiful angel reaching down from heaven to hand Saint Peter his palm of martyrdom. Caravaggio’s saint is accompanied only by the sweaty and grunting workers who strain to erect the heavy cross. Saint Peter, abandoned to suffer his fate, looks blankly into the darkness as his life comes to an end. In Caravaggio’s *Conversion of Saint Paul*

³⁸⁹ Partner, 220.

³⁹⁰ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 299-302.

the composition is also more simplified than Buonarroti's. Caravaggio's Saint Paul is accompanied only by his barefoot groom and horse. Absent are the fleeing crowd and the dynamic Christ who directs his saving power in a lightning bolt-like flash into the eyes of Paul. In Caravaggio's works the men are isolated, with only their interior faith to give these events spiritual meaning.

Like Vittoria Colonna, Cardinal Ascanio Colonna (1560-1608) (Costanza's brother), was a fan of fine literature and a man of culture.³⁹¹ After a 1576 trip to Spain with his father Marc' Antonio II and his brother Fabrizio, Ascanio remained to study at the University of Salamanca along with young members of great Castilian families, with the hope of serving the Spanish king. His immersion in Spanish court culture gave him intimate knowledge of their literature, arts, and theater. He returned to Rome eventually, but visited Spain often, serving at the court at Madrid as ecclesiastical nuncio and the viceroy of Aragon between 1602 and 1605.

Ascanio was an avid book collector, owning more than 7,000 volumes, which would be donated to the Vatican library after his death. His literary interests must have been well known, because he was the dedicatee of Cervantes's first novel, *La Galatea* (1585). In this work, Cervantes used pastoral characters to explore questions of love and frequent allusions to contemporary literary figures as a way to draw the reader into the world of its protagonists—a technique seen in Ariosto's works and used in popular theater. One dominant thread in the book is the description and discussion of contemporary rural and urban life, most evident in the dialog between Elicio (a cultured shepherd) and Erastro (a rustic herdsman).³⁹² Ascanio and Costanza, through their connections within political and cultural circles on both the Italian and Iberian

³⁹¹ Langdon, 55.

³⁹² Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *La Galatea*, eds. Francisco López Estrada and María Teresa López Garcia-Berday. (Madrid: Catedra, 1999).

peninsulas, could have provided Caravaggio with information concerning Roman and Spanish culture and vital contacts to other cultured families, particularly those associated with the Rome's pro-Spanish faction.

3.4.2 Herrera & Costa Bank

It may have been Pandolfo Pucci, Ascanio Colonna, or Costanza Colonna Sforza who first introduced Caravaggio to Ottavio Costa, one of Caravaggio's early patrons.³⁹³ He was the junior partner of Herrera & Costa bank, which often acted as an art dealer for its clients, knew many of the city's art collectors and was conversant on artistic trends within the city and abroad. Like Costanza, Ottavio was closely connected to the pro-Spanish faction in Rome. Members of his extended family had lived in Spain for years and his senior partner was Juan Enríquez de Herrera, one of Rome's most prominent Spanish businessmen.³⁹⁴ The Herrera/Costa social circle may also have aided Caravaggio's developing career. Ottavio was acquainted with Cardinal Montalto, patron of Caravaggio's friend Prospero Orsi and friend of Caravaggio's future protector, Cardinal del Monte. Costa was also familiar with Giuseppe Cesari d'Arpino who painted for many of Costa's clients and was the artist for whom Caravaggio worked before moving into Del Monte's Palazzo Madama.

Both Costa and Herrera were familiar with the artistic tastes of their clients, because they often served as art dealers for their Spanish banking clients and shipped Italian artwork to Spain.

³⁹³ Ottavio Costa knew Pucci and could have seen the paintings that Caravaggio painted for the prelate. Terzaghi, 278-9

³⁹⁴ Castilian banker from the bishopric of Palencia who spent most of his life in Rome and died there around 1602. He owned a bank in partnership with Octavio Costa, Caravaggio's patron, and had acquired the lucrative papal bureau of the *depositoria generale* in 1591. He was a benefactor of the national church of Santiago to which he gave a chapel dedicated to the newly canonized saint, Diego of Alcalá. Herrera had an extensive household in Rome that included family from Spain. Cousin Alonso Enríquez de Herrera and his wife Beatriz López lived in the city and eventually died there. Dandeleit, 152-153.

Although Juan Enríquez de Herrera was mainly interested in architecture, he did have some paintings in his home besides those of his partner Ottavio Costa. Herrera's collection was conservative with portraits of the Spanish sovereigns and a few Spanish saints.³⁹⁵

An examination of some of the art that the bank handled for its clients and that was directly associated with the Herrera family gives insight into Spanish taste in “modern” Italian paintings during the *seicento*. At the end of March 1607, the notary Loreto Persico was ordered to make an inventory of the art collection of Ludovico de Tapia, who was living with Juan and Ottavio at that time.³⁹⁶ Of particular interest are “two gypsies with a basket of fruit,” “a woman holding a basket of flowers,” “a youth holding a chicken to his chest and an old woman who holds a shopping basket,” “an insane man holding some fruit to his chest,” and “two farmers with two farm girls and a cat.” These paintings, with their subjects falling between genre scenes and still life, were extraordinary at that time.³⁹⁷ Genre painting and still life were not popular genres in Rome, because religious and history painting were considered more prestigious. The subjects of Tapia's paintings are similar to Caravaggio's *The Gypsy Fortuneteller* and *Boy with a Basket of Fruit* and may show that his work resonated with an Iberian taste in painting. [Figs. 87 & 88]

Juan's brother, Diego Enríquez de Herrera, also purchased paintings while in Rome. In preparation for his departure in 1602, an inventory of his belongings was taken. This documentation gives some indication of the artistic preferences of this Iberian prelate. Four paintings of the “Doctors of the Church” were removed from his living quarters (“camera da

³⁹⁵ Terzaghi, 77-78, 197-273.

³⁹⁶ Terzaghi, 65.

³⁹⁷ “due zinghere con una canestra con una canestrina de frutti / una donna che tiene una canestra de fiori in mano / una giovane con una gallina in seno e una vecchia che tiene una sporta / un pazzo che tiene de frutti in seno / dui contadini con due contadine con un gatto.” *Ibid.*

letto”).³⁹⁸ The official performing the inventory was careful to describe the paintings as having a strikingly naturalistic style, so much that they were if they were “ad vivam” or “alive.”³⁹⁹ Caravaggio’s art was viewed as being painted in a similarly naturalistic manner, a naturalism that would bring him criticism for being a “slave to the model”—a criticism given by painters and critics favoring a more classicizing style. There were distinct differences between the artistic tastes of Italian and Spanish collectors. Caravaggio’s work would have satisfied Iberian collectors, a topic that I will discuss in more depth in the following chapter.

3.5 PUBLIC DRAMA IN ROME DURING CARAVAGGIO’S STAY

The details pertaining to the years after Caravaggio left Pandolfo Pucci’s residence and his entry into Del Monte’s household are vague. We know that during this time, he fell ill and is reported to have convalesced at the l’Ospedale della Consolazione, where he painted some paintings for the prior, who took them to his home in Seville or Sicily.⁴⁰⁰ Terzaghi suggests that it may have been Mancini himself who attended Caravaggio while in the hospital. A letter written by Mancini to his brother Deifebo, says that the doctor had been promised a “*Sdegno di Marte*” by Caravaggio that was actually given to Del Monte (the painter’s patron) and he was then forced to

³⁹⁸ “Primum Sancti Gregorii Papae, secundum Sancti Hieronimi Cardinalis, tertium Sancti Ambrosii Archiepiscopi et quartum Sancti Augustini Episcopi quattuor sanctae Matris Ecclesiae Doctorum omnium paris magnitudinis operae et facturae (...) sex palmorum longitudinis et quator latitudinis in pariete dictae” Terzaghi, 59, 354.

³⁹⁹ “camerae ad vivam effigiem existentem...”*Ibid*, 354.

⁴⁰⁰ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 347. Catherine Puglisi is uncertain of the prior’s home, but believes it is more likely to be Sevillian than Sicilian; tentatively identified as Camillo Contreras. Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 79, 425 n. 42. Terzaghi agrees with Puglisi says it is unclear. It could be read “in Siviglia” sua patria or “in Sicilia sua patria,” but additional research suggests it may be Sicily. Terzaghi, 281.

settle for a copy made from this original.⁴⁰¹ This would place the painter in Del Monte's home, the Palazzo Madama.

While living with Del Monte, Caravaggio was very near the Piazza Navona in which the Spanish national church of Santiago, home of the Confraternity of the Most Holy Resurrection was located.⁴⁰² [Fig. 89] The Confraternity played a significant role as both the religious center for the Iberians and a major patron of religious street processions in the city.⁴⁰³ One such procession is the annual Easter procession, held in the Piazza Navona. There are records of spectacular Pasqual celebrations in 1586, 1587, 1589, 1592, 1596, and 1600. Documentary evidence, both descriptive and pictorial, indicates that the piazza was surrounded by platforms for choirs and musicians and those were encircled by fencing and laurel plants, between the branches of which some young children imitated the twittering of birds ('il cinguetto di uccelli').⁴⁰⁴ In 1587 the piazza was decorated with pyramids, obelisks, and colossi; in 1589 three temples, three ships and a galleon, with globes and ships and other figures of painted paper and canvas suspended from cables strung across the piazza from which fireworks sprayed. Most

⁴⁰¹ There are many conflicting opinions to the exact date that Caravaggio entered the hospital. Many believe it was shortly after Caravaggio left Pucci's residence early in the artist's Roman sojourn (c. 1592?), but recent research suggests that could have been as late as 1597, after Caravaggio moved in with Del Monte. This, of course, would have to have been before his commission for the paintings installed in Contarelli chapel around 1600. Quote from: Maccherini 1997, 71-2 and Maccherini 1999, 131-41. As cited in, Terzaghi, 281.

⁴⁰² One of the major Spanish institutions was the Confraternity of the Most Holy Resurrection, founded in 1579. This organization was one of the largest in Rome, growing to more than a thousand members, in a city of roughly a hundred thousand. (Archivo de la Obra Pia, Rome, leg. 71, unfoliated.) This was a place where Spanish identity and communal ties were cultivated and encouraged. It became the locus of Spanish power, patronage, religious display, and charity in Rome together with the national church of Santiago. Dandeleit, 10.

⁴⁰³ The Spanish were masters at hosting impressive religious ritual and display. As early as 1574 there was a large Easter procession in the Piazza Navona. By 1597, the event had grown so large that public laws had been passed to regulate the traffic and attendance at the ritual. This and other Spanish rituals, such as dowry presentations, Feast of Corpus Domini, the triumphs of the Spanish military and navy, and masses and festivities celebrating the births and marriages of Spanish royalty, were all part of the Spaniards' attempt to present themselves as "the most devout people in Christendom and the leaders of the Roman Catholic world." One way to do this was to have Spaniards canonized as saints. Philip II had lawyers living in Rome to lobby for this cause. Dandeleit, 185-7.

⁴⁰⁴ Gaia Bindi, "Roma 'Gran teatro del mondo,' La guerra festeggiata," in *La Festa a Roma dal Rinascimento al 1870*. Marcello Fagiolo, ed. (Roma: Umberto Allemandi & C, 1997), 102-3.

spectators stayed along the perimeter, but the bravest were in the center, crowded between the many fireworks displays. [Fig. 90] In 1592, Girolamo Rainaldi was commissioned to create representations of “l’Inferno,” “il Paradiso,” and “il Santo Sepolcro.” Above the scene, there were decorations in the form of a whale and a phoenix, allegorical symbols of the resurrection of Christ. This spectacle reportedly saw the participation of around 80,000 people. [Fig. 91] In 1600, the procession was preceded by a boat, possibly referring to the Naumachia Domitiani, an ancient Roman water theater where mock sea battles were staged, perhaps to signal Spain’s continued allegiance to the Catholic Church during the years of reconciliation with Henry IV of Navarre. The featured decorations for this Easter were figures of Christ and two angels surrounded by spectacular fireworks.⁴⁰⁵ The custom of fireworks, complex decorations, and huge processions continued throughout the century; another print dated 1650 shows a similar scene. [Fig. 92]

In 1596, the event commemorated the 25th anniversary of the naval victory over the Turks at Lepanto and proclaimed the significance of the Spanish Nation’s role as protector of the Catholic Faith.⁴⁰⁶ One of the victors was the admiral of the Papal fleet, Marc Antonio II Colonna, father of Costanza Colonna Sforza. Thomas Dandelelet describes the event:

...a skirmish occurred between a Spanish galleon and four smaller galleys, which seem to have come from the four corners of the earth. For more than two hours the adversaries exchanged fire, but the Spanish galleon prevailed like a ‘very strong rock,’ according to one observer. In the distance a Spanish castle adorned with images of saints, the Virgin, and a lion clutching a cross towered over the scene. So too, did a church dedicated to Spain’s patron, Santiago, that had been richly decorated with gold and rose-damask banners for the Easter celebration.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁶ Dandelelet, 110.

Protected by the galleon, a dawn procession celebrating the Resurrection was leaving the church, led by a choir of twenty-four members who preceded a priest carrying a consecrated Host. A group of high-ranking Spaniards, including the Spanish ambassador, the archdeacon of Calatrava, and a canon of the cathedral of Toledo, also accompanied the Host, which was covered with a richly embroidered baldachin. A large crowd surrounded the heart of the procession, and another seven choirs of twenty-four musicians each sang songs of praise from various points along the path.

From the church the worshippers proceeded to an elaborate theatrical construction decorated with angels and harps, verses of Scripture celebrating the Resurrection, and a life-sized statue of the resurrected Christ. Fireworks were set off from various windows and arches of the Resurrection monument when the sacrament arrived, and afterwards the Procession returned to the church of Santiago for morning prayers, this time accompanied by five hundred torch-carrying members of the Confraternity of the Most Holy Resurrection....⁴⁰⁷

This Easter spectacle was particularly impressive according to one observer, thus deserving a written memorial, but it was not the first.⁴⁰⁸ Since the founding of the confraternity in 1579, its members had hosted an elaborate procession for the city. Spanish galleons, elaborate firework displays and torch-bearing participants seem to be recurring motifs in this procession/celebration in the Piazza Navona, because they appear frequently in the prints commemorating these spectacular productions. [Figs. 90, 91 & 92] This spectacle, like the Milanese *Entierro*, used torchlight, polychrome statuary, and live actors (religious and laypeople) to engage the thousands of Romans and foreign visitors who crowded into the piazza to witness and participate in this religious/political spectacle. This is yet another example of the sort of popular spectacle that parallels Caravaggio's work, with its spotlighting against a dark background, and emotional engagement through use of everyday laypersons. We see many more such examples during the Jubilee.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

3.5.1 Jubilee Year 1600 and Caravaggio's Religious Paintings

Annual performances such as the Spanish confraternity's Easter procession were welcomed events, designed to awe spectators and proclaim the piety of the members of the confraternities who sponsored the spectacles and the far-reaching power of the Catholic Church and its allies. In Rome, such "performance as propaganda" was particularly prolific during the Jubilee festivities, planned well in advance to impress all in attendance—visiting religious and secular officials and the hoards of pilgrims visiting the city's famous churches and relics. Members of these organizations paraded in procession through Rome's streets with floats carrying actors in *tableaux vivants* depicting scenes of Christ's passion and lives of the saints. These street-corner dramas entertained rich and poor alike. Streets were filled with barefoot pilgrims, groups of flagellants, and the poor and crippled parading through the streets. All of these sights against a backdrop of liturgical music and *laude*, filled the streets with an endless variety of entertainment.⁴⁰⁹

As the city was preparing for the Jubilee, Caravaggio was working on his painting, *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, a popular subject for religious theater throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. [Fig 14] Federico della Valle's *Iudit*, which was based on the Judith story, was published in 1600.⁴¹⁰ It may be no coincidence that round this time, when secular entertainments were forbidden by Clement VIII and religious theater were prevalent, Caravaggio's subjects shifted from secular to religious. Miracle and morality plays of old were the primary forms of public entertainment. *Obedience of Abraham, Jacob's Ladder, Penitent*

⁴⁰⁹ Langdon, 162-163.

⁴¹⁰ Mirella Saulini, *Il teatro di un gesuita siciliano – Stefano Tuccio S.J.* (Roma: Bulzone editore, 2002), 68-9. See also Franca Angelini, *Il teatro barocco* (Rome: G. Laterza, 1993), 167-80.

Jonah, and *Judith and Holofernes* were some of the subjects of these performances.⁴¹¹ Caravaggio represented two of the subjects of these religious plays in his paintings: *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (c. 1599) and *Sacrifice of Isaac* (1603) [Figs. 14 & 93].

Unlike the elaborate performances at the courts of Italy's elite, popular theater did not showcase awesome special effects, focusing on the interaction of the characters instead.⁴¹² As a result of the de-emphasis on visual spectacle, the sets for these dramas were modest and spare, consisting of a shallow playing space that could be as simple as a wooden platform carried from a church, resting on trestles in a *piazza*, or fixed to a cart and wheeled through the streets.⁴¹³ Often these stages had a mere curtain as backdrop, usually of a solid color (often a neutral beige or tan), but these stages could also be painted with a simple scene, such as an arch, gate, or other architectural form to frame the scene.⁴¹⁴

Caravaggio undoubtedly saw many of these religious performances and appropriated elements from the many *sacre rappresentazioni* performed at this time. These *sacre rappresentazioni* were the descendants of the complex liturgical feast day liturgies, processions, *tableaux vivants*, elaborate processions and performances of Carnival, and medieval miracle and mystery plays. The *sacre rappresentazioni* originated in Florence during the 1400's. These simple devotions eventually evolved into spectacular events that were held in courts and churches across Italy. During Caravaggio's stay in Rome they could be found in churches such as Il Gesù and the Chiesa Nuova.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹¹ Between 1570 and 1580, the plays of the Jesuit author, Stefano Tuccio, were performed on the stage of the Collegio Romano when all other theaters in Rome were closed down. Herbert Thurston, S.J., *The Holy Year of Jubilee* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1949), 97-101.

⁴¹² Nicoll, 105. Fischer-Lichte, 132.

⁴¹³ Fischer-Lichte, 132.

⁴¹⁴ Also red or black, but far less common. Kernodle, 154-162; Castagno, 59-60.

⁴¹⁵ On theater in Il Gesu see: Bjurström, 99-102. On theater in the Chiesa Nuova see: Langdon, 176.

For Jubilees and other religious holidays, the whole community was involved in the preparations of these popular religious performances. Local congregations, confraternities, and wealthy families sponsoring these events looked to local carpenters, seamstresses, artist, and architects to assist in the costume and set designs. Raphael and Bernini are known to have created theatrical scenery for some spectacles in Rome. It is possible that Caravaggio also was asked to lend his talents. While doing such work would today be surprising, one must remember the status of the artist was not what we think of it now. Artists were members of the same guild as the embroiderers and mask-makers.⁴¹⁶ Numerous special effects were invented to make everything appear “real.” To accomplish the desired level of realism, the skills of an artist such as Caravaggio would be helpful. Odd jobs such as painting simple backdrops or props would have supplied the young artist with supplemental income. Although occasionally professional actors were used in these performances, most often parishioners of the local churches represented many of the roles.⁴¹⁷ Caravaggio’s circle had a close association with the Oratory of St. Philip Neri which, like many of the confraternities and churches, sponsored theatrical performances.⁴¹⁸ Langdon notes that Cavalieri’s *Rappresentazione di Anima e di Corpo*, staged at the Chiesa Nuova on 6 January 1600, is of particular interest because young men played the personifications of Pleasure, the World, the Body, and the Soul. “The Body” character shed off his worldly finery which included a gold chain and feathered hat, a costume similar to that of the youth in Caravaggio’s *Gypsy Fortuneteller*, *Cardsharps*, and *Calling of Saint Matthew*.⁴¹⁹ [Figs. 87, 94 & 20]

⁴¹⁶ Partner, 92-3.

⁴¹⁷ Megan Holmes, *Fra Filippo Lippi: The Carmelite Painter* (London: Yale University Press, 1999), 51-52.

⁴¹⁸ Langdon, 176.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Although Roman confraternities were the ones most frequently seen parading through the city's streets, religious organizations from other regions also processed into the eternal City. Langdon describes one from Folino, which entered the city with "300 flaming torches, with floats on which showed boys dressed as angels with instruments of the Passion, followed by floats on which they performed *tableaux vivants* of the mysteries of the Passion of the Christ."⁴²⁰ Many other fraternities paraded in procession through Rome's streets with floats carrying actors in *tableaux vivants* or with polychrome statues such as the Resurrected Christ featured in the Easter procession held in the Piazza Navona. These *tableaux*, like the Milanese *Entierro*, depicted scenes of Christ's passion and lives of the saints. These street-corner dramas entertained the rich and poor alike. If the players in the officially-sponsored performances were not satisfactory for Caravaggio's staged realism, the streets were filled with living "actors" who could equally move the viewer—barefoot pilgrims, groups of flagellants disciplining themselves, and the poor and crippled begging for charity. Caravaggio witnessed all of these sights, and was possibly affected by them, because his painting at that time was turning more to religious themes.⁴²¹

3.5.2 The Spectacle of Ritualized Violence

Besides the typical devotional excitement accompanying the Jubilee, the years 1599 and 1600 saw sinister dramas played out in the city squares—public executions.⁴²² As if the *sacre rappresentazioni* and processions were insufficient warning of the dangers of sin, the executions

⁴²⁰ Langdon, 163.

⁴²¹ Langdon, 163-168.

⁴²² Langdon, 160-162.

were carefully choreographed events that drew techniques from theater to emphasize the dramatic impact of the horrific event and serve as a warning to all.⁴²³ In turn, the popularity of these punishments as a ghastly form of public entertainment made them a popular subject for secular and religious drama. Even as early as the Middle Ages sophisticated devices were created for staged martyrdom scenes.⁴²⁴ [Fig. 95] By Caravaggio's day, the technological advances in theater allowed set designers to build complex machinery to present martyrdom and execution scenes in startlingly realistic detail.⁴²⁵ [Fig. 18] The need for naturalism continued throughout the century. One performance presents a scene in which a person falls to his death. To achieve a realistic effect, a dummy was made and filled with blood, meat, and bones to give a gruesome "splat" at the climactic moment. The scene became all the more realistic when the stray dogs from the street jumped on stage and began tearing at the carefully constructed "corpse."⁴²⁶ Both real executions and their theatrical derivatives may have influenced Caravaggio, who painted scenes of death and torture with unflinching realism.⁴²⁷ [Figs. 2, 7, 14 & 93] As in the case of ancient Rome, the Roman public was often desensitized to these routine atrocities in the public squares, but the case of Beatrice Cenci was an exception.⁴²⁸

In January 1599, Beatrice, Lucrezia, Giacomo, and Olimpio Cenci were arrested, tortured, and tried for the premeditated murder of Francesco Cenci, the tyrannical head of the

⁴²³ Jean S. Weisz, *Pittura e Misericordia: The Oratory of S. Giovanni Decollato in Rome*. (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1984) .

⁴²⁴ See also: John Varriano, *Caravaggio*, 73-84; Squarzina, 89-101.

⁴²⁵ Squarzina, 96.

⁴²⁶ This was for the 1640 staging of *Elias Propheta* at Graz. William McCabe, S. J., *The Jesuit Theater*, ed. Louis J. Oldani, S.J. (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1983), 62.

⁴²⁷ On Caravaggio's depictions of violence, see: Varriano, *Caravaggio*, 73-84.

⁴²⁸ A few executions, however, did outrage the public. Beatrice Cenci and her mother were beheaded and her brother drawn and quartered for the murder of their abusive father. So great was the public outrage over Beatrice's death, that she was sculpted and painted and the tale of her death was written into dramas much like the mystery plays of old. Langdon, 160-162. See also: Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 45; Varriano, *Caravaggio*, 73-84.

family.⁴²⁹ Although the public sympathized with the Cenci and prayed for the Pope Clement VIII's mercy, the family was put to death at the Piazza di Ponte Sant'Angelo on 11 Sept 1599.

One observer wrote:

This morning [there was] a terrible spectacle. They publicly beheaded a mother and a daughter of singular beauty, while a son had his flesh torn from his living body....A younger son was present on the scaffold, and watched the deaths....⁴³⁰

Reports show that the Roman people were unusually moved by this horror, some describing Beatrice as having died in a "most saintly fashion."⁴³¹ Descriptions say that her severed head was crowned with flowers as it was displayed on the torch-lit bier in the piazza.

In Caravaggio's *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, the artist seems to show a beautiful young woman getting her revenge on a male oppressor. Judith's story was a popular subject for drama, as was that of Beatrice Cenci in subsequent centuries. Judith, instead of receiving capital punishment, was lauded for her heroic bravery in destroying an evil man. Could this painting be Caravaggio's comment on the Cenci affair? Caravaggio had easy access to the Judith narrative because *Rappresentazione di Judith Hebraea* (1518) by Stefano Tuccio was reprinted and staged in Rome for the Jubilee of 1600.⁴³² Although the Judith story was available through the performance and may have been a source of Caravaggio's characters, the graphic nature of the beheading was most likely inspired by the executions in the Roman *piazze*.

⁴²⁹ Langdon, 160-61.

⁴³⁰ Letter of Luigi Vendenghini to his mother as quoted in Langdon, 161.

⁴³¹ Langdon, 162 (from a letter from Francesco Maria Vialardi to the Grand Duke of Tuscany Ferdinando de' Medici).

⁴³² Langdon, 167.

Alfred Moir describes the *Judith and Holofernes* as Caravaggio's first portraying "serious violent action."⁴³³ The dramatic light from the upper left illuminates the horrific scene. The figures are set in a very shallow space with almost no description of the background other than the blood-red curtain that indicates an interior space. Caravaggio chose to represent the climactic moment when Judith is in the process of beheading Holofernes, a seldom depicted scene of the story.⁴³⁴ Most depictions show her afterward, when she holds up the head in victory. Caravaggio depiction of the action leaves nothing to the imagination; the blood spurts from the gaping neck, the victim screams breathlessly, and Judith (with God's help) guides the blade as it passes through the last bit of flesh.

In 1600, after seven years of confinement and torture for writings that were considered heretical, Giordano Bruno, a former Dominican priest, was executed in the Campo dei Fiori. His one known play, *Il Candelaio*, lampooned the clergy and mocked local religious tradition.⁴³⁵ His controversial religious views brought him to the attention of religious officials in Rome where, after years of imprisonment, Bruno was publicly executed in a public spectacle staged by the Church as a display of power and as a warning to those who question Catholic doctrine.

Bruno's philosophical writings demonstrated his pantheistic view of the universe, which had, not the earth, but the sun as its center. To prevent the spread of similar radical ideas, Bruno had to die in a public way, cast as a villain and enemy of the Church. Executions were carefully choreographed to maximize its emotional impact.⁴³⁶ No special effects of any *tableau vivant* or *sacra rappresentazione* could serve as a better warning than the smell of charred flesh or the

⁴³³ Moir, 70.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁵ This play, set in Naples, will be discussed in the following chapter on theater in southern Italy.

⁴³⁶ For the public ritual of execution and the Confraternity of San Giovanni Decollato in Rome, see: Weisz, 1984.

sounds of human suffering.⁴³⁷ Here, the stage was the Roman *piazza* and the players were real people playing their roles—unrepentant criminal, executioner, and angry crowd. In these highly ritualized executions, the world was a stage. Although dramatists and stage designer attempted to create realistic-looking martyrdom scenes, no staged death could compare with a real execution, a horrible image that would be etched in one’s mind forever.

3.5.3 Jesuit Performances in Rome

Often secular entertainments were closed during the Holy, because they were seen as morally corrupting, but this suppression of depended on the whims of the individual pope. In the years when secular theater was permitted, religious dramas were performed as an alternative to the secular divertissements. One of the most popular of these religious entertainments was the Jesuit drama, performed at Jesuit colleges and schools, which featured student actors. Although appearing decades earlier in Messina, Jesuit dramas were first performed in Rome around 1565 at the German College and the Roman College.⁴³⁸ The performances were first conceived as wholesome entertainment, but soon after the plays developed a life of their own as a means of instruction in rhetoric and religious values. When the Vatican saw the didactic value of these dramas, they were used to entertain and teach the general public. Between 1570 and 1580, the plays of the Jesuit author, Stefano Tuccio, were performed on the stage of the Collegio Romano when all other theaters in Rome were closed.⁴³⁹ Likewise, during the Jubilee of 1600 Clement VIII banned secular entertainments; this was the same time that Caravaggio’s painting subjects

⁴³⁷ A “metal gag used on those who insulted God was applied to Bruno. It had two blades, one against the tongue, the other against the palate.” O’Grady, Desmond, *Rome Reshaped: Jubilees 1300-2000* (Victoria, Australia: Aurora Books, 1999), 98.

⁴³⁸ The first play documented at a Jesuit school was at the Collegio Marnertino in Messina in 1551. See: W. H. McCabe, S.J. “Jesuit Theatre” (Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967, 7, 893)

⁴³⁹ Thurston, 97-101.

were moving toward religious themes and his lighting was becoming more focused and artificial-looking. Both Tuccio's *Flavia* and *Rappresentazione di Judith Hebraea* were performed, since he was one of Clement VIII's favorite playwrights.⁴⁴⁰ This was around the same time that Caravaggio was painting his *Judith and Holofernes*.

Although theater was still condemned by many church leaders, religious theater was viewed by others as an effective means to entertain the public while teaching good morals and Catholic doctrine. This positive view of performance was fostered by the Jesuits' use of drama in their schools and colleges. Since the order was founded by Saint Ignatius Loyola in 1534, it promoted Catholic reform within Christian nations, preaching the Gospel in foreign lands, and converting Protestants in "misguided" regions of Europe. As the didactic value of religious drama was well known by this time, it played a central part in the Jesuits' education of both clergy and laypeople in Europe, the New World, and the Far East.⁴⁴¹ At the order's colleges, the students' participation in religious dramas was part of a well-rounded education.

The *Ratio Studiorum* ("Plan of Studies") published in 1586, set down the goals for Jesuit education and the means for achieving them. The lessons and activities of the colleges were to help the students attain "perfect eloquence," i.e., the cultivation of one's intellectual, ethical, and spiritual potential.⁴⁴² Theatrical performance served as a grammatical and rhetorical exercise, while providing the student with an example of moral living and exposure to Catholic doctrine.⁴⁴³ This didactic application of theater falls in line with Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual*

⁴⁴⁰ It is said that the pope tore a piece of the deceased Tuccio's clothing as a relic because of the many souls that had been converted after watching his plays. Langdon, 163.

⁴⁴¹ On Baroque Jesuit theater see: Bjurström, 99-110.

⁴⁴² Richard Curry, S.J., "Philosophy of Theatre Education for the Disabled" (Ph.D. diss., NYU, 1986), 19. As quoted in: Timothy S. Valentine. "Moral Education and Inspiration through Theatre." http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/EPS/PES-Yearbook/96_docs/valentine.html.

⁴⁴³ William V. Bangert, *History of the Society of Jesus* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1972), 73.

Exercises, which instructs the believer to use all of the senses to create imaginary spaces in which one could mentally interact with biblical personages. The stage sets of these dramas provided a tangible, physical manifestation of these “mental” spaces and make Ignatius’ *Exercises* available to all, regardless of class or level of education. Popular drama was loved by all classes. The development of the Jesuit drama and other religious theater was often to compete with secular performances, these performances—not only the bawdy plays performed in the city’s *piazze*, but those also found in the *sale* of Roman *palazzi*

3.5.4 Dramatic Performances in Roman Palaces

As described in my discussion of the *Chinea*, spectacle and ceremony were part of Roman aristocratic life. Often these events included entertainments hosted at Roman palaces. Out of curiosity, the public gathered outside the palaces to see the richly dressed guests and their beautiful carriages and possibly partake of free food and wine offered to the public—as was the case for the *Chinea* festivities in the seventeenth century. Musicians and acting troupes were often employed at these gatherings to entertain the guests and impress visitors with the cultural sophistication of their host. These performances became increasingly popular during the seventeenth century. During Carnevale of 1678, some 130 comedies took place in private houses.⁴⁴⁴

The rooms that the performers used in the Roman *palazzi* were the anterooms or *sale*. The size of the room determined the numbers of spectators and this could vary greatly, from an

⁴⁴⁴ Patricia Waddy, *Seventeenth-Century Roman Palaces: Use and the Art of the Plan* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1990), 57. See also: Alessandro Ademollo, *Teatri di Roma nel secolo decimosettimo* (Rome, 1888).

intimate gathering to one with an audience in the hundreds.⁴⁴⁵ The performance space in the palazzo often had no architectural features that distinguished it as a theater. The space simply had to be large enough to hold the sets, performers, and audience. After the performance, all was dismantled and the room put back into its original arrangement. The performances could be of a religious nature. Recall the performance mentioned to Borromeo in 1584, containing profane episodes and buffoonery that “openly inspire deprivations of behavior” and scenes featuring a *negromante*. This was performed in the house of a cardinal and in the presence of other church officials.⁴⁴⁶ Other theatrical forms performed in Roman palaces were tragedies, pastorals, and improvisational *commedia dell’arte* performances, which I discuss at length later in this chapter. One culturally astute prelate with whom Caravaggio was familiar was Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte, adviser to Cardinal Ferdinando de’Medici (later to become Grand Duke), who, like Del Monte, was patron of the arts and a lover of the theater.⁴⁴⁷

3.5.4.1 Cardinal Francesca Maria del Monte

Cardinal del Monte was one of Caravaggio’s most important early patrons, with whom the young artist lived in the Palazzo Madama from around 1595 to 1601. That same year Cardinal del Monte and Cardinal Paleotti (whose treatise on religious art had been published in Latin in 1594) were named co-directors of the Accademia di San Luca after Del Monte’s friend, Cardinal Federico Borromeo was made archbishop and returned to northern Italy.⁴⁴⁸ The palazzo was of

⁴⁴⁵ Waddy, 57.

⁴⁴⁶ See: Canosa, 73 and Bernardi and Cascetta, 234.

⁴⁴⁷ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 86.

⁴⁴⁸ Langdon, 103 Also see, Zygmunt Ważbiński, *Il cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, 2 vols., (Florence: Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1994), 240.

considerable size, almost ninety by sixty meters and had a typical arrangement.⁴⁴⁹ The cardinal loved music and had been planning a *salone* for music since he took residence there from 1589.

He was an avid collector of books, science, musical instruments, oriental carpets and art.⁴⁵⁰

Helen Langdon describes the cultural environment at the Del Monte household:

Del Monte was in touch with poets and men of letters, with musicians and singers, such as Emilio de' Cavalieri and Girolamo Mei, with connoisseurs and men of letters, among them Battista Guarini, whom Del Monte had known in Florence, and who was to make a brief visit to Rome in 1600, and the writer of emblems, Cesare Ripa, who was to dedicate the second Roman edition of his *Iconologia* to Del Monte in 1603, and the doctor, biographer and connoisseur, Giuilo Mancini; he knew scientists such as Johann Faber and Federico Cesi and his distinguished brother Giudobaldo; he corresponded with Galileo; he was in touch with such celebrated antiquarians and bibliophiles as Fulvio Orsini, then in the service of the Farnese.⁴⁵¹

Del Monte's palace was well placed in the city's cultural center, near the popular Piazza Navona. In that neighborhood resided many wealthy and influential collectors and connoisseurs. The cardinal's closest friend was Cardinal Alessandro Montalto, nephew of Sixtus V Peretti. Cardinal Montalto lived nearby at the Palazzo della Cancelleria, in which he hosted cultural events such as musical performances. Cardinal Cinzio Passeri Aldobrandini (papal nephew of Clement VIII) is also known to have hosted cultural events. In one such gathering, there was a contest between Torquato Tasso, Isabella Andreini (poet and *commedia dell'arte* actress), and the cardinal's other guests.⁴⁵²

⁴⁴⁹ Langdon, 96.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵¹ Langdon, 97-8.

⁴⁵² Francesco Bartoli, *Notizie istoriche*, 1782, vol. I, 31-4) As trans. in Richards and Richards, 224.

Finding herself [Isabella Andreini] in Rome, this virtuous actress not only had her portrait painted but was crowned with laurel on a decorated bust between Tasso and Petrarch: following a banquet offered to her by the very eminent cardinal Cinthio [Cinzio] Aldobrandini, great patron of the virtues, where guests were six very knowledgeable cardinals...Tasso, ...and other most illustrious poets, in magnificent competition with them in writing and improvising sonnets Andreini wittily came out best, after only the great Torquato himself. But because in her the strong desire was...to leave after death an immortal reputation, not satisfied with having published work, under the patronage of the very eminent Aldobrandini she began to compose her Lettere,those letters which are adorned by the most beautiful flowers of rhetoric, a vigorous philosophy and witty sayings....⁴⁵³

This account not only gives a sense of the types of cultural activities these Roman elites enjoyed, it also shows the growing popularity of secular theater, especially *commedia dell'arte* among the elite class.

The gracious Isabella, decoration of the stage, an ornament of the theatres, a superb spectacle no less of virtue than of beauty, has herself distinguished her profession that, while the world lasts, while the years remain, while the prevailing orders and times survive, every voice, every tongue, every cry, will echo the celebrated name of Isabella.⁴⁵⁴

The case of Isabella Andreini and the *commedia dell'arte* are examples of a theatrical form's influence having "trickled up" from the rough-hewn platform stages of the charlatan in the *piazze* to the elegant *sale* of Roman *palazzi*. The "disreputable profession" of the actor came to be embraced by the literary stars and the powerful religious across Europe. Humble street theater had become part of the cultured Italian life in which art-lovers such as Cardinal Del Monte's circle, including Cardinals Alessandro Montalto and Pietro Aldobrandini (papal nephew

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁴ Garzoni, *La Piazza universale*, 1595 ed., 738; as translated in Richards and Richards, 225.

and cousin of aforementioned Cinzio), eagerly participated.⁴⁵⁵ The Del Monte circle brought Caravaggio many collectors and enthusiastic supporters, one of whom was Vincenzo Giustiniani.

3.5.4.2 Vincenzo Giustiniani

Across the street and opposite the church of San Luigi dei Francesi, where Caravaggio painted his well-received St. Matthew series, was the imposing Palazzo Giustiniani, owned by the family of the wealthy Genoese nobleman Giuseppe Giustiniani, who once ruled the island of Chios. In 1586, Benedetto became Treasurer of the Apostolic Camera and was made a cardinal. His younger brother Vincenzo was a wealthy banker who, like Del Monte and Montalto, enjoyed music and collecting art.⁴⁵⁶

After the early paintings depicting the street-wise *Gypsy Fortuneteller* (1595-6) and the *Cardsharps* (1595-6), Caravaggio painted two paintings of young boys playing musical instruments, *The Musicians* (1595-6) and *The Lute Player* (1595-6), that show the artist's exposure to the rich musical culture of Rome during that time. [Figs. 96 & 97] Music was both part of the private lives of Roman citizens and part of Rome's spiritual life. The Oratorians had spiritual *laudi* performed at their church and commissioned Palestrina and Tomas [Tommaso] Luís della Vittoria to produce musical compositions. Since many of Caravaggio's patrons had social connections with the Oratory, it is likely that Caravaggio attended some of these musical

⁴⁵⁵ Langdon, 99.

⁴⁵⁶ Not too far away from Palazzo Giustiniani, in the area around Sant' Andrea della Valle, was the home of another of Caravaggio's future patrons, Ottavio Costa. Just beyond Palazzo Giustiniani in Palazzo Crescenzi, lived an important Roman family who was closely involved with St. Philip Neri's Oratory (where Caravaggio would paint his *Deposition* altarpiece). On the ground floor of the palace, Giovanni Battista Crescenzi ran a private academy for the practice of *virtù*, thus promoting the arts and sciences. Langdon, 99-102.

performances. Although sacred music was popular with many in Caravaggio's social circle, a survey of his early paintings shows that secular music had the strongest impact on his work. While the madrigal had been popular earlier in the century, there was a renewed interest in madrigal accompaniments to the verse of Tasso, pastorals of Guarini, and the erotic poems of Marino.⁴⁵⁷

The emphasis was now on emotional intensity, and on an increasing virtuosity, and the nobleman amateur yielded to the professional performer. Music played a role, too, in the then popular pastoral play, in which courtiers themselves took part, seeking relief from the intrigues and sophistication of worldly life in the feigned simplicity of a rural Arcadia, where shepherds and shepherdesses sang, with great poignancy, of the passing of a Golden Age and the pain of lost love.⁴⁵⁸

Del Monte wrote to Ferdinando de' Medici, "Today Montalto was here for a time in this house, where I have set aside a room for harpsichords, Guitars, a Chitarrone and other instruments, and he has taken such a liking to it, that he says that he will be good enough to favour me with frequent visits, and come dine with me."⁴⁵⁹ In Florence, Del Monte and Montalto, along with Ferdinando de' Medici, saw many performances: Cavalieri's *Blind Man's Bluff* (*Il Gioco della Cieca*) and two separate performances of Guarini's *Il Pastor Fido*, in 1595 and 1599.⁴⁶⁰ In 1628, Vincenzo Giustiniani wrote his *Discorso sopra la Musica* and nostalgically describes the music scene in Rome during the 1580's and 90's. Cardinal Ferdinando de' Medici was praised for his patronage of excellent musicians and singers. Giulio Caccini was mentioned for his ability to sing with great feeling, yet clearly enough for the words

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 105

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid*.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 107. See also: Ważbiński, 137-8.

⁴⁶⁰ Langdon, 107.

to be easily heard.⁴⁶¹ Cardinals Del Monte and Montalto both sang and played musical instruments—Montalto singing with a scratchy voice and Del Monte singing in the Spanish style while accompanying himself on the guitar.⁴⁶² This was the rich cultural environment in which Caravaggio lived for several influential years. The artist’s early paintings may be those that most directly capture the types of performances that he saw in elite Roman households and possibly participated in while living at Palazzo Madama. [Figs. 96 & 97]

3.6 COSTUMES AND CHARACTERS

3.6.1 “Classical” Attire and Beautiful Boys

In Caravaggio’s *the Musicians*, *the Luteplayer*, and *Bacchus*, the artist depicts characters in pseudo-classical roles, wearing clothing that evokes that of the ancients. [Figs. 96, 97 & 98] These classically-inspired paintings are the earliest in Caravaggio’s *oeuvre*, mostly painted before or during the early years when he lived with Cardinal Del Monte.⁴⁶³ One of the first of the paintings completed while living in the Del Monte household, *the Musicians*, shows four beautiful young boys dressed as musicians and Cupid. [Fig. 96]

This is one of eight paintings described as having a “vague Classical allusion” due to the attire of the “youths wearing shirts loosely swathed in an unrealistic way.”⁴⁶⁴ Numerous

⁴⁶¹ Vincenzo Giustiniani, *Discorso sopra la Musica*, trans. Carol MacClintock *Musicological Studies and Documents 9* (Middleton, WI: American Institute of Musicology, 1962), 67 and 80. He also had a daughter, Francesca, who was a great singer at the Medici court in Florence.

⁴⁶² Langdon, 105-8.

⁴⁶³ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 86.

⁴⁶⁴ Creighton E. Gilbert, *Caravaggio and His Two Cardinals* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 114.

descriptions of this work emphasize the nudity of the figures and some go so far as to call it perversity. Creighton Gilbert, however, in *Caravaggio and His Two Cardinals* argued:

This is puzzling because not one of the musicians is even semi-nude, unless this refers to their legs being bare from the knees down. The central figure is wrapped in a long-sleeved shirt, sashed at the waist, under a heavy cloak that falls from one shoulder over the whole body. The next most visible figure, seen from the back in the foreground, is without a cloak but has the same shirt and sash; one shoulder and the adjacent part of the upper back are bare, and that triangle of skin seems to be the basis for “sensual nudity....”⁴⁶⁵

The assumption that this attire was at all scandalous seems ludicrous considering the popularity of nudes during the Renaissance. As in painting, much care was taken to portray nudity convincingly in the theatrical performances of the day.⁴⁶⁶ The white garb of the musicians in Caravaggio’s painting covers more than it reveals. The way the toga effect is achieved in Caravaggio’s paintings also points to theatrical practice of the day, for they are not made of a rectangular cloth. Costume historian Stella Mary Pierce explained that the painting shows:

...ordinary modern shirts, with the empty sleeve tucked in and the fastenings hidden. The youths are producing a classical effect with the limited resources of their wardrobe, like amateur actors doing a classical drama. . . .Caravaggio bases the noble in the real. In the process, he changes allegories into modern performers, which means replacing females with males, as almost all performers were.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 119.

⁴⁶⁶ Nagler, 62.

⁴⁶⁷ Stella Mary Pierce, “Costumes in Caravaggio’s Painting,” *Magazine of Art*, 1953, 147-154, as quoted in Creighton E. Gilbert, *Caravaggio and His Two Cardinals*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995. 119.

While these figures were possible allusions to classical Rome, they serve as evidence of contemporary performances sponsored by Roman humanists such as Del Monte. Nudity, especially in youths, can be startling by today's standards, but during Caravaggio's day "revealing" togas would have been no more shocking than sixteen-year-old boys dressed as a group of "naked" muses riding mechanical clouds at a Medici theater festival. Caravaggio's use of makeshift togas in his early paintings paralleled that of the Medici festival and other amateur performances hosted in elite households—possibly those of Del Monte.⁴⁶⁸

Caravaggio's *Luteplayer* [Fig. 97] also shows a beautiful musician. Most have identified the model as male. In 1672, however, the early art critic Giovanni Pietro Bellori described the lute player as a woman in a blouse.⁴⁶⁹ The "blouse" that the youth wears is similar to that of the central figure of the *Musicians*. In fact, it has been suggested that they are the same model.⁴⁷⁰ Some scholars identify this rather effeminate creature as the Spanish castrato, Pedro Montoya, who, from 1592, lived with Del Monte and sang in the Sistine choir.⁴⁷¹ The physical development of the youth as a result of the castration "procedure" might explain his curiously delicate features.⁴⁷² Caravaggio may have painted Montoya because the singer was an honored guest at the Del Monte household or because Caravaggio wanted to "recreate" a performance that commonly took place at Palazzo Madama.

⁴⁶⁸ Caravaggio's inclusion of Cupid with the group of young musicians seems to give the painting a more allegorical meaning. Music and Love were frequently paired in paintings in Italy and the north. One interpretation is that the painting represents *Concordia discors*. Here the figures represent: Cupid with the grapes (intoxication), the shawm player (irrational experience), the boy with the sheet music (reason discovering harmony), and the central musician (*Concordia*), who creates "a harmonious conjunction of these three aspects of human experience." Moir, 54.

⁴⁶⁹ Giovanni Pietro Bellori, *Le vite de' pittori, scultori e architetti moderni* (Turin: Evalina Borea, 1976), as quoted in Howard Hibbard, 363.

⁴⁷⁰ Moir, 54.

⁴⁷¹ Langdon, 108-9 see also K. Christiansen, *A Caravaggio Rediscovered: The Luteplayer* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1990), 46

⁴⁷² For information on the castrato, see: Patrick Barbier, *The World of the Castrato: The History of an extraordinary Operatic Phenomenon*, trans. Margaret Crosland (London: Souvenir Press, 1996), 13-21.

Another of Caravaggio's characters wears the improvised toga typical of amateur actors—the protagonist from his *Sick Bacchus*. [Fig. 98] Many scholars believe that this is a self-portrait. Giovanni Baglione, artist and contemporary of Caravaggio, wrote that, after Caravaggio left Giuseppe Cesari d'Arpino's studio, he was forced to use a mirror and paint self-portraits because he could not afford to pay a model. In this painting, a white shirt has once again been twisted and tucked to resemble an antique toga. Not only does Caravaggio repeatedly use the white blouses to create makeshift togas and costumes for the characters, he also gives an androgynous quality to each of these figures (although somewhat less so in his self-portrait as Bacchus).⁴⁷³ This androgyny seems to relate more to a type of classically-inspired performance than to a portrait of an individual in “classical” attire. Although Caravaggio may have depicted the Del Monte musical performances, he may also looked to theater because androgynous characters and cross-dressing were frequently found in theater.

3.6.2 Men Playing Women in Theatrical Performances

The androgynous depiction of youths in Caravaggio's paintings may seem unusual today and often has been cited as evidence for Caravaggio's or Del Monte's homosexuality.⁴⁷⁴ Such a thesis, unfortunately, involves stringing together a series of subjective claims. I will pursue a less ambitious thesis that makes no assumptions about their sexual orientation or its might expression in art. Instead, I explore gender “roles” in the theater of *cinquecento* and *seicento*

⁴⁷³ Caravaggio possibly wanted to represent himself as an artist who has become the embodiment of the “artist divine,” that is one who has become drunk with artistic passion. On Caravaggio's “Divine madness” and artistic creativity, see: Moffitt, 111-141.

⁴⁷⁴ Gilbert, 191-215. In the chapter, “Reports on Sexuality,” explores some of the theories surrounding the possibility that both Caravaggio and Cardinal Del Monte were homosexual. See also: Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 87-88, 151-160, 258-259; Moffitt, 160-86.

Italy and suggest another possible explanation for the “effeminate” boys in Caravaggio’s paintings. These androgynous youths resemble the male actors who assumed female roles in theatrical performances of the day. But as is the case today, conservatives found problems with actors and their risqué profession. A Milanese father complained to Cardinal Borromeo, Milan, 3 May 1572:

Is it not possible for Your Illustrious Lordship, who has banished and expunged from the city of Milan all evil and loose conduct, rather as a farmer eradicated thorns and weeds from an orchard, to eliminate too the terrible virus of those abominable and pernicious comedies given here each year to so much scandal, and which set a bad example to all who hear them?...these infamous mummings portray on their stage such vulgarities and lewdnesses, women dressing as men, and boys as women, that I nigh blush as I write this and my notepaper near trembles seeing as it must come into the hands of Your Illustrious Lordship, whom I humbly beg to no longer close your eyes to this plague, but to drive it so far away that one cannot whiff the smell of it....⁴⁷⁵

Although this account was from Milan, similar anti-theatrical sentiments were found in Rome, most often dependent on a particular pope’s literary leanings. These troupes, which made their living travelling from city to city, performed the same plays in Rome, Venice or Paris. This letter shows that cross-dressing and gender-swapping roles were frequent in the theater. This had become a common plot twist in commedia dell’arte scenarios, traces of which can later be found in Shakespeare’s works. Men were forced into cross-dressing during the early years because women were not permitted to act. It was only in the mid 1500’s that a few women began to appear on stage.⁴⁷⁶ Most acting troupes, however, were all-male companies—a tradition that

⁴⁷⁵ From Castiglione, *Sentimenti di S. Carlo Borromeo*, 1759, 63-4 as quoted in Richards and Richards, 248.

⁴⁷⁶ Another interesting fact that may explain another side to the cross-dressing anxiety is the habit of prostitutes to dress in men’s clothing “either for reasons of sexual provocation or to avoid the attentions of the police.” Partner, 99.

can be traced back to the ancient Romans and Greeks.⁴⁷⁷ Renaissance theater looked to antiquity for models for their dramas. Many of these classically inspired dramas were performed in the colleges by the students. These “classical” plays were often “Christianized” to give moral examples describing how to live honorably.⁴⁷⁸ Because all of the students were men, male actors played the female roles. Cross-dressing also appeared at court entertainments where men or boys also played female roles; the Medici theater festival was no exception.

At the Medici festivals, actors wore carefully sewn leather costumes to give an illusion of nudity.⁴⁷⁹ In one classically-inspired *intermezzo* of 1586, “the goddesses displayed their breasts, insofar as this could be reconciled with their mythological reputations. Cupid and Pleasure were portrayed by handsome boys feigning nudity in leather skin coverings.”⁴⁸⁰ Except for a few major female singing parts, all of the actors were men. Sketches and paintings have documented these theatrical spectacles. In 1589, for the second *intermezzo* for *La Pellegrina*, “The Contest of the Pierides and the Muses,” sixteen muses carried instruments and wore classical-style costumes.⁴⁸¹ The muses wore masks and were played by boys ranging in age from fifteen to twenty-three, fitted with papier-mâché breasts and chests.⁴⁸² Caravaggio may have heard about these performances from Del Monte, who frequently attended spectacles hosted by his protector, Ferdinando de’ Medici and other theater-lovers in Rome.

⁴⁷⁷ Brockett, 25.

⁴⁷⁸ “...una rilettura cristiana della storia profana, proprio come nella tragedia gesuitica...Il fine della tragedia gesuitica come dalla rappresentazione pittorica era sempre morale, ma ora gli *exempla* servirono non solo alla purificazione degli affetti, ma per dimostrare ‘l’instabilità della fortuna, spaventare con gli esempi, affermare il trionfo della giustizia e fortificare gli animi ai colpi della sventura.’” [...a Christian re-reading of the pagan story, precisely like in the Jesuit tragedy....The aim of the Jesuit like in the pictorial representation was always moral, but now the exemplars serve not only to purify the emotions, but to demonstrate ‘the instability of fortune, to frighten with examples, to affirm the triumph of justice and to fortify the souls to the blows of misfortune.’”] Sebastian Schütze, “Tragedia antica e pittura moderna: alla ricerca di ‘una certa sublime forma di locuzione, la quale penetra, commuove, rapisce gl’animi,’” *Docere Delectare Movere: affetti, devozione e retorica nel linguaggio artistico del primo barocco romano* (Roma: Edizioni De Luca, 1998), 153.

⁴⁷⁹ Nagler, 62.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, 77-78.

Male actors also played female roles in the traveling troupes of the popular theater. While there were some famous female actors during Caravaggio's lifetime, such as Isabella Andreini, many amateur groups had no female actors at all. Female characters were usually played by the young men, but for comic effect older men sometimes played roles such as an old gypsy woman or a withered procuress at a brothel. A print of a *commedia dell'arte* troupe by Giacomo Franco (1610) shows a man dressed in women's clothing playing a lute in the piazza of San Marco in Venice. [Fig. 99] Cross-dressing musicians were a common feature of itinerant popular theater, which traveled throughout Italy and Europe. Caravaggio's choice to depict boys who looked like women was not unusual; in fact, for the quasi-classical performances such as those for the Medici, it was a common practice.

Regarding Caravaggio and Del Monte's sexual orientation, the fact that there were feminine-looking boys performing at the Del Monte residence is not solid proof of their homosexuality. There were theatrical precedents that probably served as models for these elite Roman performances. As in *commedia dell'arte*, Caravaggio's beautiful youths and musicians play lutes, wear revealing toga-like attire, and have rosy-red lips as if wearing makeup. The delicate features and sweet voice of the castrato (possibly Pedro de Montoya) made the scene all the more effective. The androgynous depiction of the male may have been intentional and explain Giovanni Bellori's describing *The Luteplayer* as a woman.⁴⁸³ [Fig. 97]

⁴⁸³ Bellori, *Le vite de' pittori, scultori e architetti moderni*, 363.

3.6.3 *Commedia dell'Arte*

As seen in the previous section, from its humble beginning early in the *cinquecento*, the itinerant *commedia dell'arte* troupe had gained popularity with all classes. Although often condemned by Church officials, the church may have played a role in the rise of popular secular theater. When the Council of Trent's dictates forbade the singing of tropes and dramatic performances during liturgy, drama was forced outside churches and into the city streets and *piazze*.⁴⁸⁴ At this point, the Church could no longer control the form and content of theatrical performance. These independently-sponsored plays were put on by local groups, often employing the talents of local citizens, instead of clergy, to play featured roles. From these humble amateur dramatic performances, professional troupes were founded. In 1545, the first documentary evidence of a professional Italian *commedia dell'arte* troupe appears. *Commedia* would be found throughout Europe by 1600 and remained popular until the eighteenth century.⁴⁸⁵

Both the commoner and the elite embraced the *commedia dell'arte*. Thus, Caravaggio had ample opportunity to see these performances as he traveled throughout the peninsula. These popular dramas were frequently performed outdoors during daylight hours, but if there was an indoor or evening performance, artificial lighting was used.⁴⁸⁶ The actors of these dramas were not highly trained, and were often amateurs who traveled with charlatans selling their wares in the *piazze*. The situations and characters of the plays were often taken from the real-life dramas of the time.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁴ Fischer-Lichte, 33-34.

⁴⁸⁵ Ferrone, 5. Brockett, 143-144.

⁴⁸⁶ Penzel, 3.

⁴⁸⁷ Fischer-Lichte, 132.

3.6.3.1 Scenes of “Everyday Life”

Caravaggio has been describes as having depicted the lower class in their everyday surroundings.⁴⁸⁸ This supposed “slice of life” depiction of the *seicento* Italian has been offered as evidence of Caravaggio’s empathy with the humble poor in Italy.⁴⁸⁹ I will not challenge the view that Caravaggio empathized with the poor, but I question the belief that Caravaggio painted the Italian people as they “really were.” The figures in these paintings seem quite posed, the settings constructed from a few well-selected props, and the costumes contrived from the materials available to him. These are amateur actors playing dress-up in a theatrical *tableau*.

When the control of drama shifted from the Church to secular organizations, there was a simultaneous shift in the characters featured on the stage. Although gods, goddesses, and historical figures continued to be represented in the dramas, as seen in the Medici theater festivals, “common people” appeared more frequently as major characters in both religious and secular plays. This may reflect not only the general humanist attitude popular at the time, which placed mankind in a more elevated position in relation to the cosmos, but also Reformation ideas that had spread to Italy encouraging the public to educate themselves, interpret the Bible themselves, and communicate directly with God.⁴⁹⁰ The *cinquecento* and *seicento* public had a voice, one that was more frequently heard through the characters of literature and staged performance.

In the works of Caravaggio, literature, and theater, the lives of ordinary men and women were considered worthy of representation. In the theater, drama imitated life and the world itself

⁴⁸⁸ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 188.

⁴⁸⁹ Although Hibbard believed Caravaggio to be empathetic to the poor, Hibbard considered Caravaggio’s illegal sword-carrying and his desire to be knighted to be evidence of his desire to elevate his social status. *Ibid*, 261.

⁴⁹⁰ On Reformation thought in Italy see: George Kenneth Brown, *Italy and the Reformation to 1550* (New York: Russell & Russell), 1971, 78-83, 223-239; Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 101-104; Spike, 98-100.

was a large stage upon which mankind plays their various roles, as Leone de' Sommi said in his *Dialogues* (c. 1565).⁴⁹¹

The frequent use of the *theatrum mundi* metaphor and popular theater's use of contemporary people and daily situations in its dramas may have inspired Caravaggio to paint his figures as though they were performing in a drama. Although performances of the upper class featured kings, gods, goddesses, and powerful historical figures, popular drama frequently looked to the lower classes for many of its protagonists. The best-loved characters of the popular street theater were the crafty servants who often tricked their foolish masters, reflecting a growing empathy and identification with humble folk in literature and in drama.⁴⁹² Caravaggio's work follows this trend. He depicted his lower-class figures in their roles on the World Stage and how they were often shown in popular drama.

Although there is no doubt that Caravaggio modeled some of his figures on ordinary Italians, scholars have debated whether his work truly represented "real life" situations. An incident related to his *Fortune-Teller* has been frequently cited to support the argument that Caravaggio preferred the common Roman as painting model over copying figures from masterworks. [Figs. 87 & 100] Bellori stated that Caravaggio saw no need to look to the work of masters for his models; the streets gave him what he needed. To prove his point, he is said to have invited a gypsy from the street to sit in his studio. Bellori indicated that such a genuine gypsy was the model for the *Fortune-Teller*. Catherine Puglisi and Alfred Moir noted that Caravaggio's gypsy girl is too "unexpectedly neat" and "well-scrubbed" to be authentic, but

⁴⁹¹ "...people in their earthly existence behave like actors on a stage. They are cast in tragedies or in comedies, some of them as princes and others as commoners or slaves. They wear a variety of strange and wonderful masks and are called to appear on-stage so that each may represent, as best he can, his appointed character. When the show is over, man is stripped of his borrowed costume and returned to his former, spiritual state. One earns praise or damnation according to the manner in which one has played his role." Levy, 173-174.

⁴⁹² However, this class reversal did not last throughout the duration of the play. True to the rules of comedy, the bad servants were punished and the class hierarchy was restored. Brockett, 126-127, 143-148.

these writers agreed that the costume is genuine—what a gypsy would have worn.⁴⁹³ The linen turban and full-sleeved blouse with the heavy mantle tied at the shoulder had been used in depictions of gypsies since the fifteenth century.⁴⁹⁴ [Figs. 101 & 102]

It has been suggested that Caravaggio's painting may reflect a contemporary issue, the gypsy "problem" that was causing a stir in the city.⁴⁹⁵ The painter may have been using the current controversy to heighten the tension between the characters, which can be sensed in Mancini's 1620 description of the painting, "a gypsy girl . . . telling a youngster's fortune. . . . [She] demonstrates her roguishness by faking a smile as she removes a ring from [his] finger. . . . he, by his naiveté and libidinous, unaware that he is being robbed, smiles at her."⁴⁹⁶ This is as much a warning of the seductive charm of the gypsy as it is a story of the Prodigal Son. The dress of the young man seems more of a theatrical costume than that of real life and the minimal background resembles the solid-colored curtains of the popular street theater. These gaudy costumes did not correspond to popular dress and were possibly even then out of date."⁴⁹⁷ Despite the naturalism of the painting technique, there is a general contrived quality to the scene, which suggests a literary or dramatic source.

This rather light-hearted depiction of a moralistic theme may have appealed to Cardinal del Monte. Alfred Moir attributed the origin of the painting to the "satirical theater."⁴⁹⁸ He compares Caravaggio's work to an engraving from the *commedia dell'arte* in a collection of late sixteenth century prints, called the *Recueil Fossard*. In this print, the youth is a "willing dupe, defrauded no less by his own vanity in wanting to know the future and by his gullibility and

⁴⁹³ Gregori, 215; Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 77-78.

⁴⁹⁴ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 75.

⁴⁹⁵ Todd P. Olson, "The Street Has Its Masters: Caravaggio and the Socially Marginal" in *Caravaggio: Realism, Rebellion, Reception*, ed. Genevieve Warwick (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2006), 69-81.

⁴⁹⁶ Moir, 15 and 52.

⁴⁹⁷ Gregori, 217.

⁴⁹⁸ Moir, 52.

erotic responsiveness than by the gypsy's guile."⁴⁹⁹ The theme continues to be popular and is seen in other images of the *commedia dell'arte*.

Another of Caravaggio's paintings shows the misfortunes of an irresponsible youth, *The Cardsharps*, a work also purchased by Del Monte. [Fig. 94] In fact, the cardinal's "interest in, and protection of, the artist began with the acquisition of this much-copied work."⁵⁰⁰ In this canvas are two youths and a rather unscrupulous-looking older man. Of the two young card players, one wears dark, rich velvet and the other a bright, striped jacket. Standing behind the velvet-clad dandy, the older cheat silently communicates to his accomplice with a hand signal. On his hand he wears a glove with torn fingers which allow him to feel the marked cards. This is not just a pair of opportunistic scoundrels, but men who make a trade of duping foolish youths. For them, cheating is a fine art. The card player, having received the cue from his friend, then reaches behind his back to remove one of a few hidden cards secretly tucked into his belt. The young dandy studies his cards unaware that all his strategy will come to no avail.

The Fortune Teller and the *Cardsharps* were subjects often depicted in paintings showing the adventures of the Prodigal Son of the Bible. The themes of gypsies and card players also were frequent in the scenarios of the *commedia dell'arte*. [Fig. 101, 102 & 103] The *commedia dell'arte*, "which was frequently performed at fairs and in other outdoor locations, drew inspiration from everyday life, freely mirroring its customs and characters while at the same time pursuing a didactic purpose."⁵⁰¹ In a work located in the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota, the *commedia* character Pantaloon is robbed by a gypsy woman. According to Moir, this is the only image in which the gypsy encounter is treated as an isolated event. Moir

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁰ Gregori, 215.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid*

suggested that similar images of *commedia dell'arte* skits possibly inspired Caravaggio to paint the *Fortune Teller*.⁵⁰² Yet the actual *commedia* performances—which were accessible to the general public—may have been better models for Caravaggio and his penchant for naturalism.⁵⁰³ As noted above, Del Monte took Caravaggio into his home after his favorable reception of the painting. It is possible that Del Monte requested Caravaggio to paint the gypsy theme to commemorate a favorite performance.

In 1589, Cardinal Del Monte attended the Medici wedding festivities in Florence.⁵⁰⁴ One of the *intermezzi* for the performance of *La Pellegrina* was a play called *La Zingara* (the Gypsy) by the famous *commedia dell'arte* troupe, the Gelosi.⁵⁰⁵ One of the featured actresses of the Gelosi troupe was Isabella Andreini, the same person who competed with Tasso at the cultural gathering sponsored by Cardinal Del Monte's friend, Cinzo Aldobrandini. The Gelosi was one of the most respected *commedia* troupes and was well-known to the Del Monte/Aldobrandini social circle. It is possible that the artist may have met some of these actors while staying with Del Monte.

Unlike many of the gypsy and card playing scenes of the seventeenth century, Caravaggio's action in the *Fortune Teller* and *The Cardsharps* does not take place in the street or in a tavern but is isolated in a bare, stage-like space furnished with only a table. The viewer's eye has only the human interaction on which to focus—the real drama. This is in accord with Puglisi's suggestion that, because of the elimination of bystanders and the neutral backdrop, the figures appear detached from real life and instead have a staged look that “reflects Caravaggio's recourse to contemporary theatre and the stock characters and situations of the *commedia*

⁵⁰² Moir, 52.

⁵⁰³ Gregori, 215.

⁵⁰⁴ Langdon, 81.

⁵⁰⁵ Nagler, 90.

dell'arte. . . .”⁵⁰⁶ *Commedia* personages included the arrogant, yet foolish, elites and intellectuals and members of the lower class such as jailers, barbers, servants, courtesans, thieves, and gypsies.⁵⁰⁷ It is just this class of city dweller upon which Caravaggio focused, regardless of a secular or religious subject.

3.6.3.2 *Commedia*'s Stock Characters

While the theatrical origins of Caravaggio's gypsies and cardsharps may seem obvious, many of the painter's religious works such as the *Madonna of the Snake*, *Ecce Homo*, and the *Doubting Thomas* also have characters drawn from *commedia*. I focus not on the situations portrayed but the curious facial types and clothing of Caravaggio's models and propose that these originate from the stock characters' masks and costumes of *commedia dell'arte*. Caravaggio did not necessarily paint the *commedia* “masks” actual masks on his models, but he did find models with particular facial features that evoked its personages. He used these familiar characters as a type visual short hand to inform the viewer of the personality and motivations of his figures in much the same way as they did on the popular stage.

In the 1580's, a troupe typically consisted of as many as eleven personages, but there were some character types common to all *commedia* troupes:

...two old men, the Venetian merchant and paterfamilias known as Pantaloon (given the title Magnifico, and sometimes called Cassandro) and the Doctor (that is, a doctor of law, a man of learning); two male servants, called *zanni*; a young

⁵⁰⁶ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 78. Puglisi, unfortunately, did not pursue that thesis much further.

⁵⁰⁷ Lynne Lawner, *Harlequin on the Moon: Commedia dell'Arte and the Visual Arts* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1998), 112.

female servant, often called Columbine, and an older one; and a pair of Lovers. To these could be added a Captain and a few other figures, such as Brighella, who is a scamp (and similar to a *zanni*), but not a servant. Pulcinella, too is of an intermediate status difficult to pinpoint. Harlequin and Pedrolino belong to the servant group.⁵⁰⁸

Each character had a prescribed costume, dialect, and series of gestures to make them immediately recognizable to all. These common elements eliminated the need to develop the characters on stage, because they were already known to the audience. The actors, using only the traditional “mask” associated with their character and a general sketch of the scene (*scenario*), improvised the dialog and action: the Doctor was a blundering self-appointed expert in medicine or law who pontificated in garbled Latin, the handsome Lovers were either naïve or sly in their pursuit of amour, the Captain was a bullying coward, and Pantalone was a meddling old fool who interfered in the love of the youths and was often cuckolded by another more virile male.⁵⁰⁹ As the comic form developed throughout the *cinque-* and *seicento*, each personage took on a particular mask, costume, and dialect.⁵¹⁰

The Innamorata and Her Maid

The *Innamorata* is one of the original *commedia dell'arte* characters. She and her lover are often pitted against the meddling father who tries to keep them apart.⁵¹¹ The Lovers (the *Innamorati*) stood out from the other characters, for they were fashionable, wore no mask, and

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 31.

⁵⁰⁹ Nicoll, 105-113; Fischer-Lichte, 131.

⁵¹⁰ Lawner, 16; Fischer-Lichte, 131.

⁵¹¹ Nicoll, 105-113; Fischer-Lichte, 131.

spoke elegant Tuscan. [Fig. 104] Although the couple spoke eloquently of love and dressed in current fashions, they were the most static of the *commedia* characters. They are often central to the play, however, for they are the characters around whom the story line revolves.⁵¹² Their beauty and elegance make the lower-class characters seem all the more rough and uncultured. The young man (*innamorato*) often sported waist coats and breeches of rich textile, plumed hats, and impressive swords, clothing that is similar to that of the dandies in Caravaggio's paintings. [Figs. 104, 105 & 106] The *innamorata* costumes were even more luxurious, often influencing the local fashion of the regions they visited while on tour. [Fig. 104, 105, 110 & 111]

The dress of the *inamorata* is described as elegant contemporary dress, similar to that found in Caravaggio's paintings. Moir described the artist's Virgin in his *Madonna of the Snake* (*Madonna dei Palafrenieri*) as being from a "prosperous artisan's family, not a costume that evokes the ancient world."⁵¹³ [Fig. 60] The Madonna's worldly appearance may have troubled the artist's patrons, the Confraternity of Grooms in the new St. Peter's. This commission was Caravaggio's most prestigious to date, an opportunity to have his work displayed in the most important church in Rome and a reaffirmation that his bold revolutionary style was as sound as that of the Renaissance masters. Unfortunately, the artist could not enjoy the prestige of this commission for long, because shortly after the painting was hung, the Palafrenieri lost their altar in Saint Peter's. *The Madonna degli Palafrenieri* was removed and taken to the confraternity's church, Sant'Anna dei Palafrenieri, and eventually purchased by Scipione Borghese.⁵¹⁴

Instead of looking to famous Roman painters for inspiration, Caravaggio may have recalled a painting from Milan and added his own theatrical interpretation of the scene. The

⁵¹² Lawner, 55.

⁵¹³ Moir, 104.

⁵¹⁴ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 194-5, 205.

pictorial source for the Virgin and Christ in this work may have been an altarpiece by Ambrogio Figino in the church of San Fedele in Milan.⁵¹⁵ [Fig. 59] The reversal of the composition may be due to the artist's use of an engraving to help his memory.⁵¹⁶ Although the poses are similar and may indeed be a source of reference for the artist, Figino's painting does not answer the question surrounding the unusual attire of the Virgin and St. Anne. Upon closer examination of the pictorial space in Caravaggio's work, we see that the figures are removed from the historical world and are placed on a bare, shallow stage with only a neutral backdrop behind them, suggesting that, once again, the artist looked to the popular stage.

Catherine Puglisi suggests that the atypical dress may have been one reason that the painting was not hung in the church of Sant'Anna after its removal from St. Peter's.⁵¹⁷ Although the composition and poses resemble those of Figino, the costumes are far from those one usually thinks of for the Madonna. Helen Langdon claims that dressing the Madonna in the attire of a "prosperous artisan's family... was traditional in sixteenth-century paintings of the Holy Kinship [Christ's extended family]." Yet the plunging neckline of her dress seems too revealing for an altarpiece.⁵¹⁸ Puglisi suspects that Mary's attire was frowned upon, for the Virgin wears a "contemporary dress of a simple design and fabric, with skirt hitched up for the work at hand, and her stooping pose reveals rather too much breast."⁵¹⁹ One must remember that the *Innamorata* was also to be found in elegant contemporary attire, most notably with a low

⁵¹⁵ According to Moir, the source of the subject is found in an Old Testament passage in which the Virgin (the Catholic Church, the Bride of Christ) joins Christ in crushing the serpent of original sin—which at that time, the stamping out of heresy (Protestantism) could be implied here as well. The subject of the painting is rather unusual. Alfred Moir states, "This is the only surviving painting in which Caravaggio undertook so irredeemably doctrinal and artificial a subject. He translated it into human terms, to bring its theological abstraction to life. Although removed from the historic world, the three figures behave naturally, as if in the intimacy of a prosperous artisan's family." Moir, 104.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 18 and 104.

⁵¹⁷ Puglisi gives an alternate possibility that the offer from Scipione Borghese was such that they could not resist. Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 195.

⁵¹⁸ Langdon, 305-7.

⁵¹⁹ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 195.

neckline revealing her womanly charms.⁵²⁰ [Figs. 107, 108 & 109] Dressing the Virgin in the costume of the *Inamorata* could be interpreted as a lack of decorum and perhaps could be the reason that Bellori “lamented the picture’s ‘vileness.’”⁵²¹

Commedia women frequently wore beautiful dresses with tantalizingly low necklines, often found troubling by the more conservative. Here is a Frenchman’s reaction to one of Italy’s most famous *commedia* troupes:

.... “The Gelosi” began to perform Italian plays in the...Hôtel de Bourbon in Paris....Parlement hastily assembled in order to forbid the Gelosi to put on their comedies. . .due to the fact that they taught nothing but empty-headed actions and adultery....The women puff out their gilded, shining chests like shoulders showing off uniforms. Their chests are naked, and their breasts sway up and down, perpetually like clocks or bellows....But by the beginning of September, by express wish of the King and corresponding to the corruption of the age, the Gelosi have been permitted to take the stage again, thus bringing honor on the heads of actors, buffoons, whores and pederasts.⁵²²

While some consider this French prejudice against a foreign art form, the aforementioned letter of a Milanese father to Carlo Borromeo is evidence of similar sentiments in Italy. Common perceptions of the lewdness of the *commedia dell’arte* and its contribution to the corruption of society could complicate the reading of Caravaggio’s *commedia*-inspired religious paintings and cause them to be rejected. However, if the viewer appreciated the art of the actor and the virtue of actresses such as Isabella Andreini, the *commedia* references would be

⁵²⁰ The female actors of the *commedia dell’arte* are often depicted with breasts partially, or completely, exposed. One might wonder if this really occurred, but there is a written account of a Frenchman watching the Italian acting troupe, the Gelosi, in France. Pierre de l’Estoile wrote, “The women puff out their gilded, shining chests like soldiers showing off their uniforms. Their chests are naked, and their breasts sway up and down, perpetually in motion like clocks or bellows.” Lawner, 83.

⁵²¹ Moir, 104.

⁵²² Pierre de l’Estoile, *Journal des choses advenue Durant le règne de Henry II*, 1574, [published 1612]. As quoted in Lawner, 83.

no problem. This would have been the case for the bon vivant and art lover, Scipione Borghese, who purchased the painting.

Further disruption of the narrative might be the unflattering depiction of St. Ann, the Virgin's mother. In *commedia*, the young *Innamorata* is often accompanied by one or two servants, a young girl and an older woman. The relationship between the *Innamorata* and her older servant is similar to the relationship between Shakespeare's Juliet and her maid. Costumes similar to that of the *Innamorata* and her maid are found within Caravaggio's unusual *Madonna of the Snake*.

The similarity of St. Anne's costume to that of the female servant of the *Innamorata* is striking. [Fig. 110, 111 & 112] The appearance of the white turban-like wrap around St. Anne's head is similar to those in paintings and prints of the *commedia dell'arte*, like that in the engraving by Hans Liefrinck the Younger. [Fig. 111] As seen in the *Scene from the Commedia dell'Arte*, older women in turban-like wraps who accompany young, beautiful girls are often the procuresses of the brothels.⁵²³ [Fig. 110] The inappropriate attire of the bosomy Virgin and the wizened St. Anne, who resemble the *commedia* representations of a young whore and her mistress, make a disturbing image for the altar of any chapel. Scipione Borghese's interest in a potentially problematic image may have made his offer one they could not refuse.

Il Dottore and Pantalone

Il Dottore and *Pantalone* are the two elderly male characters that form the core of the *commedia dell'arte* dramas. *Pantalone* (also known as Magnifico) speaks with a Venetian accent and is of

⁵²³ Lawner, 77.

the merchant class and is often the main obstacle in the lives of the *Innamorati*, thus he is in almost every *commedia* scenario.⁵²⁴ [Figs. 103, 109 - 115] He is wealthy and quite vain, sporting a mask with a deeply furrowed brow and hooked nose.⁵²⁵ His costume consists of "...a short, fitted red coat with a black cape over it and tight red leggings tucked into red shoes. He wears a long pointed beard..."⁵²⁶

Another *commedia* character similar to *Pantalone* is *Il Dottore* (the Doctor), who is portrayed as either a man of medicine or, more frequently, a doctor of law or man of letters.⁵²⁷ *Il Dottore* is an old man with a long, stiff beard and wears a black cloak and a black, soft hat [Figs. 115, 116 & 117]. He uses a Bolognese dialect mixed with Latin, and he "speaks in mismatched erudite terms, with a verbose pomposity, and is the lampoon of false learning."⁵²⁸ Like *Pantalone*, *Il Dottore* wears a mask. It is usually made of leather and has a long, hooked nose, arched eyebrows, and wrinkled forehead. The wrinkles are far more numerous and regular than would be found on a real person, a caricature of an older person raising his eyebrows. Not all of Caravaggio's elderly men have facial features that are exaggerated enough to resemble *commedia dell'arte* characters, but those who do seem to mimic not only their expressions and postures, but also their mental attitudes.

In Caravaggio's *Doubting Thomas*, Christ stands in the left side of the canvas while three of his apostles peer at the wound on his side [Fig. 118] The four heads form a tight group, moving almost in unison. Although the men are of different ages, their facial features are almost identical, frozen in an almost mask-like expression—arched eyebrows, furrowed brows and

⁵²⁴ Fischer-Lichte, 131.

⁵²⁵ Lawner, 16, 32, and 46.

⁵²⁶ Lawner, 46.

⁵²⁷ Nicoll, 105-113; Lawner, 31.

⁵²⁸ Lawner, 46.

foreheads, and hooked, bulbous noses. While Thomas is the truly incredulous one, the others seem also to have trouble grasping the significance of Christ's resurrection, although to a lesser degree. This may show echoes of Thomas' doubt in the hearts of many. Jesus' face, in contrast to the coarse-featured apostles, is soft and gentle as he guides the probing index finger of Thomas to the gaping wound. Thomas's blank eyes stare, but do not really *see*. It is only through the primitive tactile sense that the doubter can be convinced. Their facial types and poses recall those found in the prints of *commedia dell'arte* characters, particularly those of the foolish Pantalone, who is often duped even by his lowly servants. [Figs. 113, 114 & 115]

As mentioned earlier, Caravaggio's *Ecce Homo* also employs a *commedia* facial type to give the viewer an immediately recognizable clue to the personality of his "actors." [Fig. 46] Like the two paintings examined previously, this work has figures with exaggerated physiognomies and costumes.⁵²⁹ This painting contains only three figures: Christ is at the left holding a reed scepter, a jailer places a cloak on Christ's shoulders and Pilate gestures toward Christ as if presenting him to be condemned and crucified. Christ, whose head is bleeding from the crown of thorns, stands with downcast eyes. His face is sensitively painted; the light on his face and the shadow is much softer than that on his body. The jailer, who one would normally expect to have a cruel facial expression, has a rather empathetic expression on his sun-burnt face as he gently places the cloak on Christ's scourged back. The character on the far right is Pilate. [Fig. 64] Although in Cigoli's (Ludovico Cardi) *Ecce Homo* of 1607 and Domenico Fetti's *Ecce*

⁵²⁹ This painting was thought to be one of three canvases entered in a competition sponsored by Monsignor Massimi. The traditional story claims that the other artists were: Domenico Passignano and Lodovico Cardi called il Cigoli. Cigoli was declared the winner and his painting is now in the Palazzo Pitti in Florence. Catherine Puglisi doubts that this painting is related to the competition. She does not believe that the historical or stylistic evidence supports the attribution to Caravaggio. Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 404.

Homo of 1605 Pilate wears a turban, he is often depicted wearing Roman attire.⁵³⁰ [Figs. 75 & 76] Caravaggio, however, chose to paint Pilate wearing a soft black cap and a black cloak. Pilate's face is the only one that turns to the viewer. He gestures to Christ to direct the audience's attention to the event. Unlike the other figures, Pilate's face is less realistically painted. His facial features are painted as more of a caricature of than a portrait. When compared to the other figures, Pilate's furrowed brow and raised eyebrows seem harshly rendered, as if made from tooled leather.

The leather-like face may have been inspired by the old man character, *Il Dottore*. The exaggerated facial features are similar to those in the images and surviving masks of *commedia*. [Fig. 120] The *commedia dell'arte* mask contains a similar facial expression with six to eight deeply etched wrinkles above arched eyebrows. In this painting, unlike the *Doubting Thomas*, in which only the facial expressions and poses reflect the *commedia dell'arte* character, Pilate wears the costume of the Doctor as well.⁵³¹ [Figs. 115, 116, 117] The character cynically looks at the viewer and haughtily motions toward Christ as if to say "Here's your so-called King...." It seems that Caravaggio tried to show that despite all of Pilate's status and learning, he is unable to see who Christ really is. The viewer knows the true identity of the victim and is invited to feel satisfaction, almost enjoyment, in seeing the foolishness of this arrogant man. It is not the educated and powerful Pilate who seems to recognize Christ, but the man who carefully covers Christ's wounded back. In this work, Caravaggio took Morales' use of *commedia* stock characters and reinterpreted the role of the torturer from that of an ugly, animalistic brute, to a sensitive lower-class servant. He borrowed from the *commedia* routine that showed lower-class man to be more intelligent than a pompous man of letters.

⁵³⁰ See images of the Sacro Monte [Figs. 18-21].

⁵³¹ Nicoll, 111.

The *commedia dell'arte* may also have served as a visual resource for the *Supper at Emmaus*. [Fig. 121] The figure on the far right extends his arms in an exaggerated gesture of surprise after recognizing Christ. Cleophas at the same moment jumps out of his chair. The apostle's pose on the right resembles a pose in the *Recueil Fossard*, the same collection of *commedia* images mentioned earlier.⁵³² [Fig. 122] Although the Pantalone-type character in the print has his arms thrown back further than Caravaggio's apostle, the arms are widely extended in an unrealistic pose. Even more striking is the artists' rejection of the rules of foreshortening that is found in both images—instead of making the furthest hand smaller it is painted larger than the hand nearer to the viewer. In addition, the profile of the nose and forehead in the print are almost identical to those of the apostle in the Caravaggio painting. These shared artistic details suggest that Caravaggio looked to both live performances of theater and graphic representations of theatrical performance. In this case, his inspiration was images from the *Recueil Fossard*, which was originally published in the late *cinquecento* and appeared in Rome around 1600.

The Zanni and Arlecchino

Arlecchino (Harlequin) is another character whose appearance shares similarities with some of Caravaggio's figures. The rather grotesque masks of *Arlecchino* were created to be both frightening and funny, with a large "pimple on the forehead, a wrinkled brow, and arched eyebrows." [Fig. 123] Some *Arlecchino* masks have features that could be read as Asian or Negroid...“and such references are not uncommon in masks and paintings of the period

⁵³² Castagno, 160

[seventeenth century].” [Fig. 124] Lawner observed, “Commedia figures in general—and Harlequin in particular—seem to have incorporated European society’s fear of, and fascination with, the “other,” the foreign, the marginal, the different, and (in the idiom of the time) the diabolic.”⁵³³

Arlecchino was one of the many characters within the *zanni* category who were of the lower class—acting as servants, go-betweens, ruffians, and pimps.⁵³⁴ [Fig. 109, 110, 111, 115, 116 & 125] These lower-class personages start to appear in increasing numbers in drama and literature:

From the fourteenth to the sixteenth century popular comic poems, dialogues, and performance pieces, usually in the dialect of Venice or Bergamo, were written in the voice of a disgruntled, mistreated, and often scheming manservant. Here we first encounter the situations that emerge in commedia as endless variations on the themes of hunger and injured pride, offering glimpses of the misery, decadence, and frustration of society’s lower caste as it strives continually to redeem its own self-image and to satisfy its belly through the exercise of intelligence, astuteness, and wit.⁵³⁵

Traditionally, there were two types of *zanni*: the First *zanni* was “clever and cunning” and the Second *zanni* was “stupid and naïve.” *Arlecchino* was from Bergamo, *Beltram* from Milan, *Franca-Trippa* from Bologna, and *Pulcinella* (a peasant) from Naples; they all shared the characteristics of greed and thievery.⁵³⁶ During the early years of the *commedia*, these *zanni* also shared a common costume, a “light-colored full-bodied shirt with wide-legged trousers or pantaloons, supplemented with a wooden sword.”⁵³⁷ The clothing of the most famous of the

⁵³³ Lawner, 18.

⁵³⁴ Castagno, 99

⁵³⁵ Lawner, 35-36.

⁵³⁶ Fischer-Lichte, 131; Lawner, 41-42.

⁵³⁷ Castagno, 98.

zanni, Arlecchino, was covered with patches of different colors used to repair his torn clothes.⁵³⁸

Although tattered clothing such as this may have been inspired by the clothing of real laborers and the numerous poor in the city, Caravaggio may also have used the simple, tattered clothing of the *zanni* as his inspiration for the costumes of his lower-class men and laborers in works such as *The Ecce Homo* [Fig. 46].

3.7 CARAVAGGIO'S EXPOSURE TO THEATER IN ROME

The above correspondences support the likelihood that Caravaggio observed the street theater and appropriated its forms to enhance his bold painting style and make it attractive to viewer of all classes. Caravaggio wanted his paintings to capture his surroundings, a world in which the theater and its many forms were everywhere—the charlatans' mountebank stages in the *piazze*, procession carts winding their way through the city streets, and the temporary stages erected in both the luxurious *sale* of Roman palaces and popular tennis courts . [Fig. 126]

Works like the *Musicians* and *Sick Bacchus* demonstrate that Caravaggio was aware of the secular theater's appeal to the Roman elite, but it was during the 1600 Holy Year festivities, when secular entertainments were forbidden and religious processions and dramas were even more prevalent, that we see a drastic shift in Caravaggio's painting style—from the carefree secular images of young boys to religious imagery with violent scenes and sharp side-lighting. Caravaggio, observing that people from all walks of life enjoyed these religious dramas—

⁵³⁸ Arlecchino is in the beginning “a rascally beggar, a thing literally ‘of shreds and patches.’” ⁵³⁸ Nicoll, 108. Later this multi-colored patchwork design evolved into what is known today as the diamond-shaped Harlequin pattern. Castagno, 99.

royalty, Church officials, and humble pilgrims—may have decided that the theater provided an easily accessible visual language that all could understand.

Religious plays were so effective in attracting the public and competing with the secular temptations of Carnival that Roman churches ignored the Tridentine prohibition of dramatic representation in churches and hosted spectacular dramatic events, such as those held at Il Gesù and the Chiesa Nuova.⁵³⁹ Confraternities paraded in procession through Rome's streets with *tableaux vivants* depicting various scenes of Christ's passion, calling the rich and poor alike to personal penance. The streets themselves were stages upon which pilgrims, flagellants, and the poor acted out their roles.

Itinerant theater troupes were also widely available. Their simple stages could be found in the *piazze*, ball rooms, and tennis courts of the city—any large space that could hold a makeshift stage and room for the audience. Caravaggio knew these places well, even the tennis court, because it was after a tennis match near Palazzo Firenze (close to the Piazza Navona) that Caravaggio killed Ranuccio Tomassoni and was forced to flee Rome.⁵⁴⁰ The next act of Caravaggio's dramatic life begins as he set out on a moon-lit flight to southern Italy.

⁵³⁹ On theater in Il Gesù see: *Baroque Art: The Jesuit Contribution*, 99-102. On theater in the Chiesa Nuova see: Langdon, 176.

⁵⁴⁰ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 257; Langdon, 309.

4.0 THE SPANISH KINGDOMS OF NAPLES & SICILY

After being accused of killing Ranuccio Tomassoni on 28 May 1606, Caravaggio was forced to flee Rome and his successful Roman painting career, never to return. During this fugitive period, the last four years of his life, we see a dramatic shift in his painting style. Some see this stylistic change as the result of Caravaggio's life on the run, with few stable social relationships with artists and collectors, and no real painting studio. While life was harder for Caravaggio in the south than in Rome, the artist's life in the Eternal City was not without problems. He frequently ran afoul of the papal authorities and was forced to move on numerous occasions, once having his property seized by an angry landlord. Still, amidst the chaos in Rome, Caravaggio produced great work. The fugitive Caravaggio simply relied on the same survival skills and resources he found in Rome. Caravaggio had developed a large web of social relationships that aided him while a fugitive in southern Italy—the friends, family, and political allies of the pro-Spanish Colonna family.

To escape the reach of papal authorities, Caravaggio fled to the Kingdoms of Naples and Sicily, where he, a subject of Spain, could travel freely. Although the artist did not have a permanent home and studio, the painter had no shortage of patrons desiring his dramatic paintings, for his reputation preceded him. During the last four years of his life, Caravaggio's style shifted from a polished style with deep shadow and intense "Giorgione" colors, to one with a dry and thin paint application, an almost monochromatic palette, and a dark psychological

mood. Some scholars, such as Keith Sciberras and David Stone, see this stylistic shift as the result of Caravaggio's change in locale and his never-ending study and pictorial description of the world around him. They credit his stay at Valletta, when he was a knight on Malta, as *the* catalyst for this change.⁵⁴¹ While I agree that Caravaggio's period on Malta was a pivotal moment for Caravaggio when he did not have to worry about chasing commissions and could experiment with a new expressive style, I believe that the artist's artistic metamorphosis was a more complex process and was facilitated by a general attitude of acceptance toward experimentation and expression that he did not find in Rome. I posit that the change from Caravaggio's Roman painting style, filled with dazzling light effects and skillful realism, to one that was darker and more psychologically expressive was at least in part due to the artist's exposure to Spanish and Neapolitan theater and literature, which did not follow classical rules of poetics and theatrical theory, but embraced innovation, expression, and experimentation.

I therefore investigate the specific dramatic entertainments, both performed and written, to which the artist was exposed and draw comparisons between southern Italian dramatic forms and those found in Caravaggio's works. I also explore the impact that Caravaggio had on the local artists in southern Italy, especially around Naples and try to establish some rationale for the positive reception for his signature *chiaroscuro* and unidealized, everyday character types. While there is abundant evidence for cultural exchange between the Italians and Iberians living in Spanish Lombardy and Rome, Spanish influence in Italy was most profound in southern Italy, the Kingdoms of Naples and Sicily.

Although Spain ruled the region for over two hundred years, scholars hesitated to credit the Spanish with any positive contribution to Italian culture, choosing rather to adhere to the

⁵⁴¹ Keith Sciberras and David M. Stone, *Caravaggio: Art, Knighthood, and Malta*. (Malta: Midsea Books Ltd., 2006).

stereotype of the Iberian as barbaric oppressor. This negative bias has been a serious obstacle to producing an accurate description of the complex cultural interactions during Italy's "*età spagnola*." It seems that when significant evidence of a mutual cultural exchange is given, many scholars forcefully resist the idea of Iberian cultural contribution in Italy. This persistent "*antispagnolismo*" has a history reaching as far back as the *cinquecento*. This early modern negative bias was inherited by scholars in subsequent centuries.

Many nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholars blindly adopted these negative assumptions and prejudices towards Spanish culture. I posit that these attitudes affected critical opinion of Caravaggio's work because it possesses characteristics similar to those found in Spanish culture and were criticized. For that reason, I begin this chapter by discussing the *antispagnolismo* phenomenon and its impact on the early art historiography which shaped so much subsequent research and gave rise to almost unshakable negative attitudes toward Spanish culture, including Spanish drama. There is a parallel between the harsh words of critics against Spanish drama and literature and those criticizing Caravaggio's work. It may be that the association of Iberian culture with Caravaggio's work encouraged its dismissal, and allowed the Lombard artist's work to fall into relative obscurity. It may be no coincidence that around the same time scholars began to seriously reassess the role that Spain played on the Italian peninsula during the *cinque-* and *seicento*; art critics began to reconsider Caravaggio's work.

4.1 THE SPAIN IN ITALY "PROBLEM"

One might wonder why it took over 300 years for Caravaggio to be "rediscovered," when today he holds an iconic status among Italian master artists. We find a clue in the following colorful 19th-century

description which reveals both a common negative bias toward the so-called “decadent” Spaniard and a perceived correspondence between Caravaggio’s work and Iberian aesthetic taste. Alfred de Reumont, who discussed various aspects of Neapolitan culture in his *The Carafas of Maddaloni* (1854), wrote of Caravaggio’s work:

Michael Angelo da Caravaggio is wanting in refinement of feeling, and also in moderation, but he thoroughly understood nature, colouring, and effect....It was more dreadful than demoniacal, with that predilection for that which was horrible and bloody, which is chiefly to be ascribed to Spanish influence, inasmuch as it is more in accordance with the hard and melancholy nature of the Spaniard, and with his extravagant love of painful subjects....⁵⁴²

Reumont’s comparison of Caravaggio’s work with Spanish culture reveals a bias that may explain why Caravaggio’s work fell into relative obscurity. Most explanations of Caravaggio’s long period of obscurity do not directly consider the association of his work with Spanish culture, but cite general lack of enthusiasm for baroque painting or unskilled copyists as the heart of the problem. Nicholas Penny attributes Caravaggio’s decline to the confusion of his works with those of inferior imitators, becoming “the victim of his own influence.”⁵⁴³ Roberto Longhi’s research and exhibitions in the 1940’s and ‘50’s, reintroduced Caravaggio’s art to the public, publicity that greatly enhanced the Lombard’s reputation and made his work worthy of study once again.⁵⁴⁴ Longhi saw something “modern” in Caravaggio, “something that ‘anticipated’ Manet.”⁵⁴⁵ Manet, however, was not influenced by Caravaggio, but Velázquez.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴² Alfred de Reumont, *Naples under Spanish Dominion: The Carafas of Maddaloni and Masaniello* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1853), 291-292.

⁵⁴³ Nicholas Penny “Models and Props” *London Review of Books* vol. 22, No. 15, (10 August 2000, 27-9).

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 27. Subsequent restoration and exhibitions of his work helped draw attention to the artist’s works.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid*

⁵⁴⁶ “The young Manet’s enthusiasm for Spanish painting and in particular Velázquez has been documented by generations of historians...” Michael Fried, *Manet’s Modernism or, The Face of Painting in the 1860’s* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 29-30, 86-87.

In Manet's case, it was the Spanish artist, not Caravaggio, who was the conduit of "modernity" for the nineteenth-century painter. Although Caravaggio was said to have influenced Velázquez, there was already a naturalistic painting style in Spain that predated the Lombard painter's works' appearance on the Iberian Peninsula. It is possible that the similarities between Velázquez and Caravaggio's are due to Caravaggio's knowledge of a "Spanish taste in painting" that already existed in Spain during the *cinquecento*.⁵⁴⁷ The Lombard artist's *spagnolismo* may have resulted from his exposure to Spanish culture in Milan, his close rapport with pro-Spanish Italians, and the artist's subsequent appropriation of elements of Iberian culture as he traveled south to the Spanish Kingdoms of Naples and Sicily. Spanish drama and literature broke with restrictive classical rules to allow for more artistic freedom and emotional expression, a freedom that resonated with the "modern" approach to the arts which provoked much debate at the time. Caravaggio's bold "modern" style ran contrary to the ideals of the classicists whose ideas gained prominence in subsequent centuries and influenced the direction of art historiography even in the early twenty-first century.

There is more to Caravaggio's decline than mere misattribution and mediocre *Caravaggisti* followers. His decline signaled a general negative attitude toward those (either individual artists or national culture) that did not follow the "Aristotelian" unities and decorum deemed necessary by the "classicists" (also called "ancients") for works of art, drama, and poetry. Those who dared to deviate from this formula were considered "moderns" and were often perceived as dangerous to their prospective arts.

The classicists' view prevailed and Caravaggism all but disappeared by the end of the seventeenth century. In later centuries, art historians and critics considered the Baroque

⁵⁴⁷ On naturalism in Spain, see: Jonathan Brown, 79-110.

decadent and derivative, unnecessarily violent, and emotionally extreme—the unfortunate result of continued contact with Iberian culture.⁵⁴⁸ Caravaggio’s dark, bold art was seen as indecorous, extreme and violent, possibly because it reminded one of Italy’s period under Spanish domination, a dark time that Italian nationalists would rather forget. The period of the *Risorgimento* is significant because it shaped both the Italian national image and its history to conform to its vision.

One nineteenth-century example of “*antispagnolismo*” is Alessandro Manzoni’s *I promessi Sposi* (1823 and 1840-42). This canonical piece of Italian literature negatively portrays Spanish presence in Lombardy. Manzoni’s work is typical of Risorgimento literature in that it employs nationalistic themes echoing the idealism and pride of a nation in its infancy.⁵⁴⁹ It was a nationalism looking to ancient Rome and the renaissance for heroes, while looking to contemporary Spain and the Spanish occupation for scapegoats. Manzoni set his story in 1628 during the Spanish occupation of Italy and sharply criticized the Milanese situation under Spanish rule. Scholars believe that the author chose this period to draw a parallel between Spanish Milan and the Hapsburg Austrian occupation of northern Italy. This book was popular at the time of its publication and in the following decades, perpetuating its strong *antispagnolismo*. The period of Italian unification and the publication of this book coincided with the birth of the field of art historiography, as we know it today; an era when the Italian renaissance was hailed as the pivotal moment for artistic innovation in western civilization.

One influential historian who had a profound influence on art historiography was Benedetto Croce, whose writings on art and aesthetics made him popular among art critics and

⁵⁴⁸ Reumont, 291-292.

⁵⁴⁹ Augustus Pallotta, “Reappraising Croce’s Influence on Hispanic Studies in Italy: the Case of Guevara and Mexía” *Modern language Studies*, vol. 22, No. 3 (Summer, 1992), 44-52

historians.⁵⁵⁰ His *Spagna nella vita italiana durante la Rinascenza* (1922) echoes the anti-Spanish sentiments of Manzoni when speaks of the “barbaric Spanish invasion,” the inferiority of Spanish literature, and the Iberian love of honorific titles, pomp and duels.⁵⁵¹ His assessment of the period concludes with the final chapter entitled “The Hispano-Italian Decadence.” Croce’s major complaint about Spanish literature was its popularism:

Croce’s criticism of Spanish authors is based on the recurring view that Spanish culture was persistently and fundamentally popular in tone, strongly tied to medieval ideals, and lacking the philosophical and moral preoccupations which agitated the conscience and imagination of other European writers. Since Croce considers culture as having its pivot in philosophy, he asserts without any reticence that Spain not only contributed little or nothing to the progress of ideas, but exerted a negative and reactionary influence with her philosophy firmly anchored in Scholasticism and restricted by the Catholicism of the Counter Reformation.⁵⁵²

Croce’s writings support the nationalist mission at the time which strove to create a strong Italian image. *Risorgimento* leaders looked to the Roman republic and to the Renaissance to find its heroes and to the Spanish tyrants, soldiers, and prostitutes for its villains.⁵⁵³ Nationalistic sentiments corrupted the historical accounts by casting the Spanish as violent, culturally decadent, and feigning piety--a sentiment supported by Iberian literature and drama, which contained major characters possessing these very character flaws (i.e. *capa y espada* plays and the picaresque novel).⁵⁵⁴ Caravaggio’s art, with its blood and shadow, histrionic gestures,

⁵⁵⁰ On Croce and Spanish culture, see: Augustus Pallotta, “Reappraising Croce’s Influence on Hispanic Studies in Italy: the Case of Guevara and Mexía *Modern language Studies*, vol. 22, No. 3 (Summer, 1992), 44-52 and Benito Brancaforte, “Benedetto Croce and the Theory of Popularism in Spanish Literature” *Hispanic review*, Vol. 38, no. 1 (Jan, 1970), 69-79.

⁵⁵¹ Croce, *La Spagna*, 246, 151-74, and 189.

⁵⁵² Benito Brancaforte, “Benedetto Croce and the Theory of Popularism in Spanish Literature” *Hispanic review*, Vol. 38, no. 1 (Jan, 1970), 69.

⁵⁵³ See, Musi.

⁵⁵⁴ On Spanish stereotypes, see: Amelang, 434-35.

rough character types, and graphic horror, illustrated these same qualities and, like Spanish literature and drama, was judged to be too “popular” for the sophisticated eye. Italian Renaissance art, however, suited the needs of the new Italian image and took a privileged place among western artistic periods—an attitude that was reflected in art historical research of that time. The names of Renaissance artists such as Michelangelo, Leonardo, and Raphael were invoked by *Risorgimento* writers to demonstrate Italian artistic genius. The Renaissance and its art were hailed as the expression of humanity’s greatness after its repression during the Dark Ages. Conversely, Baroque art was considered a sign of cultural decay—derivative and excessive.

Scholars, like Croce, considered the cultural influence to be unidirectional, that is originating in Italy and emanating outward to other countries. Few believed that other countries influenced the Italian artists of the Renaissance, except for the Northern Renaissance’s perfection of oil painting techniques. Particularly in painting, Italian artists’ innovations such as linear and atmospheric perspective revolutionized the visual and performing arts. One of the many factors that contributed to Italy becoming a cultural center was its strategic location in the Mediterranean Sea as a commercial center, allowing free dissemination of ideas, arts, and literature.

Following Benedetto Croce’s lead, historians in countries such as Germany, England, France, and the United States also shared negative views of Spanish culture. In Alfred de Reumont’s aforementioned quote (originally published in German), the negativity is palpable. He attributes Caravaggio’s lack of refinement and feeling and love of things dreadful and bloody to “Spanish influence.” Such critical views of Spanish culture went beyond general historical accounts, coloring the discussions of the arts, as well. In M. Philarète Chasles’ *Études sur l’Espagne et sur les influences de la littérature espagnole en France et en Italie* (1847/reprint

1973), the author sees the necessity to discuss the many “false judgments” against the genre and points out the characteristics in Spanish drama which draw the most criticism from the French scholars.⁵⁵⁵ Chasles’ *Études sur l’Espagne* is unusual in that it recognizes the negative bias and seeks to address the problem. Sparks of a more enlightened attitude toward Spanish culture are evident in 19th-century scholarship, particularly in countries outside Italy, but these are rare. For art history, Benedetto Croce’s negative assessment of Iberian culture, seen in his *Spagna nella vita italiana* particularly colored the cultural assessment of the period. From the turn of the century until WWII, Croce was “at the core of Neapolitan, indeed, all Italian cultural life. His home was open to scholars of all nations, faiths, and opinions...”⁵⁵⁶ He was friends with a number of art historians such as the influential scholar Bernard Berenson. [Fig. 127]

In Berenson’s *Caravaggio: His Incongruity and His Fame* (1953), the author admitted to being largely unimpressed with Caravaggio until Roberto Longhi’s ground-breaking exhibition in 1951.⁵⁵⁷ Berenson justified his disinterest by stating that almost any starkly-lit canvas with “...figures with plumed hats, vulgar obese giants blasphemously posing as Christ and His disciples, dice-throwing or card-sharpening undermen” was attributed to Caravaggio, making his oeuvre seem variable at best.⁵⁵⁸ Berenson shared Croce’s distaste for Spanish culture by saying that it, like German and Dutch culture, was not worth studying, “no matter how interesting, how magnificent in itself,” for it contributed little to western civilization.⁵⁵⁹

⁵⁵⁵ “Le Malheur du génie espagnol est d’avoir été trop grand, trop if, trop spontané trop fort; d’avoir épuisé toute sa sèvé et fait éclater toute son énergie, sans avarice et sans compter; de s’être fié à ses ressources, à son pouvoir et à sa fécondité; d’avoir oublié que l’opulence des plus magnifiques torrents réclame un renouvellement, un aliment et un économie dans la dépense: son Malheur, enfin, a été l’orgueil. Cet orgueil a tout pris en lui-même. Il s’est dévoré.” Philarète Chasles. *Études sur l’Espagne et sur les influences de la littérature espagnole en France et en Italie*. (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1973), 3

⁵⁵⁶ Biocca, *Matter of Passion*, xi.

⁵⁵⁷ Berenson, *Caravaggio*, ii.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid*

⁵⁵⁹ Berenson, *Aesthetics*, 235-6.; Croce, *La Spagna*, 151-174.

During the same period that Berenson was reconsidering Caravaggio's contributions to European painting, Italian historians were reassessing their judgment of Italy's Spanish period to describe more accurately the cultural interaction between Spanish and Italian cultures. In later years, Benedetto Croce recanted his harshest criticism of the Spanish on Italian culture, by saying only that the Italians were willing participants in the cultural decadence of the "baroque era" under Spanish dominion.⁵⁶⁰ This may have nudged the perception of the Spaniard in Italy a little closer to the truth, but it was too late, for his biased ideas had already corrupted the scholarship and historiography of other fields, including that of art history.

Due to Roberto Longhi's Caravaggio exhibition and changing attitudes toward Baroque art, Caravaggio's international popularity has soared. He now is counted among Italy's great painters and appears on the 100,000 lira bank note. [Fig. 128a & 128b] Since he has now come to represent Italian artistic genius, scholars are often hesitant to give Spanish culture any credit for influencing his bold painting style. He is held jealously as purely Italian. One must remember, however, that the unified nation did not yet exist. Caravaggio was a subject of the Spanish crown from birth in Spanish Lombardy, and it was to the protection of Iberian-controlled lands that he ran when accused of murder in Rome.

During the *cinque-* and *seicento*, "Italian" national identity was a nebulous concept because the peninsula was culturally and politically fragmented; loyalties shifted when convenient. Regardless of one's political leanings, no one could deny that Spain was deliberately trying to shape Italian politics, religion, and culture—often using dramatic spectacle for its propaganda machine. This persistent Spanish meddling in Roman politics and was one of the main reasons that some Italians allied with France, because it was the only nation strong

⁵⁶⁰ Benito Brancaforte, "Benedetto Croce's Changing Attitude toward the Relevance of Spanish Influences in Italy" *Italica*, vol. 44, no. 3 (Sept., 1967), 326-343.

enough to thwart Iberian political aspirations in Rome.⁵⁶¹ Caravaggio, with his keen eye for popular culture, was sensitive to this Iberian influence.

Although there has been significant reassessment of the Spanish Age, due in part to the recent research of John A. Marino, Thomas James Dandeleet, and Aurelio Musi, who place the negative representation of the Spanish as "cruel", "intolerant," and "fanatical"—a stereotype known today as the “Black Legend”—within its historical context.⁵⁶² Art historiography, unfortunately, has been slow to change course. Until the past few years, art historians have adhered to the notion that the cultural influence between Spain and Italy was unidirectional, with Italian Renaissance ideas spreading to the Iberian Peninsula and Italian resistance of Spanish culture.⁵⁶³ Only Jusepe de Ribera (1591- 1652), a Spaniard living in Naples, is credited with some influence in Italy, but only as a follower of Caravaggio. In this context, Italian influence on Spanish painters is the recurrent theme—a lesser Spanish derivative of an Italian master. Although scholars at one time thought that the Spanish Golden Age painters Velázquez and Zurbarán were imitators of Caravaggio’s Italianate style, they were followers of a Spanish naturalistic painting style that used dramatic lighting effects—a style that predated Caravaggio.⁵⁶⁴ This existing preference for dramatic lighting and naturalism on the Iberian Peninsula made Caravaggio’s work especially appealing to Spanish eyes.

⁵⁶¹ See: Dandeleet, 2001 and Levin, 2005.

⁵⁶² On antispannolismo and the search for Italian identity through history see: Musi, 2003; “General Editor’s Preface” *Early modern Italy 1550-1796*, ed. John A. Marino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), v-vi; Dandeleet, *Spanish Rome*; and Dandeleet and Marino.

⁵⁶³ The 2009 Italian Art Society CAA panel titled “The International Contribution to Italian Renaissance and Baroque Art” and the 2010 RSA Conference panel, “Spain in Italy” are recent examples of research that explores Spanish contributions to Italian culture.

⁵⁶⁴ On Spanish naturalism, see Jonathan Brown, *Painting in Spain 1500-1700* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 79-110; Xavier Bray, *The Sacred Made Real* (London: National Gallery Company [distributed by Yale University Press, 2009), 15.

4.2 SPANISH ARTISTIC TASTE AND ITALIAN PAINTING

To help define a “Spanish” taste in painting, I discuss an artistic failure, Federico Zuccaro’s paintings for the high altar of Philip II’s Escorial. Philip II wanted an Italian artist for this commission because he believed that the best painters were from Italy. Federico Zuccaro arrived in Spain with much celebration. He painted altarpieces for the high altar and a few side chapels. Although Zuccaro was well-paid and graciously thanked for his work, Philip II had the paintings “corrected” by a mediocre Spanish artist, Juan Gomez. The Spanish king did not blame Zuccaro, but those who sent him, because they had not clearly explained Spanish taste in painted images to the artist.⁵⁶⁵

Letters in the Medici archive help define what this “Spanish taste” looked like by describing its prominent characteristics. In a letter dated 1599, Ferdinando de’ Medici explains that the discerning painter needed to show realistically-rendered figures that are neither contorted into fanciful poses nor grouped in complex arrangements.⁵⁶⁶ Another letter from his cousin, Doña María de Toledo y Colonna, praises Italian painters and requests him to send an Italian artist to paint an altarpiece for her convent. Although she believed that “nothing done with the brush here in Spain would turn out right,” she was confident of the skill of Spanish sculptors who were carving saints and figures for the surround. She cautioned the artist to refrain from “too much inventiveness in his art” and requested that the faces be beautifully painted, and the bodies shown in relief so that they may be seen at a distance.⁵⁶⁷ Zuccaro’s Mannerist style, with its complex compositions and uniform lighting, would not have fit either description, but

⁵⁶⁵ Edward L. Goldberg, “Circa 1600: Spanish Values and Tuscan Painting,” *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (Autumn, 1998), 914.

⁵⁶⁶ Goldberg, 916.

⁵⁶⁷ Goldberg, 918.

Caravaggio's work possesses many of the "Spanish" style's required characteristics: his compositions are simple, he looks to naturalism rather than invention, and the stark side-lighting places his figures in relief. Thus, Caravaggio would be popular where Spanish taste prevailed. Caravaggism did spread to areas that were under Spanish control or had close relations with the Iberians such as Naples, Genoa, Rome, Sicily, the Spanish Netherlands, and, of course, Spain.

Caravaggio painted the world he encountered—its drama, spirituality, and people—a world influenced by Spanish culture. This may have helped his popularity while Iberian political and cultural influence was at its peak in Italy, but as the Spanish Empire weakened, their culture was demonized—a typical reaction to foreign occupation and governance. Caravaggio's affinity for Spanish culture (with their love of dark and bloody subjects and flagrant disregard for the "rules" of classicism) became detrimental to his reputation. His work and tragic life would be seen as symptomatic of Italian Baroque decadence under Spanish rule, a period that, like Caravaggio, was "wanting in refinement of feeling, and also in moderation . . ."⁵⁶⁸

Fortunately, since Berenson and Croce's time, Italian historians have significantly reassessed their judgment of this period and more accurately describe the cultural interaction between Spanish and Italian cultures. In a recent volume of essays titled *Spain in Italy*, Sebastian Schütze briefly discusses this phenomenon. He describes a longstanding trend in art historiography:

Spanish patronage in Southern Italy under Hapsburg rule has been traditionally addressed from a very partial, indeed almost "colonialist" perspective and dominated by the supposition that Spanish viceroys would acquire and commission in the first place works of art for Spain, works they could take to their home countries once their administrative term in Naples ended, and that they had

⁵⁶⁸ Reumont, 291-292.

very little interest in patronizing “permanent” art in Naples. This unilateral perspective is still predominant and has been changing only in recent years.⁵⁶⁹

Although Caravaggio’s *Crucifixion of Saint Andrew* (1607), painted for the Spanish viceroy in Naples and later taken to Spain, fits the “colonialist” model of arts patronage, Schütze asserts that viceroys did in fact commission art that remained in Naples after their term ended—as did their wives, courtiers, and other members of their vast social network. This Iberian patronage shows a mutual exchange, one that suggests a Spanish influence on the Italian Peninsula.⁵⁷⁰ His essay dealt with the iconology of the Assumption of the Virgin, a theme popular in Spanish art, and its prevalence in Neapolitan works. Iberian presence is clearly evident in something as concrete as iconography, but it works on many levels and can be quite subtle. “Spanish” influence was not necessarily seen as un-Italian. There was not yet a clearly-defined Italian identity. People simply enjoyed what appealed to them, regardless of its national origin. It was just part of the very cosmopolitan culture that existed on the Italian Peninsula, one that included many Iberians.

Like Schütze, I believe scholars should explore that Iberian influence on artists working in Italy, especially in southern Italy where Iberian influence was strongest. Caravaggio, who looked to his surroundings for source material for his paintings, would have been more sensitive to these regional cultural differences than artists who looked to Italian masters for inspiration. To give a more accurate description of Caravaggio’s world, therefore, I explore the people, arts,

⁵⁶⁹ Sebastian Schütze, “The Politics,” 560-1.

⁵⁷⁰ Even Benedetto Croce had to admit that the Spanish did leave their mark on the art and architecture of Naples, as seen in his “Una passeggiata per la Napoli spagnuola.” Croce, *La Spagna*, 263-282.

theater, and religious devotions specific to the Spanish Kingdoms of Naples and Sicily that the artist regularly encountered.

4.3 SPANISH PRESENCE IN NAPLES AND SICILY

After the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis (1559), Spain controlled almost two-thirds of the Italian peninsula. Naples came under Spanish control earlier in the century, officially in 1504, an occupation that lasted until 1707, with the arrival of the Austrians. Naples, like Caravaggio's Milan, saw rapid population growth under Iberian control. In 1500, the population of Naples was about 100,000. By 1547, the number increased to 245,000, making Naples second in Christendom only to Paris.⁵⁷¹

Although the Neapolitans resented foreign rule, in particular the heavy taxation imposed to aid the failing Spanish economy, this resentment was not strong enough to keep the Neapolitans from adopting the “Spanish love of display, ceremony and exaggerated formality.”⁵⁷² Other forms of Spanish culture found their way to Italy as many Spaniards went to Italy to live and work. The Italians had a great interest in Spanish literature.⁵⁷³ The famous *Celestina* was translated into Italian in 1506 and the *Amadis* in 1519. In the early sixteenth

⁵⁷¹ Harry Hearder, *Italy: A Short History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 137–40.

⁵⁷² Hearder, 139.

⁵⁷³ One of the most important historical figures to introduce Spanish culture to the Italians was the Italianized Castilian Alfonso Ulloa, who served as secretary and chronicler to Ferrante Gonzaga, governor of Milan during the mid-sixteenth century. Another was the collector of travel literature, Giovan Battista Ramusio. Henry Kamen, *Empire: How Spain Became a World Power 1492-1763* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 339-40.

century, 93 Castilian works were translated into Italian, in the next century the number rose to 724.⁵⁷⁴

4.4 COLONNA SUPPORT OF CREATIVE INNOVATION

One might wonder why Costanza was so eager to help a troubled young man like Caravaggio. Her affection for Caravaggio's aunt Margherita and sister Caterina may provide part of the motivation. However, I posit that Costanza Colonna was simply continuing the family tradition of encouraging innovative artists and writers. This was, after all, the family that proudly claimed the poet Vittoria Colonna as their own—a woman who was unusual for her fame as a poet (a man's art), her refusal to remarry as others would have her do, and quasi-Calvinist religious sentiments. Vittoria was a woman with a strong opinions and an independent spirit, which was exceptional for the period. Such Colonna patronage may help us better understand Costanza's relationship with Caravaggio and her personal artistic taste. To take another example, the Colonna family supported a young Neapolitan writer, Margherita Sarrocchi, who became the talk of Rome.⁵⁷⁵ Further exploration into the career of this young poetess may help us understand Costanza's relationship with Caravaggio.

As descendent of the poet Vittoria Colonna, it is no surprise that the Colonna supported an aspiring young female writer. Margherita was the first female author of an historic heroic epic.⁵⁷⁶ Her epic, *La Scanderbeide*, first published in 1606, was dedicated to Costanza

⁵⁷⁴ Franco Meregalli, *Presenza della letteratura spagnola in Italia* (Florence: 1974), 17.

⁵⁷⁵ Margherita Sarrocchi. *Scanderbeide: the Heroic Deeds of George Scanderberg, King of Epirus*. Rinaldina Russell, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 1-6.

⁵⁷⁶ Sarrocchi, 1.

Colonna.⁵⁷⁷ Like Caravaggio, she pushed the boundaries of tradition. She was unusual also because she was comfortable debating her art with famous men of letters, just as the actress/poet Isabella Andreini had been. *La Scanderbeide* is also unusual because the main subject, resistance against the Ottoman Turks, remained a contemporary problem—her historical subject was actually a contemporary one. Her use of elements from contemporary culture was a feature found in Ariosto's *Furioso*, Caravaggio's paintings, and the literature and dramas of both Spain and Naples. Caravaggio, like Margherita, was a young talent who chose the path of innovation for his art. An exploration of Colonna intervention early in Margherita's career may shed some light on Costanza's later support of Caravaggio.

Margherita came from rather humble beginnings; she was born in Naples around 1560 to a middle-class family that ran into some difficulty. Like the Merisi family, tragedy struck when her father died at an early age. Margherita received an advanced education in the liberal arts and sciences and clearly took advantage of this.⁵⁷⁸ She was praised as a prodigy and was brought to the attention of the Colonna family, "whose palace, like those of many other aristocrats, had become a meeting place of artists and writers."⁵⁷⁹ Marc' Antonio II Colonna, the head of the Colonna household at the time, hosted literary reunions at Palazzo Colonna that young Margherita attended.⁵⁸⁰ Although it is certain that Margherita attended the Colonna literary

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid*

⁵⁷⁸ The responsibility for her education then fell to Cardinal Guglielmo Sirleto, custodian and overseer of the Vatican Library (the position Costanza's brother cardinal Ascanio Colonna would later hold). After Sirleto brought the young girl to the monastery of Santa Cecilia in Trastevere, Sirleto saw that the young woman. Her Latin and Italian poetry teacher was Rinaldo Corso, who wrote on subjects as varied as literature, dance, theology, law, and Italian grammar. Rinaldo had been in the service of Ferrante D'Avalos, the adopted son of Vittoria Colonna. Her mathematics teacher was Luca Valerio, who also taught rhetoric and Greek at the Collegio Romano and later at La Sapienza. Among his pupils was Ippolito Aldobrandini (later Pope Clement VIII). (Note: The Ferrante D'Avalos of whom the author speaks is not Vittoria's adopted son, but her husband). Sarrochi, 5-6.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 8

⁵⁸⁰ Through the contacts she made at Marc' Antonio's literary reunions, Margherita made many acquaintances and had correspondence with such literary men as Pietro Strozzi, Roberto Ubaldini, and Luigi de Heredia. Heredia was a Sicilian soldier and poet of Spanish descent who had resided at the Colonna household. She also corresponded

gatherings, she may have lived with them in Palazzo Colonna, as well.⁵⁸¹ This parallels Caravaggio's early contact with the Colonna in Rome, when As may have had accommodations in one of the Colonna properties or with a family upon his arrival and later with Pandolfo Pucci. These associations with the Colonna social circle provided Margherita with numerous contacts with "other nobles and men of consequence."⁵⁸²

Margherita's gratitude toward the Colonna is evident in her literary production. Margherita wrote a sonnet honoring Felice Orsini, Costanza's mother.⁵⁸³ She wrote two sonnets honoring Costanza Colonna.⁵⁸⁴ Another sonnet penned by Margherita memorializes the Spanish queen Margaret of Austria. This was part of an anthology sponsored by Spaniards living in Rome.⁵⁸⁵ As one of the most influential families of the Spanish faction, the Colonna probably arranged for Margherita's contribution to the project. The Colonna may also have facilitated Caravaggio's introduction into Roman society.

By the mid 1580's, Margherita was hosting literary reunions in her home, and was at the heart of literary and social circles in Rome. Margherita became a member of the academy most popular with the Roman avant-garde, *the Accademia degli Umoristi*, around 1603.⁵⁸⁶ The *Umoristi* celebrated the burlesque and created mock-heroic verse often featuring mythological themes. Its members wrote comedies for their own amusement and met to perform them in the

with Torquato Tasso. (Note: The translator makes an error by stating the Felice Orsini is Costanza's sister in law when, in fact, she is Costanza's mother. Therefore, the "Marcantonio" of whom she speaks is Marc'Antonio II Colonna.) *Ibid*, 9

⁵⁸¹ This assumption comes from a quote from Bartolomeo Sereno's *Trattato de l'uso della lancia* (Naples 1610), "in the residence of Signori Colonna shines the delightful intelligence of Margherita Sarrocchi." *Ibid*, 8, n. 15.

⁵⁸² *Ibid*, 9

⁵⁸³ This was for Muzio Manfredi's anthology celebrating the ladies of Roman High society.

⁵⁸⁴ These accompany Sarrocchi's dedication to Colonna in the 1606 version of *La Scenderbeide*.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 9, n. 16.

⁵⁸⁶ This academy was still going strong in the 1630's with notable members such as Cardinal Francesco Barberini and his brother Antonio, Cardinals Montalto and Mazari, the musicologist Giovanni Battista Doni, Lelio Guidiccione, and the singer Leonora Baroni. Among the early members were Filippo Colonna, Paolo Mancini, Giovanni Battista Guarini, and Alessandro Tassoni. Estelle Haan, *From Academia to Amicitia: Milton's Latin Writings and the Italian Academies*, (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1999), 102.

house of Paolo Mancini on the Corso.⁵⁸⁷ As Cardinal del Monte's friend, Cardinal Montalto was a member of this society, Caravaggio knew of their activities. The groups anti-traditionalism is evident in the *Umoristi*'s choice of a rain cloud as their impresa, "just as the cloud is condensed from humorous vapors risen from the bitterness of the sea, so the Accademia de gli Humoristi is a gathering of spirited wits who have distanced themselves from the bitterness of social custom."⁵⁸⁸

The avant-garde leanings of the Roman *Umoristi* show some revolutionary thinking, but pale in comparison to those of some academies in Naples, which are discussed later in this chapter. Notably, Caravaggio's friend Gian Battista Marino was associated with avant-garde societies in both cities.⁵⁸⁹ Margherita left the *Umoristi* around 1608, perhaps due to the growing number of members who admired Marino, a follower of the "modern" camp of writers, opposed to the more "moderate" or "classicist" style of Sarrocchi.⁵⁹⁰ If these avant-garde academies were open to artists, Caravaggio may have been a candidate for membership, due to his revolutionary approach to painting.

Although Sarrocchi was more conservative than Marino and was technically classified as a "classicist," her choice to use contemporary events and her choice of a "masculine" genre made her innovative. The Colonna's support of her is typical of their pattern of nurturing innovative

⁵⁸⁷ Sarrocchi, 10 n. 22.

⁵⁸⁸ Quote from Girolamo Aleandro's, *Discorso sopra l'Impresa degli Accademici Humoristi*, discusses "sicome la Nuvola è condensata d'umorosi vapori levatisi dall'amarezza del mare, così l'Accademia de gli Humoristi è una raunanza di spiritosi ingegni, che dall'amarezza de' costumi mondani sí sono separati." Adrienne Laskier Martín, *Cervantes and Burlesque Sonnet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, revised ed., 1991), 73.

⁵⁸⁹ It is very likely that Caravaggio knew Margherita; because she continued her friendship with Costanza (citing her 1606 dedication to Colonna) and the author frequented some of the same circles as did Giambattista Marino, Caravaggio's good friend. Possibly through the meetings of the *Umoristi*, Margherita was introduced to fellow Neapolitan Gian Battista Marino, who was a member of the academy while he was in Rome from 1600-1606. Marino and also attended the literary gatherings held in Sarrocchi's home. For a time, there was a mutual exchange of complementary sonnets, but the friendship ended abruptly when the hyper-critical Sarrocchi criticized Marino's work. Margherita's sensitivity and crassness made enemies of "many men of letters." It seems her fame led to pride and vanity, for she harshly attacked those who criticized her work. Sarrocchi, 10.

⁵⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 14

musicians, artists, and writers—such as Vittoria Colonna’s own writing, Costanza’s support of Caravaggio, and Orsina Peretti Sforza’s (Costanza’s daughter-in-law) musical patronage in Milan. Colonna patronage seems to have encouraged experimentation and innovation and was not bound by the poetical rules that the “classicists” deemed necessary for outstanding work.

Caravaggio was another innovative young talent that Costanza aided. During her stay in Rome around 1592, she helped him get established in Rome and set him up with art collectors eager to acquire works from Rome’s up-and-coming artists. Costanza then returned to Lombardy, leaving Caravaggio on his own. She returned to the Eternal City with her son Muzio to celebrate the Jubilee of 1600, just in time to witness firsthand the success of her Lombard painter. Having found his personal style and an eager public, Caravaggio was no longer quite so dependent on her help, for he had his own connections within Rome’s artistic circles. Yet because Caravaggio frequently ran into difficulties with authorities, Costanza again offered her help, taking advantage of her large social network to get the troubled painter out of his mounting predicaments.⁵⁹¹

4.5 CARAVAGGIO’S LAST YEARS IN SOUTHERN ITALY

Where the fugitive went immediately after leaving Rome is unclear.⁵⁹² Berra believes the most reliable account is a letter from Fabio Masetti (the ambassador of the duke of Modena, Cesare d’Este) that locates Caravaggio at Paliano. This seems likely from the point of legal jurisdiction,

⁵⁹¹ For the most recent and extensive look at Costanza Colonna’s role in Caravaggio’s life, see: Berra, 292-333.

⁵⁹² Some scholars believe the Colonna fiefs in Lazio. Baglione believed he went to Palestrina, where Cardinal Ascanio Colonna, Costanza’s younger brother, was just named bishop June 5, 1606. However, Mancini’s account states that the artist first went to Zagarola where he was secretly protected by the Prince Marzio Colonna (1584-1607), member of the Zagarolo branch of the Colonna family. Bellori also agrees with Mancini’s story. *Ibid*, 297-99

because the Colonnas of Paliano exercised absolute authority in their territory—the right to maintain public order and to exercise justice, both civil and criminal, as they saw fit. This was also the region in which the Sforza-Colonna family was most involved, because they were busy acquiring new land and property in the Kingdom of Naples. Caravaggio’s movements around the peninsula, such as his flight to Genoa, show a travel pattern that follows that of the business trips of the Sforza-Colonna.⁵⁹³ Regardless of the specific detail, all sources claim some sort of aid from some member of the Colonna family.⁵⁹⁴

There is only sketchy evidence as to who arranged for Caravaggio’s escape. It was most likely Costanza Colonna, who was then living in the family palazzo at SS. Apostoli in Rome, only a short distance from where Ranuccio Tomassoni was killed. In Palazzo Colonna, Caravaggio probably found an immediate, although a temporary refuge.⁵⁹⁵ A famous artist like Caravaggio, who actually took the name of her *marchesato* could not be ignored by the marchesa; he was one of her own. Her close relationship with members of his family would further move her to assist him. Although a powerful family such as the Colonna had some power to protect their subjects, she could not shelter him from papal authorities forever. Thus, Caravaggio was forced to seek exile outside papal jurisdiction, preferably in Spanish territories where Caravaggio, a Spanish subject, could travel freely there.

Caravaggio could have fled back to Milan, but the Spanish Kingdom of Naples was the better choice. Naples was a larger city and had a thriving court culture; Milan’s administration

⁵⁹³ *Ibid*, 294-97, 308

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 297-299

⁵⁹⁵ Powerful families occasionally gave refuge from justice; this was one way to publicly show their true power. One merely had to run to the door of the palazzo and call the name of the noble family or yell the name of his nationality in front of the house of an ambassador to gain protection. Powerful Roman signori (ambassadors and cardinals) enjoyed some legal privileges that were directly proportional to their economic condition and social prestige. The Colonna were certainly powerful enough to exercise this right...one that the papacy tolerated, but officially denied. *Ibid*, 305, 307

changed too frequently to be a reliable source of commissions. Moreover, Costanza was planning to move near Naples permanently, because this was the region that the Sforza-Colonna preferred. Both Costanza and Muzio wanted to buy property and possibly trade their fief in Caravaggio for one in the south.⁵⁹⁶ Naples could serve as a new home base if a papal pardon could not be arranged. After leaving Rome, Caravaggio's first stop may have been Marzio Colonna's fief in Zagarolo, only 22 miles (36 km) from Rome.⁵⁹⁷

The *principato* of Paliano was a feudal state of Costanza's father, Marco Antonio II Colonna.⁵⁹⁸ The official head of the Paliano branch of the Colonna the duke of Paliano and Gran Connestabile, Marc' Antonio IV, who was a mere 11 years old when Caravaggio entered Colonna territory.⁵⁹⁹ Due to his age, the fiefdom was governed by his "tutori," Cardinal Alessandro Peretti Montalto (Cardinal del Monte's close friend) and the Duke of Zagarolo Marzio Colonna), with the consensus of Cardinal Ascanio Colonna (Costanza's brother) and the Duke of Sermoneta, Pietro Caetani. Since these were the persons really in charge of Colonna lands around Naples, any one of these men could have arranged for Caravaggio's stay, at least until Costanza arrived in Naples.

Berra's careful research into the relationship between Caravaggio and Costanza Colonna shows that she was ever present in his life. Sometimes she was directly involved, while at other

⁵⁹⁶ In 1609, documents show that Costanza was buying "casa Massima Jacentem" in Naples for her son Muzio who was searching for land similar to the fief of Caravaggio to relocate in the south. Berra believes that she may have been living near her nephew Luigi Carafa Colonna (son of her older sister Giovanna and prince of Stigliano Antonio Caraffa) or may have moved into "casa Massima." Berra, 309. On 12 June 1607 Costanza was staying at Torre del Greco with the prince of Stigliano – Luigi Carafa Colonna. She had arrived to check on some land in Abruzzo that Muzio wanted to exchange for his holdings in the State of Milano. *Ibid*, 323

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 300.

⁵⁹⁸ Due to a lack of male heirs, the property was passed on to the first born of Fabrizio Colonna and Anna Borromeo, Marco Antonio III (1565 -1595). He died prematurely in 1595, leaving the property to his son Marco Antonio IV (1595-1611). *Ibid*, 89-92, 299-302.

⁵⁹⁹ On Marc' Antonio IV, see: *Ibid*, 299 and 309. The matrimonial contract of 1598 between Muzio Sforza and Orsina Peretti (mother of Marco Antonio IV Colonna) named his tutors and their powers. *Ibid*, 299. Marco Antonio IV, also was called "il Contestabilino" also inherited the Colonna fiefdoms in the Kingdom of Naples. Although he was formally the prince of Pagliano, he was too young to make any real decisions on the plight of Caravaggio.

times remaining in the background. She knew him in his infancy and in his youth—perhaps even taught him catechism. She was in Milan in 1591-92 when Caravaggio was there as a young painter. She was in Rome when Merisi arrived at Rome and saw his success around 1600. Later when the painter was in trouble, she helped him find temporary sanctuary in Genoa. She was in Rome when the painter killed Tomassoni and helped him flee Rome to the Colonna fiefdoms near Naples. She arranged for his trip to Malta on the ship of her son Fabrizio and took Caravaggio into her home when the painter returned to Naples. Finally, saw him off on his final voyage with the hopes of Caravaggio receiving the papal pardon that Costanza probably also arranged.

Caravaggio was always under Costanza's watchful eye as a subject of her fief and member of her the Merisi/Aratori family. Caravaggio was the grandchild of her faithful servant, "Joannis Jacobi de Aratoribus," and the nephew of her beloved Margherita Aratori, who nursed and cared for her children. Moreover, Caravaggio's sister was employed by her son as the nurse of her grandchildren and named her daughter Antonia Costanza.⁶⁰⁰ Caravaggio's relationship with the house of Costanza Colonna was more intimate than previously believed and it may be assumed that Costanza's social and cultural interests were known to the painter. In each region that Caravaggio visited, the Sforza Colonna played a central role in the cultural life of the city, a social and cultural circle of which the painter was certainly aware, if not directly participating.

If Caravaggio stayed with Don Marzio Colonna in Zagarolo, he would have visited the immense Palazzo Colonna, where he supposedly painted a few paintings.⁶⁰¹ Mancini said there were two—a "Magdalene" and a "Christ on the Road to Emmaus," while Bellori mentions only

⁶⁰⁰ Berra, 335-6.

⁶⁰¹ Costanzo probably would have helped Caravaggio find refuge here in the family's territory, but Del Monte also may have aided the desperate painter, for Marzio's son, Francesco Colonna was a close friend of the cardinal. Langdon, 315

“a Mary Magdalene.”⁶⁰² Some scholars believe these to be the *Magdalene in Ecstasy* (thought to be a copy of an original) and the *Supper at Emmaus* now in Milan.⁶⁰³ [Figs. 129 & 130] If this “Mary Magdalene” is the *Magdalene in Ecstasy*, Caravaggio painted her differently from those of his Roman period. [Figs. 64 & 68] One does not find the impressive illusionism, rich color, and careful brushwork, but roughly painted surfaces with little color. What strikes the viewer is not beautiful technique, but intense psychological expression. This is also true of the “Emmaus” paintings. The London painting has bright colors and generous paint application. In the Brera version, grays and browns dominate the thinly-painted canvas.

4.6 CARAVAGGIO’S MOVEMENTS DURING HIS LAST YEARS

After a time in Naples, Costanza arrange for Caravaggio’s arrival in Malta in mid-1607, with the hopes of him receiving the habit of a Knight of Malta. Caravaggio greatly desired a title so that he could legally carry a sword. At this time only “gentlemen,” that is men with titles, could carry arms in the street. While in Rome Caravaggio was arrested for illegally carrying a sword, but explained that he was connected with the house of Del Monte and thus, should be allowed that privilege.⁶⁰⁴ Caravaggio’s hunger for recognition and excessive pride possibly motivated

⁶⁰² *Ibid*, 314-15 Bellori as quoted in Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 355. Mancini as quoted in Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 348.

⁶⁰³ On the Magdalene: Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 405; Langdon, 314-15; Berra, 308-11. On the Supper at Emmaus: Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, Langdon, 316-17.

⁶⁰⁴ “But Caravaggio’s preoccupation with painting did not calm his restless nature. After having painted for a few hours in the day he used to go out on the town with his sword at his side, like a professional swordsman, seeing to do anything but paint.” Bellori as quoted in Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 367. Also see: Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 130; Langdon, 152-53, 298; Sandro Corradini and Maurizio Marini, “Roma 1605: Lo strano furto di ‘...un lama di spada...di m[aestro]. Michelangelo da Caravaggio Pittore” in *Caravaggio: La Luce nella pittura lombarda* (Milano: Electa, 2000), 102-107; and Giuseppe Resca, *La spada e la misericordia: Caravaggio e il Demone della Violenza* (Rome: Armando Editore, 2001).

some of his more erratic behavior. When he did not receive the respect that he believed he deserved, his temper flared and trouble was soon to follow.

Recent documentary evidence shows that it was most likely one of the Sforza-Colonna, probably Fabrizio Sforza Colonna, who arranged for Caravaggio's entry into the Knights of Malta. Caravaggio is thought to have arrived in Malta on a vessel commanded by Fabrizio himself and it may have been Colonna who helped him escape the island and get to Sicily.⁶⁰⁵ On 14 July 1608, Caravaggio entered the Order of Malta as one of the "Cavalieri dell'Obbedienza Magistrale dell'Ordine Gerosolemitano."⁶⁰⁶ On 18 August 1608, Caravaggio was involved in some "tumult," the reason for which is not clear. He was arrested and was waiting to go to trial when he escaped sometime during the first week of October 1608.⁶⁰⁷

Caravaggio did not remain long in any place after his escape from Malta.⁶⁰⁸ Sometime around August of 1609, Caravaggio was in Palermo.⁶⁰⁹ On 24 October 1609, word reached Rome that Caravaggio was fatally wounded in an incident that occurred near the door of the "hosteria del Ciriglio" di Napoli."⁶¹⁰ 7 November 1609, Mancini wrote to his brother Deifebo that four men had assaulted Caravaggio in Naples and he was feared to be disfigured. This report supports Baglione's claim that Caravaggio was wounded in the face and was hardly

⁶⁰⁵ On Fabrizio Sforza Colonna and Caravaggio's stay in Malta, see: Berra, 315; Langdon, 345-7; Sciberras and Stone, 20-23, 27, 35, 39; Cynthia de Giorgio and Keith Sciberras eds., *Caravaggio and the Paintings of Realism in Malta* (Valletta, Malta: Midsea books, 2007), 83.

⁶⁰⁶ He did not receive either the title "Cavalieri di Grazia" or "di Giustizia" because these were reserved for nobility. Berra, 325-8; Sciberras and Stone, 28-9.

⁶⁰⁷ Berra claims that he probably was not actually put in prison but was free to roam the island. Berra, 327. Sciberras and Stone, however, believe that Caravaggio was detained in Fort St. Angelo, Sciberras and Stone, 32-33.

⁶⁰⁸ Caravaggio flees Malta possibly with the help of Fabrizio Sforza and one of his ships at his command. Berra, 328. Sciberras and Stone do not mention Fabrizio. They cannot say because the evidence does not point to anyone in particular. They suggest that it would have been very dangerous for a fellow knight such as Fabrizio to aid Caravaggio, because he could be thrown out of the order as punishment. Sciberras and Stone, 33-34.

⁶⁰⁹ At this time also Card Giannettino Doria (younger brother of Andrea Doria) had just been named archbishop of the city and was related to Costanza Colonna in as much as he was a cousin of Giovanna Colonna and nephew of the marchesa. Berra 328.

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid*, 329; Langdon, 382-5.

recognizable. Berra believes that the assailants did not want to warn the painter by bullying him, but wanted to kill him, making it necessary for him to be officially protected in a noble's palazzo. Costanza Colonna was in Naples at the time and had the authority to assume this responsibility, as she had done in the past.

Documentation proves that Caravaggio was indeed living with the marchesa, who intervened on Caravaggio's behalf once again.⁶¹¹ From the home of the marchesa in the neighborhood of Chiaia at Naples, Caravaggio departed by boat to Palo with the aim of reentering Rome where he was pardoned. At Palo, however, Caravaggio was imprisoned. The ship returned to Naples and his belongings were sent to the palazzo in Chiaia, where he stayed with Costanza. The artist managed to free himself after paying a huge sum of money and, by land and on foot, arrived at Porto Ercole very ill and later died. The three paintings Caravaggio is said to have had with him were temporarily kept in the Colonna palazzo—two “John the Baptists” and a “Magdalen.”⁶¹²

4.7 THEATRICAL PERFORMANCE IN SOUTHERN ITALY

Caravaggio's last years were spent traveling between Naples, Malta, and Sicily. During that time, he was exposed to a number of dramatic forms that influenced his late style. In the next sections I describe a variety of dramatic forms written and performed—which include: the

⁶¹¹ In a letter dated 29 July 1610 bishop Caserta Deodato Gentile sent a letter to Scipione Borghese that Caravaggio in the final days of his life was lodged in the palazzo of Costanza Colonna, a building located in the neighborhood of Chiaia at Naples. Berra, 329.

⁶¹² Pacelli found this letter in the Vatican's secret archive. Berra 329-30 The Colonnas would have had the knowledge and the power to have found Caravaggio's legitimate heirs. The “Marchesa” mentioned in the letter was most likely Costanza, but it also could have been the “young” marchesa, Orsina Peretti Sforza. *Ibid*, 330.

commedia dell'arte, Neapolitan theater, *commedia de santos*, and the Jesuit Theater. Some of these dramatic forms, such as Neapolitan theater and the *comedia de santos*, were unique to the southern region. Others, such as the *commedia dell'arte* and Jesuit Theater, were ubiquitous throughout Italy.

4.7.1 *Commedia dell'Arte*

As was the case throughout Europe, the *commedia del'arte* had become popular in southern Italy. In this theatrical form, Caravaggio found an immediately recognizable visual language—familiar character types and situations—to utilize in his own paintings and communicate with all classes. These familiar facial features and poses suggested a particular *commedia* stock character, with its standardized personality traits, attitudes, and social class, thus informing the viewer of the type of persons inhabiting the world of Caravaggio's paintings. Although Caravaggio utilized these stock characters both in Rome and Naples, the *commedia* personages he used in southern Italy were mainly had malevolent personalities.

Arlecchino (Harlequin), discussed in the previous chapter, is one of the *zanni* characters who were from the lower class, often acting as servants, go-betweens, ruffians, and pimps, and spoke the dialect of the poor from their particular hometown. *Pulcinella*, was a rural peasant from around Naples whose mask featured a sharply hooked nose a white conical hat and the baggy white shirt and trousers worn by laborers working in the sunny fields around Naples.⁶¹³ The simple, tattered clothing of many of the lower-class men and laborers appeared in

⁶¹³ Croce wrote an essay on Pulcinella in *Saggi sulla letteratura italiana del Seicento*, 1931 (rev. ed., 1949).

Caravaggio's paintings such as *The Ecce Homo* [Fig. 46], *The Burial of St. Lucy* [Fig. 8], and the *Raising of Lazarus* [fig. 10] are similar to that of the *zanni*. [Figs. 111, 115 & 116]

Caravaggio's *Flagellation* painting also contains *zanni* types in action. [Figs. 131 & 132] Of the three men who surround Christ, only one face is visible. The tormenter at the left grabs Christ by the hair and snarls as he prepares to strike him with a scourge. His features resemble those of the violent and diabolical "other," the darker side of the *zanni* class to which *Arlecchino* belongs. [Fig. 125] The forehead is etched with deep wrinkles, the eyes are small and beady, the nose broad, and the mouth frozen in a cruel grimace. Caravaggio repeatedly chose this face type when depicting a lower-class man involved in some violent or menial activity such as an executioner, a gravedigger, or a torturer.⁶¹⁴ [Figs. 131, 132 & 134] The similarity between the *Arlecchino* mask and Caravaggio's figures is striking. [Figs. 133 & 123] The violent activity that this character performs also mirrors that of *Arlecchino* (Harlequin) images and live performances [Fig. 135].⁶¹⁵

4.7.2 Jesuit Theater

Jesuit Theater takes several approaches that we see in Caravaggio's work, including an attempt to engage viewers through the dramatic representation of biblical narrative, focusing on middle or lower class figures so that the audience may more easily relate to the drama, adjusting theatrical styles when needed to communicate to the various classes watching these dramas. Caravaggio knew Jesuit drama while in Milan, because the Jesuits were invited to Milan by

⁶¹⁴ Vincenzo Pacelli, *L'Ultimo Caravaggio: dalla Maddalena a mezza figura ai due san Giovanni (1606-1610)*, (Todi: ediar, 1994), 199-205.

⁶¹⁵ Castagno, 96.

Borromeo to help with religious and lay education. Because Jesuit Theater had tremendous success in engaging the emotions of its audience, teaching the youth Christian doctrine, and serving as a wholesome form of entertainment, Carlo Borromeo employed theater as a didactic tool encouraged him to use similarly theatrical conventions in his own public devotions for the city.

Since Jesuit Theater was famous throughout Italy and the rest of Europe, it would have been a familiar part of religious life in southern Italy as well. In fact, the earliest Jesuit performances were performed in Messina as early as 1551. The Jesuit college in Messina was influential in those years because it is the model upon which all Jesuit schools were formed.⁶¹⁶ Its theater was also influential, with Tuccio's plays performed in Jesuit schools throughout Europe. The path to being such a popular and prolific playwright usually began as a student trained according to the ideals of the *Ratio Studiorum*. Upon entering the Jesuit order, the theater remained a prominent part of Jesuit life, at both the colleges and the seminaries. The Jesuit student regularly saw performances and perhaps tried his hand at writing some. After completion of his philosophical and theological education, the young Jesuit returned to the college as a professor of rhetoric, humanities, or poetry.⁶¹⁷

After a number of successes, the office of playwright was given to an exceptional dramatist and, if they were particularly skilled, they might be commissioned by other Jesuit

⁶¹⁶ McCabe, *An Introduction to the Jesuit Theater*, 45

⁶¹⁷ This educational background exposed him to dramatic theory and practice, private acting training, experience performing before an audience, introduction to playwriting, and frequent contact with a vibrant theatrical tradition. The poetry professor was expected to write dramas, but for other professors there was a selective process. In addition to the well-rounded education described above, the professor had to have a sound knowledge of ancient drama and be skilled in Greek and Latin versification. *Ibid*, 36.

colleges to write for a special event or have their plays circulated among the colleges. This was the case for Stefano Tuccio. Here is a description of the ideal Jesuit playwright:

Gifts required in the playwright: apart from native genius, without which there is no hope of success in this field, he must first be a poet, and a Latin poet; he needs a brilliant imagination; he must be an unexceptionable moralist; he must be himself an actor of more than ordinary ability; and finally, a person of some technical skill. These things are essential, and without them his work would be inferior. If over and above, he is gifted in music and painting—a very desirable, though not essential, gift—he will be perfect.⁶¹⁸

It seems that this extensive training paid off, because the Jesuit dramas were popular throughout Europe. In fact, the Spanish viceroys ruling southern Italy were “confirmed addicts.”⁶¹⁹ In 1645, the viceroy of Sicily had a production of *Pelagius martyr* written and performed in Palermo. It was popular not only with the viceroy and his court, but with the general public as well, so much so that there almost was a riot:

The viceroy’s satisfaction was supreme, incredible the numbers who came to see it from the viceregal household, the court, and the ranks of the people, unprecedented their applause. We did not, however, escape the usual wrangling of those, who on account of the size of the crowd and its lack of order, were unable to obtain seats.⁶²⁰

We know that a similarly diverse crowd watched another Jesuit play in the previous century. In 1558, at the Jesuit College at Messina, the viceroy was there to see *Philoplutus seu De misero avaritiae exitu* along with ‘an immense crowd of nobles, citizens, and learned

⁶¹⁸ Stefano Tuccio was skilled in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. Franz Lang. *Dissertatio de action scaenica*. Alexander Rudin, trans. (Bern: 1575 and originally published Munich, 1727), 61. As quoted in McCabe, *An Introduction to Jesuit Theater*, 37.

⁶¹⁹ McCabe, *The Jesuit Theater*, 44.

⁶²⁰ G. V. Rossi (necius) *Pinacotheca imaginum illustrium doctrina vel ingenii virorum, qui auctore superstite diem suum obierunt* (Cologne, 1645). No.7. As quoted in McCabe, *The Jesuit Theater*, 44.

men.’⁶²¹ The performance was so well received that a Dominican in the audience praised the drama in a sermon shortly afterward.

4.7.2.1 Stefano Tuccio, Sicily’s Jesuit Playwright

Another set of popular plays was written for the Jesuits by Messina’s master dramatist Stefano Tuccio [Tucci] (1540-1597). In 1562, Tuccio began writing for the Jesuits. His *Nabuchodonosor* was performed three times in succession that year. His *Goliath* was performed in the following year. In 1565, Tuccio’s *Judith* had to be performed four times due to its tremendous popularity.⁶²² Tuccio’s most popular play was *Christus Judex* (1569). As usual the viceroy, nobles, and the general public were in attendance:

All watched it throughout in tears.... Later on, so great was the demand for this play that there is scarcely any well-known town in Europe in which it has not been produced, always with a harvest of grief and fear among its spectators.⁶²³

In a later performance, after being seen in Sicily, this play was received in Rome in a similarly positive manner:

And so the citizens of Rome, who had hitherto seen no spectacle like this, sped from their homes as if mad in their eagerness to be present, to feast their eyes, and to steep their souls in the wonders of a show of which they had an extravagant notion from hearsay. The crowd was so great that neither the Swiss Guards nor any other body of soldiers was able to control it.⁶²⁴

⁶²¹ McCabe, *The Jesuit Theater*, 45.

⁶²²Emmanuel Aguilera, S. J. *Provinciae Siculae ortus et res gestae* (Palermo, 1737-1740), I, 166 and 178. As quoted in McCabe, *The Jesuit Theater*, 45.

⁶²³ Aguilera, 178. As quoted in *Ibid*, 45.

⁶²⁴ Rossi cited in *Ibid*, 45.

In 1574, Pope Gregory XIII closed the playhouses of Rome; the Jesuit Theater there was allowed to perform a “*Judicium Universale*,” which was probably a restaging of Stefano Tuccio’s *Christus Judex*. The Jesuit dramas were a continuing presence in Italian city life whether in Milan, Rome or Messina. Caravaggio had ample opportunity to see them while travelling in the Kingdoms of Naples and Sicily.

Stefano Tuccio entered the Jesuits in 1557 and spent his novitiate at the *Collegio Mamertino* at Messina. There he became acquainted with the Spaniard Jerónimo Nadal who later became vicar general and wrote a treatise on the use of images in Jesuit church decoration. Tuccio in 1561 wrote a letter expressing his desire to go to India, a fantasy of many young Jesuits, but he stayed in Sicily and continued his education.⁶²⁵ Between 1562 and 1569 he wrote and represented six Latin tragedies with a biblical theme: the aforementioned *Nabucodhonor* (1562), *Goliath* (1563), *Juditha* (1564); and a trilogy on the life of Christ: *Christus Nascens*, *Christus Patiens*, and *Christus Judex*.

Tuccio followed the Jesuits’ view that theater served mainly as a support to their studies. The importance of this pedagogical function is clear in a letter from Tuccio dated 1563 that discusses the performance of *Nabucodhonor*.

Studies [classes] did not resume unhappily [for us], but, on the contrary, very well, due to a play that was written about the [story of the] unfailing heart of three youths as recorded by Daniel in chapter 3.... [This play was] interspersed with much music and much to dazzle the eye. [It was] heard by many gentlemen, while many more, due to there not being enough room, were turned away. It was also understood by everybody, as at the beginning of each act what was going to happen was briefly summarized in Italian...the oration that came before the

⁶²⁵Later, Tuccio later traveled to Rome, possibly Milan, Padua, and returned to Sicily. Saulini, *Il teatro di un gesuita*, 17.

performance induced in us much gravity and goodwill...it argued, in simple rhetoric, that one should not look for nobility other than in virtue.⁶²⁶

Of interest here is the mention of the presence of music and the “replica,” which seems to be some sort of summary of the drama in Italian before every act as a comprehension aid for the general public who did not know Latin. A similar synopsis was often distributed to the audience to help them understand the major parts of the play.⁶²⁷ These efforts to reach out to the public and accommodate for the various education levels present shows the Jesuit attempt to adhere to Counter-Reformation directive to engage all classes and produce art (or plays) that all can understand.

Although Tuccio’s *Goliath* followed a classic model, a play in five acts that included a prologue and an epilogue, he added variety and expressiveness by ending each act with a chorus adding lyric parts with various metric forms throughout the prologue. As was the convention, the welcome addressed the audience and, in particular, don Juan de Cerda (the viceroy) and the “*Conscripti patres*” (municipal authority of Messina). An interesting part of the prologue follows the brief description of David’s daunting task (killing with a mere slingshot the well-armed giant Goliath). The speaker engages the audience by posing a series of questions to them, “...to whom must one attribute the glory of victory? to a weapon that is not exactly such? to a

⁶²⁶ La rinnovazione delli studij non ci successe infelicemente, anzi molto bene, per causa della tragedia, che dal animo costante di tre giovanetti registrati da Daniele, al terzo capo, si compose. Fu questa tragedia ben rappresentata et con molta leggiadria, intermediata con molta musica et con molto de’ riguardanti, udita da molti gentiluomini, quanti molto più, per non esser luogo di più capace, se ne ritornavano. Et fu anche intesa da tutti, ché in principio di ciascun atto sommariamente, il che s’haveva da fare, si replicava in italiano; et fu adornata di molti et varij versi che havevano affisso li nostri scolari. Fu assai giocondo tutto ciò, ma la oratione, che previene il tutto, ci arrecò molta gravità et riputazione. In vero ella fu bellissima: ragionava con facile rettorica che la nobiltà altronde non si ha da cercare che dalla virtù. Archivum Romano della Compagnia di Gesù, *Sic. 182*, cc. 72v e 73r. As cited in Saulini, *Il teatro di un gesuita*, 49. For public reception to Tuccio’s plays see: Soldati, *Il collegio Mamertino*, 22-23.

⁶²⁷ Saulini, 50.

youth judged mad for having dared so much?”⁶²⁸ The desired answer is not David, but God, for it was divine intervention that gave courage to the boy and guided the fatal shot. This Old Testament story was a pretext to teach a higher truth, but in a way that directly involved the spectator. The speaker challenges the audience and, in a way, the audience has become an active participant, rather than a distant observer. In Caravaggio’s *David with the Head of Goliath*, the direct gaze of David toward the viewer, the foreshortened hand thrusting into the viewer’s space, and the realistically-depicted detail of Goliath’s severed head all add to the illusion that the viewer is involved in the action. [Figs. 2 & 134] Just as Tuccio’s drama involved the audience by breaking the barrier between the fictional and the real world, Caravaggio similarly draws his “spectator” into the scene, thereby intensifying its emotional impact and facilitating the communication of the spiritual message.

After Tuccio’s David delivers the fatal blow and the giant Philistine falls to the ground, David directly addresses the wounded head of Goliath, “But you, unfortunate head, are due to me as a trophy. Therefore, I tear you from your other limbs, cut by your very own sword.”⁶²⁹ This also captures the mood of Caravaggio’s late work. It commonly is believed that the painter used his own likeness for the giant. This is an unusual choice, but it parallels the odd choice that Tuccio made when he named his play *Goliath*. The greatness did not lie with David, he was just the youth that God chose to use as a tool. This is the message we are left in the final scene, an acknowledgement of our powerlessness without God, we are less than little David. In fact the

⁶²⁸“... a chi si deve attribuire la gloria della vittoria? a un’arma che non è propriamente tale? a un giovinetto giudicato demente per aver osato tanto.” Saulini, 52.

⁶²⁹In Italian, “Ma tu capo infelice sei a me dovuto a mo’ di trofeo. Quindi ti strappo alle membra, tagliato dalla tua stessa spada.” Latin is below:

*Vice sed trophaei, tu mihi infelix caput
Deberis, igitur ense dissectum tuo
Vellere membris* (5° , II) *Ibid*, 66.

message seems to be that in many ways mankind is more like Goliath. He was the one who tried to surpass his limits and challenge God by threatening his chosen people. An arrogant and evil Goliath challenged God, and by the hand of youthful David, he was defeated. God was the true victor.

In Caravaggio's work, we see his severed head with mouth agape almost as if preparing to speak to us. The young David depicted does not appear so brave, so victorious. He looks at the head almost with pity, just after his address to Goliath's head quoted above. After his posturing, he reflects and realizes that this deed was accomplished only with help, and he sees that the dead Philistine looks not so different from any other man. Goliath is a symbol of the dark side of human nature. According to classical tragedy he is the main protagonist who reaches beyond his grasp and falls victim to his own weaknesses—pride and arrogance. Perhaps, Caravaggio believed he was also victimized by his own overconfidence.

The next play performed with an Old Testament subject was the aforementioned *Juditha*. Like *Goliath*, *Juditha* was divided into five acts and had a prologue and an epilogue. The first four acts ended with a chorus, but in the fifth act, the chorus consisted of the priests and religious leaders who accompanied Joachim and occurred at the end of the penultimate (sixth) scene.⁶³⁰ The function of the chorus varied, occasionally giving commentary, but mainly descriptive and laudatory passages, especially referring to Judith.

This play did not start with the traditional welcoming prologue, but launched directly into the argument of the play, directly addressing the city of Messina. Again, Tuccio poses questions

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.*, 69. Also see: Stefano Tuccio. "*Giuditta*". *Dramma sacro*. trans. Giuseppe Scarfi. (Messina: Editore La Sicilia, 1926) and *The "Juditha" of Stephen Tucci*. trans. Mario T. Puricelli, PhD thesis Saint Louis University, 1939.

to the audience referring to the motivations of Judith and explaining the symbolism of Judith as Mary, Mother of God. This was a particularly strong association for those in Messina because of the large number of marian devotions held in that city.⁶³¹ These women share similar characteristics—courageous and deliverers of salvation. The plot largely follows that in *Judith* (a book in the Old Testament Apocrypha), but with some variations and additions. To make Holophernes' cruelty toward the Israelites more poignant, Tuccio chooses not to show a group of indistinct citizens suffering, but shows a mother and father desperately trying to quench the thirst of their children after Holofernes diverted their water supply. The mother cries over the cadaver of one of her children. Tuccio shifts to an intimate familial scene—one with which everyone could identify—to more easily engage the audience's emotions. This focus on an intimate relationship in the midst of a biblical narrative is similar to the way that Caravaggio chose to exclude extraneous details from his pictorial spaces and focus on a few significant figures, common people that were very familiar to the viewer.

Judith is first seen in prayer. She is not distressed, but defiant as she waits for God's aid. In response to her plea, the angel Raphael appears to her bearing God's message. Tuccio chose Judith's words and attitude to echo those of Mary at the annunciation. The dialogue between Judith and the angel reveals her doubts and complexities to the audience. Like David, Judith is a regular person without any special strength.

Judith: I do not see what more I could say: you repel my arms with arms [or weapons].

⁶³¹Saulini, 71. For other info on the prologue see: Saulini, *La città nel teatro, il teatro per la città, Le tragedie del P. Stefano Tuccio S.J.*, in *Vita cittadina nel teatro fra Cinque e Seicento* (Rome: Torre d'Orfeo, 1999), 289-296.

Raphael: Listen rather to my admonishment: He who reigns in Mount Olympus swears that, by His power and His design, you will cut off the wicked head of the ferocious tyrant.⁶³²

Tuccio adds a vivid dream to the biblical narrative through which God (through the appearance of Raphael) assigns Judith alone the task of freeing her people. Holofernes represents evil, and as such, his character is not explored in the course of the drama; he is simply the symbol of evil to be conquered.⁶³³ Judith's personality, however, is revealed gradually throughout the play. She openly describes her hatred for Holofernes, voicing her desire:

...to lose the monster, to condemn the cruel head into the fires of Styx" and in the moment in which she delivers the blow with Holofernes' own sword, she appears even violent. There is no hesitation not even when, with the help of faithful and watchful Abra, she places the head she severed in her sack and leaves the camp with her servant to return to Betulia with her glorious and macabre trophy.⁶³⁴

When Judith returns to her city, and opens her sack to show the severed head of the tyrant, there is no repulsion, or pity from the citizens. Only Achior appears shaken, but not out of horror, but rather out of amazement of these amazing events demonstrating God's protective

⁶³² Saulini, 75. Juditha: Non vedo che cosa potrei ancora dire: tu respingi le mie armi con le armi.
Raphaele: Ascolta piuttosto il mio ammonimento: colui che regna nell'Olimpo giura che, per la sua potenza e per i suoi ordini, tu taglierai l'empio capo al feroce tiranno.

Juditha: Quid referam haud video: telis mea tela repellis
Raphael: Accipe quae contra moneo: Regnator Olympi
Perque suas vires et per sua numina, iurat
Impia te rapido cesura colla tyranno (2°, VI)

⁶³³ Saulini, 82.

⁶³⁴ “di perdere il mostro, di condannare il capo crudele ai fuochi dello Stige’ e nel momento in cui vibra il colpo con la spada dello stesso generale, appare addirittura violenta. Nessuna esitazione neppure quando, con l’aiuto della fedele e vigile Abra, ripone nella bisaccia il capo che ha reciso e insieme alla serva esce dal campo per tornare a Betulia con il proprio glorioso e macabro trofeo.” *Ibid*, 82.

hand.⁶³⁵ The fifth act is followed by an epilogue which does not speak more about the story but urges the people of Messina to meditate on what they have seen, the consequences of drunkenness—death. The speaker urges the city to put down its “*superbia*” and arrogance and turn to God who is all-knowing and faithful and always ready to come to the aid of those who put faith in him:

Do not rely on your wealth, do not exalt your strength,\ Lay down your pride, He says: and you can have that which you ask\ In your adversity never presume that the “Thundering one”,\ is oblivious of you, He says: and May you have that which you ask.⁶³⁶

This cautionary comment regarding *superbia* (pride) will be taken up again in Tuccio’s prologue, which addresses the people of Messina in *Christus Judex*, the third play in his series treating the life of Christ. Once again the direct relevance of the story is brought into the lives of the audience. Theater was the bridge by which the audience and personages could move between sacred and secular worlds. Caravaggio saw the effectiveness of the theater and employed its forms in his paintings. In Caravaggio’s *David and Goliath*, we are presented the head of the giant, as if we are standing in Saul’s place. Saul, a warrior with sword and armor, was afraid to combat the philistine. At the moment he sees David’s success, he must acknowledge that it was David’s faith in God that made this act of bravery possible. This had to have been a humbling moment for Saul.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid*, 83.

⁶³⁶ Non confidare nelle tue ricchezze, non esaltare la tua forza,\ Deponi la superbia, parla: e possa tu avere ciò che chiedi.\ Nelle avversità non supporre mai che il Tonante,\ Sia di te immemore, parla: e possa tu avere ciò che chiedi
Nil opibus confide tuis, neu robora iactes,
Pone supercilium, dic: petis hoc et habe
Rebus in adversis non unquam disce Tonantem
esse tui immemorem, dic: petis hoc habe. Saulini, 84.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Tuccio's *Christus judex* was performed in Latin in Rome in 1573-74 and was positively received. This play was part of a trilogy composed in 1569. The series included: a nativity (*Christus nascens*), a passion (*Christus patiens*) and a Last Judgment play (*Christus judex*), which included an appearance of the Antichrist.⁶³⁷ A contemporary account described it as having a large cast and "some form of multiple staging."⁶³⁸ It was translated into Italian in 1584, with a revised translation being printed in Verona in 1596. A hundred years later another revised edition was printed in Rome, with new musical additions such as a duet between Lucifer and the Archangel Michael. The author of this revision later rewrote the play as a music drama (Florence, 1721). The original Latin text was still being performed in the seventeenth century and was performed and published in Germany in 1603. A Polish version was printed in 1725 and a Serbo-Croat edition in the eighteenth century. The broad and long-lived success of this one play shows Tuccio's skill at capturing the imagination of his audience.⁶³⁹

Although large cast and special effects of these plays were meant to dazzle the audience, another function was to educate the young men attending Jesuit schools and move the public to contrition. Tuccio's dramas accomplished these goals, which made him respected among his fellow Jesuits, brought his plays public acclaim, and earned him the compliment, "persona santa," from Clement VIII Aldobrandini, who took a piece of the playwright's clothing and locks of his hair as a relic.⁶⁴⁰

⁶³⁷ Lynette R. Muir. *The Biblical Drama of Medieval Europe*. (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 166.

⁶³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁹ Saulini, *Il teatro di un gesuita siciliano*, 10.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

4.7.3 Neapolitan Playwrights

4.7.3.1 Giambattista della Porta

Giambattista Della Porta (1538–1613) was a man of many talents who like many men during this period dabbled in many fields of study—in this case, science, philosophy, and drama. Of interest to a painter like Caravaggio, Della Porta wrote *De humana physiognomonia libri IIII* which explores physiognomy in 1586 and a book on optics, *De refractione*, in 1589, which deals with lenses, discussing concave and convex lenses at length. Of particular interest to an artist was his *Physiognomonia*, which explored the reading of external features to determine one's character. While living in Naples, Della Porta spent much of his time studying science. His most famous work, *Magiae Naturalis* (1558), covered a wide variety of the subjects, including occult philosophy, astrology, alchemy, mathematics, meteorology, and natural philosophy.

As a dramatist, Della Porta specialized in the *commedia erudita*, the diversion of the well-educated, which unlike the *commedia dell'arte*, used scripts. It had a 5-act structure, followed the "classical pattern" of plot development, and followed the unities of time, place, and action. Of a possible total of twenty, seventeen of Della Porta's plays, survived—fourteen comedies, one tragicomedy, one tragedy, and one liturgical drama. The comic plays are written in prose, based on subjects taken mainly from Boccaccio and Plautus. His *I due fratelli rivali*, an international success, is thought to have been based on the story by Bandello, which supplied Shakespeare with the plot of *Much Ado about Nothing*. Even some of his non-dramatic works refer to theatrical practice. In 1566, his *Arte del ricordare*, written in Naples, has frequent

references to the importance of good memory to actors, and its lists of mnemonic ways to remember the difficult names of Plautus's characters.⁶⁴¹

As was the case for Giordano Bruno, Della Porta's keen fascination with science and the occult attracted the attention of Neapolitan and Roman inquisitors.⁶⁴² However, Della Porta was much luckier than Bruno, for Della Porta was simply ordered to dissolve his academy the *Segreti* and focus his energy on writing a new comedy. This rather odd request suggests Della Porta's reputation as an amateur playwright was well-known. After this brush with inquisitors (probably during the 1560s), he wrote more comedies such as *La turca*, probably written in 1572. He was evidently actively producing dramas at this time, for in 1578 Giovanni Matteo Toscano hailed him as a flower of Italian literature. Della Porta's were international hits; his *La fantesca* and *La Cintia* were translated and performed at Trinity College, Cambridge, as *Leander* (1598) and *Labyrinthus* (1603). George Ruggle used *La trappolaria* as the basis of his *Ignoramus* (1615).⁶⁴³

After the dissolution of his own academy, Della Porta found another social circle with which to share his interest in science, literature, and drama. In 1603, Della Porta was introduced to Federico Cesi, marchese di Monticelli, who was visiting Naples.⁶⁴⁴ Cesi wanted to establish an institute of sorts for scientific research, a group of thinkers that became the *Accademia dei Lincei*.⁶⁴⁵ Among these scientifically-minded Neapolitans was Fabio Colonna (1567-1650),

⁶⁴¹ *Arte del ricordare* was not published in its original form until 1602. In 1593, *Ars reminiscendi*, an augmentation of the earlier treatise on memory, was published and was his only nondramatic work of which the Italian version appeared before the Latin. Although Della Porta was writing plays during the 1560's and 1570's, he only sent his non-dramatic works to the printer during this time. Louise George Clubb, *Giambattista Della Porta Dramatist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 14.

⁶⁴² Fellow Neapolitans had become "scandalized by his growing reputation for magic and by the titles of "Indovino" and "Mago" bestowed on him by the populace." *Ibid*, 15-17.

⁶⁴³ *Ibid*, 276-8, 281-4.

⁶⁴⁴ Later in 1614, Cesi would married to Artemisia Colonna, the daughter of Francesco, principe di Palestrina.

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 47.

Costanza Colonna's cousin.⁶⁴⁶ During this period, the Roman Tribunal permitted the publication of Della Porta's more straightforward writings and his comedies: *La sorella* was printed in 1604 and *L'astrologia*, *La turca*, and *La carbonaria* all appeared in 1606. Another comedy, *Il moro*, followed in 1607 and two more, *La furiosa* and *La Chiappinaria*, in 1609.⁶⁴⁷

Another literary group with which Della Porta had common interests was the *Schirchiate de lo Mandracchio e' Mprovesante de lo Cerriglio* (Wits of the Mandracchio and Improvisers of the Cerriglio), described by Giulio Cesare Cortese as a contemporary academy devoted to Neapolitan dialect literature.⁶⁴⁸ Cortese's *Vaiasseide* (1614) follows the group's model by using local people as its main protagonists. His work takes the form of a heroic comedy, but the lyric meter and the heroic themes those of the protagonists, common Neapolitan women (*vaiasse*) who speak only in their rough dialect and whose daily mundane life is the focus of the drama.⁶⁴⁹

The location for the aforementioned academy of "Wits" and "Improvisers" was Mandracchio, a waterfront district of Naples, and the Osteria del Cerriglio, the same tavern where Caravaggio was injured before his death. Although the club probably met in Cortese's house, its spiritual home was the Cerriglio. This rowdy tavern became both subject and setting of dialect poems and plays such as *Candelaio* by Giordano Bruno.⁶⁵⁰ Della Porta named the Cerriglio

⁶⁴⁶ Fabio officially joined the *Lincci* in 1612 thanks to the support of Della Porta and became a famous botanist and botanical illustrator, and eventually became the vice-prince of the *Liceo Napolitano*. Colonna's suffered from epilepsy, which drove his interest in medicine and herbalism. He published a number of books on medicinal plants (*Minus cognitarum stirpium pars altera* (Rome: apud Iacobam Mascardum, 1616) and became a well-respected botanist and botanical illustrator.

⁶⁴⁷ Clubb, 47-48.

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 47.

⁶⁴⁹ *Ibid*

⁶⁵⁰ The greatest of the dialect writers, G.B. Basile, who was probably in the Schirchiate and was certainly a friend of both Cortese and Della Porta, entitled the third of his nine Neapolitan eclogues *Talia o lo Cerriglio*, picturing the inn as a rollicking den of thieves. Cortese wrote a mock epic, *Lo Cerriglio 'ncantato*, recounting the Cerriglio kingdoms's fall and transformation into a tavern. Another favorite subject of the Schirchiate was *lo chiappo*, the hangman's noose, as indicated by the manuscript discovered by Minieri-Riccio of an anonymous member's *Discorso Napolitano ncoppa l'accellenze de lo Chiappo*. The title of Della Porta's *Chiappinaria* (1609) seems to allude to this

headquarters for the criminal characters in his *L'astrologia* (1606) and made it the central scene of action in *La tabernaria* (1616), a comedy written partly in Neapolitan dialect (a dialect that resembles Spanish more closely than standardized Italian—another indication of the significance of Spanish presence in the cultural life of Naples).

One cannot be certain if Della Porta was a member of the academy of “Wits and Improvisers,” but his subjects and characters suggest that he had some connections to the avant-garde academy. It is possible Caravaggio knew this literary group and its fondness for the rough characters that frequented the Cerriglio, because he was probably a regular patron. Like Caravaggio, the members of this creative society of thinkers looked to local culture for inspiration, using the rough characters at the tavern—gamblers, drinkers, prostitutes, wash women—and the local dialect to give their work an immediacy and familiarity to which any Neapolitan would naturally relate.

During the last years of Della Porta’s life, he was associated with the Academy of the *Oziosi*, (officially established in 1611), which featured many prominent Neapolitans, including the viceroy, Pedro Fernández de Castro, Count of Lemos (1610-1616), who demonstrated his own love of the theater by presenting his own comedy to the academy. Caravaggio’s friend, Giambattista Marino, one of the academy’s most important members, wrote a laudatory octave in memory of Della Porta after his death. The *Oziosi* numbered many notable men of letters.⁶⁵¹

Drama seems to have been of particular interest to this group, although no other playwright’s works surpassed those of Della Porta. Zinano was admired for his tragedy

joke. *Ibid*, 47-8. The “tavern” scene was found earlier in Aretino’s *Cortigiana* (1524 and 1534), which was set in Rome. This may have inspired the “Wits’s” usage of this setting for their plays.

⁶⁵¹Some of its members were: such as Scipione Errico (Sicilian writer, poet, and dramatist), Gabriele Zinano/Zinani (writer, poet, dramatist), and G.B. Basile (Neapolitan poet, courtier, and author of fairy tales—written in dialect). Clubb, 48-49.

L'Amerigo. Errico and Basile wrote plays in addition to their works in other genres. Filippo Caetani (Duke of Sermoneta), was a member and is of particular interest, because Pietro Caetani (also Duke of Sermoneta) was the advisor to Costanza Colonna's grandson, Marc' Antonio IV.⁶⁵² Della Porta, although at one time suspected of heresy due to his unconventional beliefs and love of magic, continued to thrive in the rich scientific, artistic, and theatrical circles in Naples. The events of his life are in sharp contrast to that of that other controversial Neapolitan thinker and dramatist, Giordano Bruno.

4.7.3.2 Giordano Bruno

In the previous chapter, I mentioned Bruno's execution in the Campo dei Fiori and its possible impact on Caravaggio. Bruno's death was just one of many violent scenes that Caravaggio saw in the rough urban streets of Rome. It is ironic that Bruno's life should end in such a way, because he seemed to be fascinated with the dark side of Italian life. He often used the voice of the illiterate masses to issue scathing critiques of the nobles and religious elites on the peninsula. His revolutionary ideas and rebellious attitude cost him his life, but his ideas lived on in the literature he left behind. Of particular interest, is his only drama, *Candelaio*, which features common "low life" characters who question and mock the academicians of his day. His work has elements common to the aforementioned "wits" of the Cerriglio, Della Porta's rough-talking Neapolitans, and Caravaggio's *bravi* and dirty laborers.

⁶⁵² Other dramatists in early years of the *Oziosi* were Andrea Santa Maria, Francesco Zazzero, Ettore Pignatelli, Fabrizio Carafa, and Fabrizio Marotta. Clubb, 49. As noted above Pietro Caetani (Duke of Sermoneta), along with Cardinal Ascanio Colonna, gave the final word on the governance of the Colonna family's southern fief and the education of the 11-year-old. Marc' Antonio IV Colonna, Costanza Colonna's 11-year-old grandson, who was its official leader. Berra, 91 and 300.

Like Della Porta, Giordano Bruno, was a man with many interests: philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, the art of memory, and drama, but was far more aggressive in his rejection of tradition. He was a revolutionary.⁶⁵³ While in Naples, Bruno became known for his skill with the art of memory, visiting Rome to demonstrate his mnemonic system before Pope Pius V and Cardinal Rebiba.⁶⁵⁴ Although Bruno's intelligence could not be denied, his taste for controversial ideas and forbidden books soon forced him to flee Naples. Bruno also held controversial ideas about poetry, arguing in his *De gli eroici furori* (1585) that "poetry is not born of the rules, except by the merest chance." For him the rules derived from the poetry. "For that reason there are as many genres and species of true rules as there are of true poets.' True poets are to be recognized by their fame, and by the delight and instruction they give, not by their observance of rules. Aristotle is of use only to 'those who cannot, as Homer, Hesiod, Orpheus and others could, be a poet without the aid of Aristotle.'"⁶⁵⁵ Bruno openly challenged the "rules" of poetry and judged poets by their fame and their ability to move the reader. This perspective is similar to that of Caravaggio, who categorized the best Roman painters as those who were most famous and earned the most prestigious commissions—the adherence to any particular style or set of rules was not a factor.⁶⁵⁶

Bruno's rebellious attitude is evident in his only drama, *Candelaio*. This dramatic work is a metatheatrical polemic against theater, particularly against fifteenth-century Italian comedy.

⁶⁵³ Bruno was born in Nola in the Campania region and later educated at the Augustinian monastery in Naples. He entered the Dominican Order at the monastery of San Domenico Maggiore in Naples and was ordained in 1572. Dorothea Waley Singer, *Giordano Bruno, His Life and Thought*, New York, 1950.

⁶⁵⁴ Alessandro G. Farinella and Carole Preston, "Giordano Bruno: Neoplatonism and the Wheel of Memory in the 'De Umbris Idearum'", in *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 55, No. 2, (Summer, 2002), 596-624. See also: Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

⁶⁵⁵ Giordano Bruno, *De gli eroici furori*. Paul Eugene Memmo, trans., University of North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures, 50 (Chapel Hill, 1964), 83. As quoted in Carlson, 52.

⁶⁵⁶ For a comparison of Caravaggio and Bruno, see: Anna Maria Panzera, *Caravaggio e Giordano Bruno: fra nuova arte e nuova scienza. La Bellezz dell'artefice* (Roma: Fratelli Palombi Editori, 1994).

The title page flaunts his anti-academic approach, “*Candelaio* is a ‘Comedia del Bruno Nolano, Academico di nulla Academica, detto il Fastidito.’”⁶⁵⁷ He begins the play with a ridiculous number of prologs in various forms: “proemial sonnet, dedication, extensive plot summary, anteprolog, proprolog, and Bidello (the Janitor).”⁶⁵⁸ The play ends with a similarly metatheatrical note:

when the pedant Manfurio awakens from his dream of superior knowledge, stripped and lashed by the conmen. It is degradation, but not unredeemed. Manfurio awakens to his true position: i.e., as a character. A page asks him to look around and evaluate his true position. Where is he? There seems to be an audience, Manfurio admits, he seems to be in a play. At what point would he like the play to be? The End, Manfurio agrees. So Ascanio coaches him how to ask for applause.⁶⁵⁹

Although Bruno parodies the sophisticated attitudes and habits of his academic audience, he also looks critically at the dark underbelly of Naples and shamelessly exposes it to his readers, who probably avoid this segment of the population whenever possible. Yet, Bruno uses these low-life characters who, like fools babbling riddles, obscenity, and buffoonery, speak the truth of society and human nature. Bruno’s Neapolitan riff-raff characters turn Neapolitan society on its head and critique the stodgy intellectualism of the elite class and its academies. The rough characters of Bruno and Della Porta were the very people that Caravaggio would have

⁶⁵⁷ He continues with a *sonetto caudato*...Full of circumlocutions, non-Petrarchan language, accumulative elements (“Piango, chiedo, mendico un epigramma, un sonetto, un encomio, un inno, un’oda”), repetitions (“mamma’...), a mythological reference and obscenities, the sonnet illustrates Bruno’s purposeful destruction of form.” Ronnie H. Terpening, “Cinquecento Commedia D’Intreccio and Bruno’s *Candelaio*” *Pacific Coast Philology*, vol. 11 (October, 1976), 72.

⁶⁵⁸ Alan Powers, “Giordano Bruno’s *Candelaio* and Naples,” online article Bristol Community College, *Campania Felix* seminar. <http://www.nsula.edu/campaniafelix/CandelaioNaples.html>.

⁶⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

encountered at the tavern, *il Cerriglio*, and possibly were the actual for paintings such as his *Seven Acts of Mercy*, *Flagellation*, and *Martyrdom of Saint Andrew*. [Figs. 136, 131, 132 & 21]

4.7.4 Spanish Theater in Italy's South

Although Benedetto Croce downplayed the contributions that Iberians made to Italian culture, he could not deny that Spanish literature and drama were popular in Italy. During the *cinque-* and *seicento*, Italy imported more Spanish literature than any other European nation. Spanish texts were also printed in the publishing houses in Venice and Milan. Caravaggio was familiar with Spanish drama by watching performances or reading printed texts that he or his friends may have owned. The Colonna were avid collectors of Spanish literature and drama, as were the Herrera and Costa families. Pietro Herrera, Juan Enríquez's son, owned 22 volumes of Lope de Vega's work. Cardinal Ascanio Colonna, Costanza's brother, was the dedicatee of Cervantes's novel, *La Galatea*, and was an avid book collector who certainly had Spanish works among his vast collection of more than 7,000 volumes.⁶⁶⁰ Spanish literature and theater had become part of early modern Italian life.

Before launching into a discussion on Spanish theater in Naples, I briefly describe some characteristics particular to Spanish drama in the Iberian Peninsula that may have had some influence on Neapolitan forms. I explore the works of Spanish playwrights such as Bartolomé de Torres Naharro, Juan de la Cueva, Lope de Vega, and forms such as the *comedia de santos* and *autosacramentales*. I also will compare various types of theatrically-inspired sculpture groups such as the Spanish *Sacri Monti*, Iberian *retablos*, Spanish *pasos* and Neapolitan *presepios* to

⁶⁶⁰ On the Herrera book collection, see: Terzaghi, 92. Ascanio's library became part of the Vatican Collection in 1740.

better understand Spanish and Neapolitan theatrical practice. All of these forms prominently depicted elements from everyday life, and used shallow space with minimal set decoration, dramatic light effects and characters drawn from the street to engage the public—characteristics found in theater and Caravaggio's paintings.

Until the suppression of religious theater after the Protestant Reformation and the Council of Trent, Spanish religious drama adhered to a form commonly found throughout medieval Europe.⁶⁶¹ After 1550, however, the Spanish theater developed distinctive traits, largely due to the Iberian church's and the Inquisitor's active support (and control) of the theology and drama, a national form that continued until they were prohibited in 1765.⁶⁶²

With the Spanish Church's active employment of arts to further their Counter-Reformation agenda and engage its public, religious dramas grew in popularity among religious leaders and the general population. The Church saw theater as an effective teaching aid with the added benefit that it was a tightly-controlled mode of entertaining the masses—a desirable thing in such a highly restrictive society. This convergence of religious power, religious catechesis, and public entertainment is evident during the Corpus Christi festival, which is linked to the Eucharist and the doctrine of transubstantiation, a belief sharply criticized by Protestants. The Corpus Christi proved to be an excellent opportunity to proclaim Church authority and defy Protestant criticism. Because of the close connection between religious dramas and the sacraments, these dramatic works became known as *auto sacramentales*.⁶⁶³

⁶⁶¹ Brockett, 188.

⁶⁶² *Ibid*, 117, 188.

⁶⁶³ Until 1592, three *autos* were performed each year, after which four were presented annually until 1647, when the number was reduced to two. Both new and old dramas were performed, but between the years of 1647 and 1681 all the dramas in Madrid were written by Pedro Calderón de la Barca (1600-1681). The troupes that were chosen during Lent, had exclusive rights to play in Madrid between Easter and Corpus Christi. After Corpus Christi, they would tour to neighboring towns and perform the *autos* in Madrid's public theaters, also. The link to the sacrament of the Eucharist was so strong that the *carros* were included in the procession of the Host through the streets. *Ibid*, 188-89.

The Spanish *auto sacramentales* were performed on large carts (*carros*) furnished with decorations and furniture supplied by the city. The actors had only to supply the costumes and props for their specific characters and the particular drama performed. This gave the drama a very contemporary appearance because the costumes and props derived from daily life, not fantastical costumes dreamed up by a playwright. For the early *auto sacramentales*, two *carros* were used, each with the approximate dimension of 20 feet long by 10 feet wide.⁶⁶⁴ These large theatrical wagons had two-stories and were made of wooden frames covered by canvas and painted for the needs of each drama. The façade of the upper story was often hinged to reveal something within—a recessed “discovery” space.⁶⁶⁵ These discovery spaces could be on either the upper or lower stage. If it was on the lower stage, it was a nested space opening off the rear wall of the main stage. This discovery space or back-stage area was a recess or alcove, concealed from the audience by a curtain. Its main function was to disclose important events or characters in a *tableau-vivant* style scene. At the appropriate moment, the curtain was drawn and the scene exposed. This theatrical technique was not used in every play, but was used to supplement the main action on the primary stage:

It [the discovery space] was confined to those occasions when the desired effect on the audience was one of wonderment or shock or surprise or wonder and awe. But this motive only partly explains the frequent regular use of the back-stage [or discovery space] in the seventeenth-century theaters. Plays in which interest was maintained through an original plot, a complicated intrigue and heroic or comic dialogue in appropriate verse did not need a multiple stage. They did not depend on the spectacle and panorama that of necessity made old, well known subjects seem thrilling and new. They could be presented on small platforms with little or no decoration. But at times it was necessary to change the place of action or to elaborate the stage setting. Then it was that the seventeenth century dramatist used the

⁶⁶⁴ After 1647, however, the number was raised to four for each performance. *Ibid*, 188-89.

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 189.

back-stage. In so doing he obtained either a temporary multiple stage or the benefits that simultaneous staging would have provided naturally. Thus, the back-stage made possible a compromise between the old methods, from which the dramatist could not entirely free himself, and the system of consecutive settings which was eventually come into general use and continue to the present day.⁶⁶⁶

Although the discovery spaces were located farther away from the audience in a dark, recessed area behind the main stage, they added depth and dimension to the main stage area and showcased climactic events that often informed the events taking place on the main playing area.⁶⁶⁷ Caravaggio's art served a similar function. An excellent example is his *Entombment*, painted for the Chiesa Nuova. This altarpiece shows the body of Christ being lowered into the tomb, which in Caravaggio's painting is designated by a flat stone, much like the stone surface of the altar. As the believer watches the priest raise the Host above his head, the eye is drawn to the painted image and reminds the congregation that the simple wafer is the flesh of Christ. Like the *tableau vivant*, Caravaggio's image defines the climactic moment in the Eucharistic rite, when the Host is raised as the miracle of transubstantiation takes place before the believer's eyes.⁶⁶⁸

Another aspect of the discovery, the unveiling the scene to shock, dazzle, or awe the beholder, finds a parallel in the experience of viewing art. There are numerous cases when miraculous images were revealed to the awe of the believer. One such case that Caravaggio knew was the miraculous Vallecillian Madonna and Child at the Chiesa Nuova in Rome, hidden for much of the year behind Ruben's altarpiece. The oval inset in the larger altarpiece is removed

⁶⁶⁶William Hutchinson Shoemaker, *The Multiple Stage in Spain during the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1935), 125.

⁶⁶⁷Anita M. Hagerman-Young and Kerry Wilks, "The Theater of the World: Staging Baroque Hierarchies," in *The Theatrical Baroque* (Chicago: The David and Alfred Smart Museum/University of Chicago, 2001), 36-45.

⁶⁶⁸Gregg, 51.

only occasionally to allow public devotion. The inaccessible nature of the image heightened its emotional power.

This multiple staging (in this case a nested stage within a stage) continued on the *carros* and *auto sacramentales* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and was derived from medieval staging techniques that had lost popularity in France and Italy. Spain's continued use of the medieval multiple stage reflects a fundamental characteristic of Spanish culture, "Its persistent medievalism is one of the countless manifestations of Spain's tenacious adherence to the traditional, the customary, the popular."⁶⁶⁹

The vast popularity of the Iberian plays continued in Naples where the Spanish population enjoyed both Italian and Iberian theatrical performances. One Spanish form, the *comedia de santos*, became so popular in Naples that it eclipsed the older Italian *sacro rappresentazione*. My exploration of these Iberian forms demonstrates some theatrical attitudes and characteristics embraced by the Neapolitans and appropriated in Caravaggio's southern Italian painting style.

4.7.4.1 *Comedia de Santos*

The *comedia de santos* is a theatrical genre that flourished during Spain's Golden Age. Its predecessors can be found in the *Códice de autos viejos*, and lasted well into the 18th century. These plays featured events of the life of a saint and possibly some legends associated with them—all to serve as a moral example for the audience. Communities, confraternities, and devout nobles hosted the plays. Often they were used as propaganda supporting the canonization

⁶⁶⁹ Shoemaker, 125.

of a particular saint such as Lope de Vega's play for *San Isidro Labrador* (Saint Isidore the Farmer), who was canonized along with Saints Phillip Neri, Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila, and Francis Xavier. Agustín de Rojas Villandrando in his *El viaje entretenido*, (1603) described its origins and its success:

Recently there have been comedies and theatrical spectacles of saints, and among these mock battles. Pero Díaz did one of the Rosary that was good... Eventually there was not a poet in Seville that didn't write a saint comedy.⁶⁷⁰

The structure of these plays was usually chronological, including episodes from their life. Miracles and martyrdoms were particularly popular with the audience, because of the spectacular visual effects used to capture the viewer's imagination. The "mock battles" were also popular because they would provide an excuse for quick-paced action. A common feature was the inclusion of elements (people, costumes, locales) from everyday life. Some criticized these plays for their mundane elements, indecorous personages, and prominent display of human vice (justified by the conversion of a repentant sinner). The early examples were works from the Canonico Terrega [Francisco Agustín Tárrega], Lope de Vega, Tirso de Molina, and Cervantes.⁶⁷¹ Later in the century, Pedro Calderon de la Barca wrote in this genre. After recurring criticism, the performance of saints' plays and other religious dramas was prohibited by Carlos III's Royal Decree of 11 June 1765.⁶⁷²

⁶⁷⁰ *Llegó el tiempo que se usaron / las comedias de apariencias, / de santos y de tramoyas / y entre estas, farsas de guerra; / hizo Pero Díaz entonces / la del Rosario, y fue buena / ... / y al fin no quedó poeta / en Sevilla que no hiciese / de algún santo su comedia.* Agustín de Rojas Villandrando, *El viaje entretenido*, (1603). Hugo Albert Rennert, *The Spanish Stage in the Time of Lope de Vega* (New York: Dover Publications, 1963), 144.

⁶⁷¹ Ramón de Mesonero Romanos, ed., *Dramáticos contemporáneos a Lope de Vega* (Madrid: M. Rivadeneyra, 1881).

⁶⁷² Javier Huerta, Emilio Peral, and Héctor Urzaiz, *Spanish Theater from A to Z*. (Madrid: Espasa, 2005).

4.7.4.2 Bartolomé de Torres Naharro

After living the soldier's life, Torres Naharro (c.1485 - c.1530) took holy orders and settled in Rome about 1511, where he devoted himself to writing plays. Although he mentioned Giulio di Giuliano de' Medici (future pope Clement VII), as his protector, he left Rome to enter the household of Fabrizio Colonna at Naples. While he was in Naples, he served as a chaplain; his works were printed under the title of *Propaladia (First Fruits of Pallas, 1517)*, the first treatise on dramaturgy printed in Europe.⁶⁷³ [Fig. 137] He classifies drama into two groups: "realistic plays dealing with customs, and imaginative plays of intrigue."⁶⁷⁴ He advocated the classical division into five *tornados* (acts), "adherence to verisimilitude, limitation of the number of characters to between six and twelve, and the observance of decorum."⁶⁷⁵ His advice to deal with contemporary themes, use a realistic approach, and limit the number of characters is similar to the artistic style of Caravaggio, which focuses on a few characters, is painted in a naturalistic style, and shows situations often seen in everyday life. Like Caravaggio, Torres Naharro received mixed reviews. A 1911 entry in the Encyclopedia Britannica describes the playwright's work, but with a bias reminiscent of De Reumont, Berenson, and Croce:

Torres Naharro is much less dexterous in stagecraft than many inferior successors, his humour is rude and boisterous and his diction is unequal; but to a varied knowledge of human nature he adds knowledge of dramatic effect, and his rapid dialogue, his fearless realism and vivacious fancy prepared the way for the romantic drama in Spain.

⁶⁷³ Carlson, 58

⁶⁷⁴ Henryk Ziomek, *A History of Spanish Golden Age Drama* (Lexington KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), 16.

⁶⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

This assessment of Torres Naharro's work is interesting because it underscores the perceived "problematic" nature of Spanish drama, its rude humor and boisterous attitude, which, at that time, was considered too coarse and ugly for refined sensibilities. Although the author acknowledges these deficits, he does recognize some of Naharro's strengths: his study of human nature, "dramatic effect," lively dialog, and fearless realism. His early plays deal with contemporary events and manners and were written for mixed audiences of upper and lower classes.⁶⁷⁶ Naharro gave a simple definition of Comedy, "Comedy is no other than an ingenious composition of significant and ultimately light-hearted events, enacted by people."⁶⁷⁷ His willingness to explore the lives of regular "people" is seen in his *Comedia Tinellaria (The Servants' Mess Hall*, 1516), which exposes the corruption he saw in Rome by satirizing the living conditions of the servants of the cardinal of San Iano.⁶⁷⁸ Like the work of Caravaggio, the dramatist's plays used current events and quotidian scenes as a means to connect to a diverse audience and gain popularity among all classes.

Both the negative and positive comments about Torres Naharro's work have parallels in critical reviews of Caravaggio's paintings. The artist's close study of human nature, skill at capturing the climactic narrative moment, careful depiction of character interaction, and unflinching realism seem to fit the Torres-Naharro model. The painter's rough, crude characters, with their indecorous poses and costume seem to echo the Iberian *pícaros* of literature and theater that Torres Naharro and other later writers, such as Cervantes, would make popular. The dramatist drew from his own experience as an Imperial soldier to create the "soldier-ruffian" type featured in his *Comedia Soldadesca (Military Comedy)*, a play set in Rome which follows

⁶⁷⁶Ziomek, 15.

⁶⁷⁷ Carlson, 58.

⁶⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

the adventures of these “low-life” characters. The main protagonist is a braggart captain who is recruiting soldiers in Italy to serve in the pope’s army.⁶⁷⁹ Caravaggio may have known this literature, because the text was first published in Naples in 1517 while Torres Naharro was under the protection of Fabrizio Colonna, father of Vittoria Colonna (the poet) and Costanza’s great-uncle.⁶⁸⁰ Caravaggio certainly knew the real soldier-ruffians, or the *bravi* as they were known in Northern Italy. These were the armed men that he saw and was warned about as a boy. These are the men Caravaggio saw portrayed as *Il Capitano* by the *commedia dell’arte* troupe *I Gelosi* when they played in the *piazze* of Milan; the men he later depicted in his *Cardsharps* and *Calling of Saint Matthew*. [Figs. 94 & 20]

Colonna patronage of this Spanish playwright shows their affinity and active participation in the support of Spanish and Neapolitan writers and dramatists and their interest in literature that is revolutionary and breaks with classical models. Caravaggio’s revolutionary paintings, with their contemporary characters (sword wielding ruffians, ragged laborers, and prostitutes posing as biblical personages), follow a pattern found in the *commedia dell’arte* and Spanish theater. Both of these theatrical forms were innovative and experimental, characteristics also found in many artists playwrights, and writers the Colonna supported. Caravaggio not only fit this pattern, but may have been encouraged to develop his particular style to fit what the Colonna saw as a promising direction for literary and dramatic works and one that would resonate with their social circle and the Spanish in Italy who were eager to purchase works that resonated with their aesthetic taste for painting.

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸⁰ Amelang, 434. On *Comedia Soldadesca*, see also: Bartolomé de Torres Naharro, *Comedias: Soldadesca, Tinelaria, Himenia*, ed. D.W. McPheeters (Madrid, 1973), 10-15, 23-24, 51-100.

4.7.4.3 Juan de la Cueva and the Proto-Lopean *Comedia*

Juan de la Cueva (1550-1607) was a Spanish poet and dramatist, born in Seville. All that is known of his personal life in his later years is that he visited the New World for three years (1574-77) and then returned to Spain. He is best known for his dramatic writing, but unfortunately, few of his plays survive. His first play was performed in 1579 and continued to be dramatically active until 1581.⁶⁸¹ His plays were based on historical events and characters, which was unusual for a period when mythology and biblical narrative were the more popular subjects. He is also noteworthy for his revolutionary attitude toward drama, which dared to ignore Greek and Latin traditions, thereby developing his plots and characters with little regard for classical “unities.”⁶⁸² Thus, he was one of the first to forsake the “classical” for the “modern” romantic drama, an approach that was taken up later in Lope de Vega’s work. Several of his plays are on national subjects, such as *La Libertad de España por Bernardo del Carpio* (The Liberation of Spain by Bernardo del Carpio) and *Los Siete Infantes de Lara* (The Seven Princes of Lara). Among those dealing with ancient history and mythology are: *La Muerte de Ajax*, *Telemon sobre las Armas de Aquiles*, and *La Muerte de Virginia y Apio Claudio*. He also drew from contemporary events such as the Sack of Rome, which occurred in 1527. His *El Saco de Roma y Muerte de Borbon* (1579), described the Italian triumphs of Charles V. *El Infamador* (The Defamer, c.1581) whose principle character Leucino presents himself as a swaggering

⁶⁸¹ Ziomek, 24-26.

⁶⁸² “He is known for having definitely established strophic flexibility through the intermingling of various Spanish and Italianate verse forms—a practice that previously had been only sporadically experimented with. *Ibid.* 25.

seducer of women and may have served as the prototype for Tirso de Molina's famous libertine, Don Juan.⁶⁸³

When compared to the work of Lope de Vega and Calderon, these plays are somewhat crude in structure. One curious feature of Cueva's work is that the characters, regardless of their social standing, use sophisticated language—making the street vendor appear as refined as the count. Moreover, his plots are not as complex or as plausible as those of later dramatists. De la Cueva relies on extreme solutions for his plots, a murder or some supernatural intervention, to save his protagonists. Among his non-dramatic works are: a collection of lyric poems and sonnets, *Obras de Juan de la Cueva* (Seville, 1582), a collection of one hundred romances, *Coro Febeo de Romances Historiales*, (1587), and an epic poem in twenty-four cantos, *La Conquista de la Betica* (Seville, 1603), describing the conquest of Seville by the king/saint Ferdinand III.⁶⁸⁴

As previously mentioned with regard to Dell Porta and Giordano Bruno, “classicist” poets and playwrights considered an open rejection of Aristotle's “unities” to be a grave error. What sporadically appeared in Italian literature and drama became a common, even defining, feature of Spanish Golden Age Theater. Lope de Vega, in his *Arte Nuevo de hacer comedias eneste tiempo* (1609) would instruct young dramatists that the unities need not be followed because the general public does not care about them.⁶⁸⁵ Lope was a famous proponent of a more “modern” approach to theater, but he was not the first. Juan de la Cueva laid the groundwork for revolutionary approaches to drama.

⁶⁸³ Fuentes, V. “Juan de la Cueva”. In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company. (1908). Retrieved January 20, 2010 from New Advent <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04563a.htm>

⁶⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸⁵ “Now when I have a comedy to write/ Six keys I use the laws to lock away/ Plautus and Terrence banish from my sight/ For of what these injured souls might say.../Since after all, it is the crowd who pays/ Why not content them when you write your plays?” Carlson, 62.

4.7.4.4 Lope de Vega

Spanish secular theater and dramatic literature were also popular. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Italy imported more Spanish literature than any other region in Europe. Playwright and poet Lope de Vega (1562-1635) was widely read. He wrote religious *auto sacramentales*, secular *comedias*, and *capa y espada* plays featuring violent sword fights over love and honor. Lope's work is known for its simple charm derived from popular art. He, like Caravaggio, was an innovator and a rebel. In his *comedias*, he daringly blended the genres of comedy and tragedy, thereby breaking the rules of dramatic construction.

In 1609, when Lope advised playwrights to reject Aristotle's "unities," he began a literary rebellion that demanded artistic freedom for the writer and greater recognition of the broad tastes of his audience, a revolutionary approach seen in Caravaggio's bold painting style.⁶⁸⁶ Another quote from Lope de Vega's *Arte nuevo* could apply to the art of Caravaggio, "Nature in this must our example be, since she gains beauty by variety."⁶⁸⁷ It would seem that Italian audiences appreciated Lope's revolutionary approach to dramatic structure, rejection of poetic tradition, and naturalism, because this Spanish playwright's works were prized possessions in Italian libraries. His writing was even recognized by Pope Urban VIII, who awarded Lope the prestigious Cross of Malta.

⁶⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

4.7.5 Neapolitan Theater

The flow of Spanish culture into Italy was particularly heavy during the seventeenth century. Like Spanish literature, Spanish theater was enjoyed by the Spanish subjects living in Naples. In Benedetto Croce's *I teatri di Napoli*, he notes that there were many plays performed with religious subjects, and the form of these Neapolitan sacred dramas was similar to the *auto sacramentales* of Spain.⁶⁸⁸ Documentation of Neapolitan theatrical performance reveals that the "archaic" form of the Italian *sacra rappresentazione* was abandoned for the new style of the Spanish *comedias de santos*. These Iberian religious dramas were elaborate performances representing scenes from the life of a saint. *Comedias de santos* included characters dressed as citizens of Naples—the crowds in the plays, the parents of the saint, or the suitors of the female saints—and the comic Spanish *graciosos* (servants).⁶⁸⁹ The plot of the Neapolitan version closely followed that of its Spanish counterpart, consisting of a series of temptations and victories with some miracles, possibly a martyrdom scene, and a final glorification or apotheosis. These plays were very popular with all classes in Naples, and were seen in various venues: in the convents, in the colleges, in private houses, royal palaces and in public theaters during Lent, when secular plays were forbidden.⁶⁹⁰

Some of the Neapolitan authors writing in this new Spanish style were: De Castro, Sorrentino, Castaldo, the Dominican Francesco Zacconi, Father Francesco Gizzio, and Andrea Perrucci. The saints represented in the Neapolitan dramas were similar to those in Italian plays, but there were also favorites of the region such as *Il martirio di San Gennaro* (1664), the patron

⁶⁸⁸ Benedetto Croce, *I teatri di Napoli dal rinascimento alla fine del secolo decimottavo* (Milan: Adelphi, 1992), 129.

⁶⁸⁹ Croce, *I teatri*, 130.

⁶⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 131.

saint of Naples and a play representing the Spanish female patron saint, *La Fenice d'Avila Teresa di Gesù* (1672).⁶⁹¹

Baroque ingenuity pervades many of these plays. In *Santa Rosa*, written by Zacconi, the saint and Jesus play a game of cards while the saint's life is narrated. This scene, showing a common card game, gave the saint and Christ an approachability that was popular and amusing to the general public. These dramas achieved much praise and success, and continued to be performed at least until Croce wrote of it in the early 1900's.⁶⁹² The card player motif also is found in numerous *commedia dell'arte* scenarios and Caravaggio's early painting, *The Cardsharps*. [Fig. 94] Scholars think this work, painted for Del Monte, had a moralizing message. The paintings depicting the Prodigal Son often showed the foolish youth being cheated in games of chance. Caravaggio uses a common scene from his own life, but translated into the visual language of popular theater, to both engage the viewer's interest and to present a biblical theme.

4.7.6 Theatrically-Inspired Sculpture in Spain and Southern Italy

Although a formal *Sacro Monte* was not constructed in Spain until after Ca'imi's prototype in Varallo, Spanish interest in recreating a "Jerusalem" that believers could visit for meditation and prayer predated the northern Italian *Sacro Monte* by fifty years. In 1425, in a mountainous region near Córdoba, the Dominican Saint Alvaro of Córdoba founded a monastery of "strict observance," called *Scala Coeli*.⁶⁹³ There in the solitude of nature, he established an evocative

⁶⁹¹ Croce, *I teatri*, 131.

⁶⁹² *Ibid.*, 132.

⁶⁹³ Antonio Bonet Correa, "Sacromontes y calvarios en España, Portugal, y América Latina," *La "Gerusalemme" di San Vivaldo e i Sacri Monti in Europa*, Sergio Gensini, ed. (Comune di Montaione-Florence: Pacini, 1989), 178.

journey of virtual Holy Sites, “*un trayecto doloroso*” (Way of Sorrow). Like the Italian Sacro Monte, this series of mountain paths was created to reproduce the journey of Christian pilgrims in Jerusalem. The paths, the vegetation, the topography, and the distances between the sites mimicked those in the Holy Land. Alvaro regularly traveled these paths to enter his cell, located near a hill upon which he planted three crosses—his own Calvary. He gave other valleys and hills biblical names such as the “Garden of Gethsemane,” “the Mount of Olives,” and “Mount Tabor.”⁶⁹⁴

After significant restoration and development, Scala Coeli was no longer a hermitage in the desert, but stood like a fortress (*alcazar*) to house men dedicated to study and penitence—a spiritual retreat to reinvigorate the Dominican order. In addition to the original “Way of Sorrow,” chapel annexes dedicated to Mary Magdalene and the Holy Cross were built on the hilltops near Alvaro’s Calvary and a *sacro monte*. As did the Italian Sacro Monte later in the century, St. Alvaro successfully united the contemplation of nature with the Passion of Christ, to spiritually engage the believer’s senses and transport them to a virtual world where the present and biblical could coexist.⁶⁹⁵ This early example of a virtual Jerusalem and its popularity in Spain helps explain why Varallo’s Sacro Monte became so popular with the Iberians and inspired copies on the Iberian Peninsula and in Latin America during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The concept already had footing in the Iberian mind. The northern Italian sculpture complex gave them the means of making it a more tangible reality.

An Englishman, Richard Ford, documented one of these lost replicas of Holy Land sites in his *Manual de Viajeros por España* (1845). He mentions the palace of the Duke of Medinaceli, known as the “Casa de Pilotos (Pilate)” so named because it was built to resemble

⁶⁹⁴ Correa, 178.

⁶⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 179.

Pontius Pilate's palace. This "Palace of Pilate" was constructed in 1533 for the aristocrat Don Fadrique Enríquez de Ribera in order to commemorate his pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1519.⁶⁹⁶ From this palace one began the ascent up the Stations of the Cross, particularly during Holy Week. Few Spanish cities lacked the Stations of the Cross or a Calvary, which consisted of a hill of crosses erected in memory of Christ's crucifixion.

There was renewed Iberian interest in creating versions of the *sacro monte* and Calvary, which may have been fueled by the first Spanish printing of Adricomio Delpho's *Breve Descripción de la Ciudad de Jerusalem y sus lugares circunvecinos* in 1603. There seems to be continued interest in reproducing the Holy Land, because in 1654 another book on the subject, *El Devoto Peregrino y Viage a Tierra Santa*, written by Brother Antonio del Castillo. This text provided detailed illustrations of panoramas, exteriors and interiors of the buildings, plans of the cities and the edifices and was reprinted repeatedly throughout Spain.⁶⁹⁷ These Spanish religious retreats became increasingly elaborate as their popularity grew during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These more complex devotional sites later were established in the New World as Spanish colonialism spread Iberian culture to foreign lands.⁶⁹⁸

4.7.6.1 The Neapolitan *Presepe*

They are not few those who consider the Neapolitan presepe tradition as the static representation of the Christmas landscape, in the tradition of the *sacre rappresentazioni* "in a miniature version, collectable and humble."⁶⁹⁹

⁶⁹⁶ Correa, 179-80.

⁶⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 180.

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 194.

⁶⁹⁹ "...Non sono pochi coloro che considerano la tradizione presepiale napoletana come una trasposizione nelle forme statiche del paesaggio natalizio, della tradizione delle sacre rappresentazioni "in una versione minuscola, raccolta, casalinga." V. Viviani, *Storia del teatro napoletano*, (Napoli, Guida, 1969), 218 as quoted in Marino Niola, *Il presepe*. (Napoli: l'ancora, 2005), 29.

As was the case of the northern Italian Sacro Monte and the Spanish “Way of Sorrows,” the Neapolitan *presepe* (or *presepio* in Italian) grew in popularity among the local population and then spread throughout the world. These miniature sculpted nativity scenes, like the Sacro Monte, were based on the popular religious dramas performed as part of annual Christmas festivities in Naples. Although elaborately sculpted nativity scenes in churches were known in the 13th-century, it was St. Francis of Assisi who helped popularize the more humble tradition. In mid-December 1223, in a natural cave in the town of Greccio, Francis prepared a straw-filled manger complete with live actors and animals, as seen in the fresco cycle depicting the Life of St. Francis in the Upper Basilica at Assisi. [Fig. 138] Since there were many claims of miraculous healings credited to this humble reenactment of the birth of Jesus, such reenactments of the Christmas story spread throughout Europe.⁷⁰⁰ The vast popularity of this Franciscan tradition and many reports of spiritual benefits attained from these displays undoubtedly inspired Caìmi’s Sacro Monte in Varallo, a theory supported by the fact that one of the earliest chapels featured the Nativity—a sculptural representation of St. Francis’ *tableau vivant*. [Fig. 139]

Although the *presepio* tradition spread throughout Italy and contained many common elements and figures, the style and materials used in creating the manger scene was characterized by geographical origin, historical periods, and local materials. The Sicilian *presepe* featured materials such as coral, ivory, bone, mother-of-pearl, alabaster, and other sea materials, while the Roman versions reproduced the typical landscape of the Roman country, including pine and olive trees and ancient aqueducts. In the late 13th century, Arnolfo di Cambio was commissioned

⁷⁰⁰ F. Mancini, 1.

to carve marble nativity figures for the first Jubilee held in Rome in 1300, today located in Santa Maria Maggiore. [Fig. 140]

It was in Naples, however, that the production of these small sculptural representations of the Holy Family developed into a true art. There are numerous examples of large *presepe* in churches: two *presepi* found in Santa Maria la Nova (the first sculpted by Agnolo Fiore and the other by Girolamo Santacroce), the wooden *presepe* of Giovanni da Nola in San Giuseppe Maggiore, and that of Antonio Rossellino (at one time thought to have been made by Donatello) in the Piccolomini chapel of Sant'Anna dei Lombardi.

There were also portable *presepe* that became popular in later years such as that which is annually displayed in Santa Brigita featuring the shepherds of Michele Perrone.⁷⁰¹ The 17th century was crucial in the development of the uniquely Neapolitan form known today. At this time, the first articulated joints for the wooden figures appear and an important structural innovation: separately carved head, neck, and limbs of wood attached to a mannequin with a supporting armature of wrapped wire.⁷⁰² [Fig. 141] These structural improvements allowed for an endless variety of arrangements for the figures, giving these frozen scenes a more life-like appearance resembling more the *tableau vivants* with live actors than religious statuary.⁷⁰³ Another important innovation came at the beginning of the *settecento*—the establishment of a standard height for the figures, ranging from around 35 to 40 centimeters and the substitution of

⁷⁰¹ Franco Mancini. *Il presepe Napolitano nella collezione Eugenio Catello*. (Firenze: Sadea/Sansoni editore, 1965), 1.

⁷⁰² "... la dozione di giunture a snodo per tutte le articolazioni della figura di legno e ... l'applicazione sia della testa che degli arti, sempre scolpiti in legno ma in pezzi distinti, su un manichino ottenuto avvolgendo della stoppa ad un'anima di fil di ferro." *Ibid*, 1.

⁷⁰³ Artists working during this period were: Perrone, Giuseppe Picano, Lorenzo Vaccaro, Andrea Falcone, Nicola Fumo, Bartolomeo Granucci, Giacomo Colombo, Fortunato Zampini, and il Buonifino. Friends of the Creche <http://www.friendsofthecreche.org/historyCreche.html>.

terracotta for the wooden heads and limbs. Wax would also become a popular modeling material.⁷⁰⁴

The simple early Neapolitan scenes not only featured the Holy Family and the other principle characters from the Nativity narrative, but also many people and architectural elements derived from contemporary life: merchants, Neapolitan gentlemen, street vendors, wash women and crippled beggars. [Figs. 142, 142, 146 & 147] In addition, the 17th century saw the appearance and development of scenic effects which revolutionized the *presepe*. There were reproductions of the urban landscape with recognizable architectural façades, ancient ruins, and market stalls. [Fig. 146 & 147]

Nativity Scenes became a mirror for the culture which produced them, reflecting the society of the day and the most vivacious aspects of daily life with traits of intense realism: they were enriched with unusual and exotic elements and spectacular scenery, displaying inventive imagination typical of Baroque. At this time the Presepio began to step out of churches to enter patrician, bourgeois homes as an object of luxury interior decoration, mounted and remounted differently year after year.⁷⁰⁵

By the eighteenth century, the presepe had become an elaborate, dramatic scene, full of minor characters with little to do with the biblical story. These intricate scenes became sought-after commodities (often made by leading sculptors) collected by wealthy patrons. [Fig. 146 & 147] It is said that Charles III (1716–88), King of the Two Sicilies, collected elaborate *presepe*, and his enthusiasm encouraged others to do the same.⁷⁰⁶ Today in Naples, at the Museo Nazionale di San Martino is "Il Presepe Cuciniello", a monumental collection from the 18th century that includes shepherds, angels, and animals. [Fig. 147]

⁷⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰⁶ F. Mancini, 1-4.

The close attention to the rough characteristics of Naples' streets is evident in the numerous carefully-sculpted statuettes of cripples, vendors, and merchants. One female character in this collection has a goiter, the same affliction seen in the old woman in his Caravaggio's *Martyrdom of Saint Andrew* and the "goiterous Jew" in the Sacro Monte at Varallo. The characteristic that unites Caravaggio's paintings, northern Italian *sacri monti*, the *presepe*, and Spanish and Neapolitan theater is their close attention to detail and expression of local culture in the description of a biblical scene—all to heighten the viewers' identification with the depicted narrative. The baroque *presepio* reached its highest artistic expression in the Neapolitan *presepe*, which influenced, albeit with natural regional differences, the *presepio* in Sicily, Genoa and Rome. Neapolitan *presepi* found their way to other regions of Italy in the 18th century, where they developed their own styles of *presepio*—ones which were usually simpler and used local materials. In South Tyrol the figures were made of carved wood and in Lombardy and Romagna they were made of polychrome terracotta. Later, mechanical *presepio* became popular, taking the desire for realism in sculpture to the extreme.⁷⁰⁷

4.7.6.2 Spanish *Pasos* and *Retablos*

The Spanish love of realistic sculpture is demonstrated by the spread of the Sacro Monte to Spanish-occupied lands, the diffusion of the *presepio* to Iberian territories, and the long-standing tradition of polychromed statuary in Spain.⁷⁰⁸ The Iberians eventually made these naturalistically-carved sculpture groups a central part of their religious observations, both in their frequent street processions and within their elaborately-decorated churches.

⁷⁰⁷ Teodoro Fittipaldi, ed., *Il presepe napoletano del Settecento* (Naples: Electa, 1995), 14-15.

⁷⁰⁸ On Spanish polychromed sculpture, see: Bray, 2009.

While the *sacri monti* of northern Italy served as remote religious retreats for the spiritual pilgrims, the Spanish Calvary displays were easily accessible to the general public, because they often were found near the city entrances. Although these Stations of the Cross were spiritually moving for many believers, they were humble artistic expressions of the community's piety, due to their continuous exposure to the elements. These humble sculpted shrines were updated to meet the needs of the developing "Baroque" aesthetic, one that celebrated luxurious materials, expressive force, and striking naturalism.

One manifestation of this new form of Spanish Baroque sculpture was the elaborate Spanish *retablo* still found in many Baroque churches. The *retablos*, which combined architecturally-inspired niches and polychrome statuary, cover entire walls of church apses.⁷⁰⁹ [Fig. 148] These highly detailed figures placed in stage-like architectural niches are frozen in dramatic poses, with faces contorted in tremendous sorrow, hands clutching their chests out of extreme grief, and arms thrown toward heaven in desperate helplessness. These are far from the serene faces and ideal body-types of Italian Renaissance sculpture; there is a pathos and psychological depth that is characteristically Spanish. Although the *retablo* emotionally engages the viewer, it is at a great distance from the viewer and did not have the emotional impact of a street drama or a painting done by Caravaggio in which the action is thrust to the foreground, almost breaking into the viewer's personal space. [Figs. 121, 130, 2 & 14]

The Neapolitan *presepe*, Spanish sculpture, and Caravaggio's paintings (i.e. *Crucifixion of St. Peter*, *Madonna of Loreto*, and *David with the Head of Goliath*) use naturalistic detail to draw the viewer into the scene, as an actual participant in the action. [Figs. 85, 17 & 2] In Spain, there was a longstanding competition between painting and sculpture. The Spanish poet Juan de

⁷⁰⁹ Rolf Toman, *Baroque and Rococo* (Berlin: Feierabend, 2003), 168.

Jáuregui wrote a treatise entitled *Diálogo entre la naturaleza y las dos artes pintura y escultura* (1618). This was the Spanish interpretation of the Italian *paragone*.⁷¹⁰

The Iberian sculpted form that more closely achieves this sort of active participation of the viewer was the *paso* sculpture groups used in religious processions. It may have been this type of processional form that Carlo Bescapè saw while in Spain and inspired the Milanese *Entierro* that was praised and emulated in northern Italy. The *pasos* brought the formal religious sculptures out of the churches and interacted with the public, who played its role (observer, mourner, angry mob) as the sculptures moved throughout the city, much as the *carros* of the *auto sacramentales*. The blunt realism of these sculpted scenes transported the people into the world of the biblical narrative, where they experience Christ's suffering and follow his footsteps as he made his way to Golgotha. To heighten the emotional impact and make the figures more realistic, the colored statues were given accessories similar to those of the Italian *Sacro Monte* such as "wigs made of real hair, eyes and tears of crystal, and wounds of red leather or cork."⁷¹¹

A surviving example of a *paso* made during Caravaggio's lifetime is the *Raising of the Cross* by Francisco Rincón (b. 1567) sculpted in 1604. [Fig. 149] This large sculptural group contains eight life-size figures representing the dramatic moment when the cross bearing Christ is raised by the Roman soldiers. Their backs dramatically arch as they pull the cross into an upright position. Another man heaves his back upward as he strains under the cross' weight. Christ's body is not a thing of beauty, as in its Italian counterparts of Florence or Rome, which were inspired by ancient sculpture. Rincón's Christ is pale and taunted, his head thrown back in excruciating pain. One of the thieves awaiting crucifixion looks away. He wears a tortured expression on his face, unable to watch the horrific scene—his destiny. His body is tensed and

⁷¹⁰ Bray, 38-9.

⁷¹¹ Toman, 166.

his hands are tied behind his back. Special care was taken to portray his facial expression: eyes bulging in fear, downturned mouth, and deeply furrowed brow. To suggest a setting for this petrified drama, the shallow stage-like surface of the cart is covered by pebbles and rocks of various sizes with small clusters of dried thistles placed amongst the stones. On each of the four corners of the cart, there is a large lantern to throw a dramatic light on the event during nocturnal processions. [Fig. 150]

Another *paso* group is the *Descent from the Cross* by Gregorio Fernández (1576-1636).⁷¹² [Fig. 151] This complex work captures the moment that Christ's body is released from the cross. Two men on ladders are leaning over the arms of the cross as they gently lower the Savior's body. At the foot of the cross are the three Marys and St. John. Typical of Spanish religious works, Christ's crucified body is not idealized; it looks battered, covered with blood from the wounds on his head, hands, and feet. In addition to showing the traditional five wounds of Christ, Fernández took particular care to show the bloody wounds from Jesus' dislocated knees.

This brutally realistic approach to depicting the body of Christ is typical not only of Spain, but also its territories where Spanish culture spread—places such as Milan, Naples, Genoa, Sicily and Latin America. These carts also provide some evidence of the staging and characters of the saint and passion plays of the period. In the sixteenth century, serious plays had dramatic interludes that also were called *pasos*. These were simple dramas, with two to four live actors. These dramas served as comic relief for the audience—similar in function to the *intermezzi* of Italian theater.⁷¹³ The fact that the *paso* was originally an enacted drama supports

⁷¹² Toman, 166.

⁷¹³ Antonio R. Polito, *Spanish Theater: A Survey from the Middle Ages to the XX Century*. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1967), 24.

the idea that the later *pasos* were based on actual theatrical practices of the period, reflecting the appearance of the processional carts of the *auto sacramentales* and other religious drama carrying live actors during the Renaissance and Baroque periods.

The differences in the treatment of similar themes in the sculpted groups of Italy and Spain reveal stylistic differences in the treatment of biblical events in the religious drama and visual arts of these two Catholic nations. The Spanish artists creating the sculpted *paso* and *retablo* sculptures chose to heighten the realism of the event and the psychology of the figure, sacrificing beauty—even when representing the body of Christ who, in Italian art, was usually idealized to preserve his deity-like appearance. By comparison, the Italian *sacro monte* is more restrained in its expression, particularly in the figure of Christ, adhering more closely to the Renaissance ideals which called for decorum and restraint in sacred figures. In Italian works, the secondary figures have rough faces and contorted poses—ugly people were sinful people. In this image, the “goitered Jew” on the left has facial features that are similar to those of Caravaggio’s thugs and the *Arlecchino* masks. [Figs. 152, 133, 123 & 134]

The Spanish attention to the blood and psychological anguish of the characters portrayed in the sculptural groups may have also appeared in the enacted *pasos* and the *auto sacramentales*. Spanish cultural influences on Neapolitan theater may have created a dramatic form that showed more brutal acts of violence and more psychological suffering than in the rest of the Italian peninsula. Caravaggio’s exposure to these displays of violence and psychological pain may explain the changes in his painting in Naples and southern Italy. To investigate the painter Caravaggio’s dark period, the focus shifts to Spain’s southern Italian territory, Naples and its culture during the Spanish occupation.

4.8 CARAVAGGIO'S AMATEUR ACTORS

It often is noted that Caravaggio's paintings reflect empathy for the poor.⁷¹⁴ Similarly, the popular theater focused on the simple lives and spirituality of the common person and their personal relationship with God. Salvation was presented to the audience "along the simple lines of good and bad so that one can easily see where they themselves ought to place their allegiance in order to be on the safe side . . . providing clarity about what to do to be saved."⁷¹⁵ Echoing Counter-reformation dictates to communicate Church doctrine and the Gospels in a language everyone, even the uneducated farmer, could understand, Caravaggio chose themes and personages with which his viewers—both upper- and lower-class citizens—could easily identify. The popular theater companies took advantage of their freedom from Church control by introducing everyday situations and people to help the public identify with the personages of the dramas. While Caravaggio's *Madonna of Loreto* was famous in Rome for its sympathetic portrayal of the devotions of poor pilgrims, the artist's *Adoration of the Shepherds* (Santa Maria degli Angeli in Messina, Sicily) is also striking for its sensitivity to the devout spirituality of the humble believer. [Figs. 17 & 153] Once again, the scene is dark, but he rendered the details of the setting more carefully, showing the rough-hewn boards and heavy beams behind the figures in the dark brown background. This is not an elaborate interior where the artist displayed his talents at reproducing luxurious textures of fine silks and velvets, instead he chose to emphasize the rough timbers, the dirt floor, and the straw bed of the young mother, like the miniature

⁷¹⁴ Pamela M. Jones, "The Power of Images: Paintings & Viewers in Caravaggio's Italy," in *Saints & Sinners*, Franco Mormando ed., 46-48.

⁷¹⁵ Heike Holenweg, "The Middle English Mystery Plays: the voice of clerical authority?" in *The Growth of Authority in the Medieval West: Selected Proceedings of the International Conference, Groningen 6-9 November 1997*, Martin Gosman and Arie Johan Vanderjagt, eds (Groningen: Jan R. Veenstra, 1999), 239.

Neapolitan *presepe*. It is not luxury, but humility that he chose to highlight—a fitting theme for the Capuchins whose founder, St. Francis, is credited with the first *presepe*.

This is not a moment of pompous adoration, but a silent moment of meditation and awe of something mundane, yet beautiful. The poses of the mother and child appear natural and relaxed. The only expression of joy is a shepherd's silent gesture, arms thrown wide in joy. All eyes are fixed on the miracle before them. Pressed against him is a younger man whose bearded face bears an expression of profound tenderness. His rough hands are folded in a thoughtful gesture of simple devotion. There is a direct encounter with the Divine. There is no inclusion of any element that symbolizes the hierarchical or intercessory nature of the Church. Caravaggio's work demonstrates that the most humble were the first people given direct access to Christ. The popular religious theater, as we have discussed, took this same approach by making it accessible to all classes and casting lower class characters as protagonists.⁷¹⁶

4.9 CARAVAGGIO'S WORK AND DRAMA IN SPANISH ITALY

Caravaggio's works share with the popular theater, the *Sacro Monte*, Spanish *pasos*, and Neapolitan theater, a mix of antique costume and contemporary clothing and the conspicuous display of lower class persons in religious scenes. These dramatic sculpted scenes include: horrified mothers reaching for their murdered children in the Massacre of the Innocents, angry crowds shouting for Christ's death in front of Pontius Pilate's palace, or bystanders peacefully watching the Baptism of Jesus. Although often portrayed in passive roles, some of these

⁷¹⁶ Holenweg, 239.

contemporary figures are shown in as participants of violent scenes of crucifixion, floggings, or beheadings, while other witness these events. All were depicted with much attention to detail and realism. [Figs. 47 & 154]

Caravaggio's figures show a variety and intensity of emotion similar to many of the common people in the scenes shown in the *Sacro Monte* and the *pasos*. In the artist's Roman works there is a deliberate attempt to dazzle the viewer with illusionistic effects and refined brushwork, in his southern Italian works, there is a noticeable change in emotional expression and handling of paint. These paintings executed in Naples and southern Italy are less gestural in their expression of sorrow, horror, and grief, but are instead rendered in a quieter and more psychologically introspective manner.

Caravaggio is famous for his dramatic *chiaroscuro*. The intense illumination does not radiate from a natural source but seems to originate from a light source that has been amplified and directed by artificial means. Caravaggio's characteristic artificial lighting effects recall the lighting of outdoor stages with the torch (or cresset lighting), lanterns that illuminated the night visits to the *Sacro Monte*, and the lanterns mounted on the sides of the *pasos* carts or on the Neapolitan stage. The strong side-lighting enhances the three-dimensional qualities of the scene and heightens the emotional impact of the event. Caravaggio's figures emerge from the enveloping darkness, brightly highlighted with his intense raking light. This lighting picks up the various textures in the clothing, but also emphasizes the lines and crevasses in the face and forehead. [Fig. 130, 46, 131, 132, 134 & 2] These deeply etched shadows heighten the emotional impact of the facial expression and engage the viewer emotionally. In his religious paintings, this light may have represented the presence of the Divine.⁷¹⁷ Yet, for all of its symbolism, this light

⁷¹⁷ Varriano, "Caravaggio and Religion," 200.

is not painted abstractly like the decorative gilded lines emanating from the head of a Botticelli Madonna. Although Caravaggio paints the effects of this light naturalistically, it is a light manipulated for a specific effect as was theatrical lighting in the theater of his day.

Like the minimal scenic elements of the Spanish *paso*, Caravaggio's paintings often have little to define clearly the space inhabited by his characters. His works usually contain a shallow, stage-like area occasionally framed by a curtain. When Caravaggio does include some suggestion of architecture, only a simple arch, window, or doorway behind the action defines the *platea*-like space—a convention used in Italian popular religious theater, the *commedia dell'arte*, and the Spanish *auto sacramentales*. Usually, however, his characters, in such works as *Supper at Emmaus*, *Penitent Magdalene*, *Ecce Homo* occupy only a shallow interior space, devoid of decoration other than the striking ray of light streaming across the dim background. [Figs. 130, 64 & 46] Within these shallow stages Caravaggio groups only a few life-size figures in a frieze-like arrangement on very large canvases.

While Spanish drama is noted for its inclusion of personages derived from daily life, dark tragedy, and psychological depth, another interesting feature is its minimal set decoration when compared to Italian forms. In Spanish street theater, only a simple drapery (most often solid tan or with a simple painted scene) was used to define the playing space. Another interesting feature was characteristic of the Spanish theater, the discovery space. [Fig. 155] This recessed area at the back of the theater had only a solid-colored curtain as a backdrop, a background similar to the black drapery found in the Caravaggio's *Martyrdom of St. Ursula* and *David with the Head of Goliath*. [Fig. 11 & 2] Although this black curtain is often thought to represent a tent, I do not believe it to be true in this case, because Caravaggio used a more obvious and extravagant red drapery to show a tent in his *Judith and Holofernes*. [Fig. 14] The

black curtain in his later works served as an unobtrusive means to emphasize his starkly-lit figures—similar to the dark background of Morales’s *Ecce Homo*, the night sky of the *Entierro*, and the black backdrop seen on the stages of some popular street theaters. [Fig. 110]

4.10 RECEPTION AND EMULATION OF CARAVAGGIO’S WORK

News of Caravaggio’s bold, new style had reached southern Italy long before his arrival in southern Italy. Thus, among Naples’ elite, Caravaggio found many patrons willing to pay handsome sums for the work of this famous painter. One such patron was the viceroy of Naples, Juan Alonso Pimentel y Herrera, the eighth Conde de Benavente. The viceroy was an avid art collector and had Caravaggio’s *Crucifixion of Saint Andrew* sent back to his permanent home in Valladolid, Spain—the home of the Spanish *paso* artists. [Fig. 21]

This interesting connection between Caravaggio and Valladolid indicates that Caravaggio’s later style was greatly appreciated by the Spanish nobles. In fact, Benevente’s successor, Pietro Fernandez di Castro, the Conde de Lemos, acted quickly to try to secure Caravaggio’s unclaimed works after his death. He delayed consigning the *Saint John the Baptist* to its rightful owner until he could have a copy painted for himself. Another Spanish noble, Don Juan de Tasis y Peralta, second Conde de Villamediana, owned a half-length “David and Goliath” by Caravaggio, bought during his stay in Naples between 1611 and 1617. He also tried to buy Caravaggio’s *Seven Acts of Mercy* but had to settle for a copy. Other prominent merchants and nobility connected with the Spanish court commissioned works from Caravaggio. Two such families were the De Franchis, who bought the *Flagellation of Christ*, and

Marcantonio Doria, who bought the *Martyrdom of Saint Ursula*. Doria was a prince from Genoa, another Spanish stronghold in Italy.

The De Franchis *Flagellation of Christ* (1607) was commissioned by a successful family connected with the viceregal court. [Fig. 132] For the composition, Caravaggio chose a simplified setting with Christ and only three other figures, an approach that differs considerably from those of renaissance masters who include background detail. [Figs. 156 & 157] The only architectural form is the column to which Christ is tied; everything else is obscured in the inky shadows. By reducing the background to shadow, Caravaggio focus attention on Christ, whose muscular torso and head are dramatically twisted with the force of his tormentors' ropes. Christ's legs are awkwardly twisted as though he is being pulled off balance, too exhausted to stand straight. Caravaggio chose to depict an unusual moment of tension, the moment just preceding the flagellation. The muscles of the tormentors are tensed, ready for action, and their vicious faces are twisted with anticipation of the cruel torture. Art historian Catherine Puglisi describes this work is a "raw exposition of man's cruelty as an anonymous business carried out in secret with cold-blooded efficiency."⁷¹⁸ The brute-like faces of the tormentors recall the ugly Roman soldiers found in the *Sacro Monte* and the Spanish *paso*.

After problems with the Knights of Malta, Caravaggio fled the island, this time to the Spanish territory of Sicily, away from both Maltese and Papal jurisdiction. This island welcomed the fugitive artist with numerous prestigious commissions including the *Raising of Lazarus* (1608-9) and the *Burial of Saint Lucy* (1608). [Figs. 10 & 8] In the *Burial of Saint Lucy*, Caravaggio shows the event in an unconventional manner, with the sweaty workman in the foreground and the pale, dead saint behind them at their feet. Saint Lucy is dressed in drab

⁷¹⁸ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 270.

brown and her throat is cut. The people in the crowd at the back of the scene wear expressions of sorrow and grief as in the earlier *Entombment* and *The Death of the Virgin*, but the mood seems quieter, more introspective. [Fig. 58 & 12] The colors are dark and muted, except for the red cloak that identifies Saint John.

In 1609, Caravaggio returned to Naples, where he completed his *Crucifixion of Saint Andrew*, for the viceroy. [Fig. 21] In July of 1610, he boarded a ship carrying three works intended for the papal nephew Cardinal Scipione Borghese, one of them a painting of *Saint John the Baptist* and one of Mary Magdalen (now lost). [Fig. 158] These paintings may have been intended as a gift, because Scipione's uncle finally granted his long-awaited pardon for murder. Caravaggio was on his way to Rome. But his plan to leave unraveled when he was imprisoned due to a case of mistaken identity. During the confusion, his belongings on the ship had already left for Palo, near Rome. Caravaggio was forced to travel up the malaria-ridden coast and on July 18, 1610, he died of fever at Porto Ercole.⁷¹⁹

Art history scholars have long studied the legacy of Caravaggio's bold painting style and are quick to point out that his influence was most strongly felt and long-lasting in areas outside of Italy—especially those that had been under Spanish dominion such as Flanders, Holland, and Spain. Rubens, Rembrandt, and Velasquez are all painters possessing some Caravaggesque qualities and lived in areas with a strong Iberian presence. Within Italy, it is Naples—the Spanish territory—that stands out as the Italian region with the most Caravaggesque painters.

It is significant that among Naples's elite, Caravaggio found many patrons connected with the Spanish courts willing to pay handsome sums for his work. The interest of the viceroy of Naples, Juan Alonso Pimentel y Herrera, in Caravaggio's paintings and the fact that the

⁷¹⁹ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 366.

viceroys' permanent home was Valladolid, Spain—the home of the Spanish *paso* artists is significant. This interesting connection between Caravaggio and Valladolid indicates that Caravaggio's later style was greatly appreciated by the Spanish nobles and suggests parallels in the Spanish-Neapolitan and the Caravaggesque aesthetic.

Caravaggio painted the world he encountered—its drama, spirituality, its people—a world profoundly influenced by Spanish culture. This may have helped the painter's popularity while the Iberians on the peninsula were in a position of power. When the Spanish Empire's hold on the rest of Europe weakened, any resemblance to what would become known as “decadent” Spanish culture would be seen as negative. I believe this may help to explain Caravaggio's subsequent rejection by both biographers and art critics. Over the following centuries, the accounts of his life became more sensational—without facts to support this change.

Caravaggio's life and art may have been considered symptomatic of the period of Iberian decadence and was judged harshly, as “wanting in refinement of feeling, and also in moderation.”⁷²⁰ It was only after Roberto Longhi's work during the 1950's that Caravaggio's work was considered worthy of serious study. During the period that scholars reconsidered Caravaggio's contributions to European painting, Italian historians were reassessing their judgment of Italy's Spanish period and strove to describe more accurately the cultural interaction between Spanish and Italian cultures. While scholarship in other fields have produced nuanced accounts of *l'età spagnola*, art history has been slow to reconsider Spanish cultural contributions. I have presented a challenge to this misconception, arguing that Caravaggio was a subject of Spain and it was to Spanish Italy that he ran when in grave difficulty. As a close observer of culture, Caravaggio was affected by this culture and appropriated its most emotionally-engaging

⁷²⁰ Reumont, 291-292.

dramatic forms to give expressive power to his innovative paintings and to reach a broad audience.

5.0 CONCLUSION: PAINTING AS MEMORY THEATER

The previous chapters have followed Caravaggio's career and established links between his works and specific dramatic forms, citing regional differences he encountered on his travels. I now conclude the story of the painter's dramatic life and painting career by looking to preaching, education, and memory studies to find the likely reasons for Caravaggio's appropriation of dramatic forms. In that sense, this is like the conclusion of a story in which we learn the likely motives of the protagonist. We have already explored how Caravaggio's work mirrored that of the current theatrical scene in Milan, Rome, and Southern Italy. Now in the conclusion, I transcend those regional specifics and explore more universal trends to explore the broader question of why Caravaggio adopted various theatrical conventions for his paintings.

Caravaggio was motivated by the theater's broad popularity and the Church's employment of dramatic techniques to emotionally engage, delight and teach a popular audience. Because he was mainly a painter of religious pictures in his maturity, the majority of his patrons were either Church officials or pious individuals. Both groups were aware of current issues on Church doctrine and Counter-Reformation directives on religious art. I discuss here how contemporary theories about effective preaching reflected the Church's ideas about how theatrical practices could delight, teach, and help audiences remember. Caravaggio wanted his art to be memorable. Thus, he carefully created his own memory images to impress prospective patrons and to bolster his reputation. Imagery that remained in the mind longest was considered

the best for teaching and would be sought by those who wanted to communicate to a broad audience. Caravaggio's sponsors would have been well versed in memory studies, for it had become popular during this time among Church leaders and humanist intellectuals. It was common belief that the images with the strongest impact were also the most vivid.

After witnessing the positive public reception of street theater and civic spectacle, Caravaggio adopted the theater's and Church's mode of teaching and emotionally engaging audiences, not only to make his art memorable, but to enhance his reputation. Caravaggio wanted fame. Like the great artists in the biographies he must have read as a young man, he wanted a life worthy of note. It was a common perception that "master" painters had outrageous personalities. These oft-repeated accounts portrayed vivid personalities as exaggerated personages caught up in their own life dramas. With the rising status of the artist during the Renaissance, the public was fascinated with these artists' lives. Through his close relationships with humanists such as Del Monte and powerful families such as the Colonna, the artist saw the art of self-fashioning. From these influential individuals, he saw how a reputation could be crafted. Because Caravaggio also wanted to control his own myth-making, he became the playwright and director, both of the personages within his paintings and of his own life. This meta-theater is evident at many levels of Caravaggio's work, including his own self fashioning. Just as drama at the time depicted stage within stage, space within space, and roles within roles, Caravaggio took on multiple roles.⁷²¹ As the artist, he played the role of documenter and witness to important events for; after all, the viewers of his paintings see biblical history through his eyes. Although he followed a common trend of the time by depicting himself as a character within his paintings, he also took great care to fashion his role outside his paintings—on the world stage.

⁷²¹ On embedded artist self-portraiture, see: Azar M. Rajaie, "Defining Artistic Identity in the Florentine Renaissance: Vasari, Embedded Self-Portraits and the Patron's Role," Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2006.

Caravaggio sought fame on this *theatrum mundi* by painting it with convincing “realism” but, as we have seen in earlier chapters, this was a contrived reality, one employing specific dramatic forms—shallow and dark space with a few spotlighted stock characters in compelling interaction. Moving from the specific regional theatrical traditions Caravaggio encountered, I explore more general motives for adopting dramatic forms, ones that touch the fields of oration, preaching, memory studies, theater, literature, and painting. The common denominator linking these disparate fields is the communication of complex ideas. I argue that dramatic forms drawn from these varied sources served both the Church’s needs and Caravaggio’s—to emotionally engage, delight, and teach the public. I begin by examining the Church’s employment of theatrical techniques to move the public and communicate religious doctrine, as evident in models of effective preaching.

5.1 EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT IN RENAISSANCE PREACHING

The Church saw the theater as an efficient tool for both teaching and entertaining its diverse congregations.⁷²² Although we have seen the widespread use of theatrically-inspired devotions and processions within the Church during the *cinque-* and *seicento*, preachers also adopted theatrical techniques for their sermons. The heightened emotionalism of their preaching was a response to the call for humanist eloquence; the “Augustinian ideal of preaching to move,

⁷²² For a recent study on memory and theater, see: Attilio Favorini, *Memory in Play: from Aeschylus to Sam Shepard* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

persuade, and delight; and post-Tridentine emphasis on ‘plain speaking.’”⁷²³ To achieve these combined goals the Church drew from a variety of sources, new and old:

Catholic preaching after Trent was not monolithic; rather than being uniform and intolerant, it was a hybrid of forms past and present, interpreted as needed to particular situations. Along with diversification of the genre came diversity of content.⁷²⁴

Both the Church and theater blended traditions from the past and new innovations to reach their audience, as one sees in Caravaggio work. As was the case for theater, preaching was the “means to both spread and control the faith as well as a vehicle for propaganda and demonstration of civic, political, and religious power.”⁷²⁵ In Rome after Trent, “sermons aimed at touching the heart and moving sinners to compunction – the prelude to sacramental confession, communion, and a reordered life.”⁷²⁶ Like the Roman orator, the effective preacher was to engage the emotions to communicate to the congregation and move them toward a more sound spiritual life. The worst condition for any person was to have a hardened heart, to be immune to calls to penance and contrition, with the final objective being absolution by a priest and full communion within the Body of Christ, the Catholic Church.

[Rome, ca. 1576,] And to heare the maner of the Italian preacher, with what spirit he toucheth the hart, and moveth to compunction.... These things are handled with such a grace coming from the preachers mouth,

⁷²³ Larissa Taylor, “Preface,” *Preachers and People in the Reformations and Early Modern Period*, ed. Larissa Taylor (Leiden, Boston and Köln: Brill, 2001), xi.

⁷²⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁵ Taylor, xiii.

⁷²⁶ Thomas Worchester, S.J., “The Catholic Sermon,” in Larissa Taylor, *Preachers and People in the Reformations and Early Modern Period*, ed. Larissa Taylor (Leiden, Boston and Köln: Brill, 2001), 22.

that it calleth of al sortes great multitudes, and worketh in their hartes marvelous effects.⁷²⁷

Emotional engagement was at the heart of good preaching and preaching was a large part of Italian culture between 1400 and 1700.⁷²⁸ People, at least in the larger cities, expected to be “dazzled, entertained, informed, even transformed, on a regular basis, by preaching. Thus, they would come, sometimes in the tens of thousands if the sources do not exaggerate, to hear Italian preachers.”⁷²⁹ We already saw evidence of such popular preachers in the section describing Colonna support of Bernardino Occhino, who moved his listeners to tears. Preaching, always a popular attraction in the Eternal City, saw an upsurge after the Council of Trent. It was the primary means of communication at that time, one that included everyone. With its central role in the culture, it was “an expression rooted in society’s perception of its social identity.”⁷³⁰ Since the medieval period, preaching was perceived as an “expression of the divine; sacred mystery was the root of its power to transform and define.”⁷³¹ The Italian preaching tradition developed independently, influenced only by the Spanish and French orders which sent preachers to Italy.⁷³² Spain’s influence on the Church also is evident in the pervasiveness and power of the Jesuits within the peninsula and the popularity of Spanish mysticism during Caravaggio’s day. There are common assumptions shared by preachers from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century that find parallels to theatrical and artistic practices of the period:

1. Preaching “should transform; it ‘toucheth’ and ‘moveth.’”⁷³³

⁷²⁷ Gregory Martin, *Roma Sancta (1581)*, ed. George Bruner Parks (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letterature, 1969), 71-2, quoted in Larissa Taylor, *Preachers and People*, 125.

⁷²⁸ Corrie E. Norman, “The Social History of Preaching” in Larissa Taylor, *Preachers and People*, 125.

⁷²⁹ Norman, 125.

⁷³⁰ Robert Bonfil, “Preaching as Mediation between Elite and Popular Cultures: The Case of Judah del Bene,” in David B. Ruderman, ed., *Preachers of the Italian Ghetto* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 69.

⁷³¹ Norman, 126.

⁷³² *Ibid*, 127.

⁷³³ Norman, 129-30.

2. The “wonderous effectes’ of transformation are harmony in society and between society and the sacred,” with personal and communal compunction, repentance, and appeal for divine mercy as the most common themes.⁷³⁴
3. The “moving” of the heart stems from a combination of the preachers “spirit” of God’s Word which is embodied in the speaker and transmitted to the hearer where it “toucheth the harte” and the preacher’s rhetorical skill which is guided by divine grace.⁷³⁵
4. Successful preaching is found in those “whose image and action as well as words recall or even miraculously recreate those of the earliest apostles and prophets of God before the people” and is most likely to belong to one of the medieval preaching orders or one of the new orders that looked to medieval models of preaching.⁷³⁶
5. The sacred is made manifest. The crowds “crying and shouting” is the result of the “activity of the Spirit through the preacher; but it occurs in ritualistic form: the preacher sounds the message and the hearers respond with communal cries.” It is “tied to liturgical, sacramental, or devotional practice and is understood and experienced in similar ways.”⁷³⁷
6. The audience, the preacher, and the Spirit determined the nature of the preaching event. “Their reactions, the degree to which they receive the words of the preacher, and their emotional and physical responses confirm the presence of the holy, showing the ‘marvelous effectes.’”⁷³⁸

As was the case in Renaissance art, literature, and theater, humanistic interest in classical rhetoric also influenced its preachers, manifested by a shift from the more popular medieval style to one that spoke to the elite circles of Roman society. Preaching in Rome became an art that articulated “the religious and cultural milieu of the Renaissance papal court.”⁷³⁹ After the Council of Trent, however, this preaching style, which employed classical *epideictic* (or “the art of praise and blame”), had a broader aim that “transformed society at all levels.”⁷⁴⁰

While the sermons reflected the tastes of elite practitioners and audiences, they were heard by all classes. Counter-Reformation leaders, who realized the need to reach everyone,

⁷³⁴ Norman, 129.

⁷³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷³⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷³⁷ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁷³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷³⁹ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁷⁴⁰ *Ibid.*; see also: John W. O’Malley, *Praise and Blame in Renaissance Rome: Rhetoric, Doctrine, and Reform in the Sacred Orators of the Papal Court, ca. 1450-1521* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1979).

stressed plain language to communicate with the lower classes. The skilled preacher varied his style according to the situation; thus, sermons meant for mixed crowds were more extemporaneous than those preached to elite audiences. Bishop Gabriele Paleotti wrote his popular sermons only in outline form, allowing for flexibility to adapt to the audience's reaction to his words. In this sense his preaching was improvisational, like the *commedia dell'arte* actors who used a simple *scenario* to guide them while responding to the emotions of the crowd. The general public was impressed with words that appealed to their emotions, not strict adherence to rules of rhetoric. In this, the preacher was very similar to Lope de Vega, who threw out the rules of poetics because he believed the public cared nothing for them.

The art of preaching was at the heart of the Counter-Reformation mission. Between the 1570's and the eighteenth century, over 1200 works on sacred rhetoric appeared.⁷⁴¹ Although there was great concern regarding pastoral training and public religious education in earlier years, there were few guidelines on crafting a sermon. These preaching treatises were created to address that need. An examination of these texts reveals a Post-Tridentine pastoral psychology and attitudes toward various types of audiences held by the "reformers of preaching."⁷⁴² "Italians, especially members of the traditional preaching orders, were in the vanguard of Catholic writing, even before Trent. Thus, new ideas mixed with traditional thinking and practice of the orders."⁷⁴³

It is interesting to note that although there was a growing humanist influence in preaching, making it appeal to a more elite audience, there was a directive to use "plain"

⁷⁴¹ Norman, 138.

⁷⁴² *Ibid.*

⁷⁴³ *Ibid.*, 138. See also: John W. O'Malley, "Form, Content, and Influence of Works about Preaching before Trent: The Franciscan Contribution," in *I frati minori tra '400 e '500. Atti del XII Convegno Internazionale* (Assisi, 18-20 ottobre 1984), ed. Centro di Studi (Assisi: Centro di Studi, 1985), 27-50.

language to make the sermons comprehensible to everyone. This less-elitist approach looked back to medieval preaching practice, a time when the Church used liturgical theater to engage the emotions of all classes. Preachers were applying late medieval preaching practices to achieve post-Tridentine goals and used church decoration (sculpture and stained glass) as Bibles for the poor.⁷⁴⁴ The Counter-Reformation Church's return to medieval thought may provide a rationale for the growing interest in Spanish mysticism.

Since the Spanish contingent was a powerful force in shaping the Tridentine dictates, their more conservative and "medieval" form of Catholicism was less about abstract neo-Platonic ideals than a visceral approach to the faith that focused on Christ's bodily suffering and encounters with the sacred made manifest through the sense—a sensual spirituality. The unlearned might not grasp lofty language and humanistic allusions, but they could understand a spiritual world described in physical and emotional terms.

The Post-Tridentine innovation in preaching style was to blend the old with the new, creating a hybrid with the universal aim to "move all types of people."⁷⁴⁵ Church leaders believed that using local dialect, as popular theater did, was the best way to communicate easily to a mixed audience. In this way, preachers spoke directly to their audience and rejected ineffective formulaic sermons which contained lofty speech that was unintelligible to so many.⁷⁴⁶ Regardless of the education level of the audience, however, the preacher presented a moral message "aided by emotive rhetoric designed to elicit transformation." The overarching goal of the preacher always was "moving and pleasing."⁷⁴⁷ To achieve this, there were varying

⁷⁴⁴ On religious imagery as "text substitutes" for the illiterate, see: Michael Camille, "Seeing and Reading: Some Implications of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy, *Art History*, vol. 8, no. 1 (March 1985), 26-49.

⁷⁴⁵ Norman, 142.

⁷⁴⁶ Norman, 164-6.

⁷⁴⁷ O' Malley, *Praise and Blame*, 124.

preaching styles that converged during the sixteenth century; a similar hybridization of form also seen in the Church's use of theatrical forms and art within its didactic mission. The goal of this blended form was to move the audience emotionally. This was realized by presenting vivid pictures of the consequences of vice and virtue, an approach used in the early Church, and combining theme with persuasive rhetorical techniques espoused by humanists of the period:

...papal court preaching in the Renaissance primarily fit into the oratorical genre known as "demonstrative." That is, it was to please, to delight with its grand discourses on the majesty of God. The sermons of the mendicant preachers, as [Saint] Francis's words indicate, were to inspire hope *and* fear with their discussions of the consequences of vice and virtue....by the mid-sixteenth century, however, the goal of preaching at the court and elsewhere was generally understood to be "persuasion" that might be accomplished in a variety of rhetorical forms drawn from the classic orators and the Church Fathers, but that maintained the focus that Francis articulated.⁷⁴⁸

The new orders, in particular the Jesuits, looked to the older preaching orders for their approach to preaching.⁷⁴⁹ They realized that moving the emotions changed lives; thus, their use of theater within their schools and colleges, both for the edification of the audience and the student actors representing the characters on stage. The many accounts of conversions after watching such religious dramas and Clement VIII's respect for the deceased playwright Stefano Tuccio demonstrate how successful the Jesuits were at using the drama to convert souls.

Church leaders during this time saw the act of preaching, like the Mass, as a means to make Christ present to the people. "The preachers, moved by the Spirit, put the holy before their hearers through their words, actions, and images as surely as the priests' words did in the

⁷⁴⁸ Norman, 143. See also: Frederick McGuinness, *Right Thinking and sacred Oratory in Counter-Reformation Rome* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 55-60.

⁷⁴⁹ O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 94-96.

Mass.”⁷⁵⁰ This recalls the original function of ancient theater, that of religious ritual. The preacher and priest are actors of sorts, representing the role of Christ—the Christ who broke bread at the Last Supper and the Christ who preached his Sermon on the Mount. The congregation also had an active role:

Preachers portrayed themselves as “Isaiah’s” wailing against the Israelites; audiences were to respond in kind to the “prophets” by playing the part of the errant chosen. The playwright in this case was also the star; the drama only worked, however, when all the actors were able to grasp their parts and were willing to play them. The people had to be convinced to see themselves in their roles; they had to be moved to collaborate with the preacher and with the Word.⁷⁵¹

The preacher was also a poet who transformed the delights of heaven and the horrors of hell into moving, poetic descriptions. Religious theater and art were just extensions of the Counter-Reformation Church’s proselytizing mission—useful means to bring these vivid descriptions further to life.

5.2 VISUAL ELEMENTS IN RENAISSANCE PREACHING

Reports on preachers’ sermons and treatises on preaching increasingly show interest in capturing the audience’s attention with external visual signs and detailed description of scenes to be “seen” in the mind’s eye. The most primitive of these visual cues is gesture. These well-known hand signals were compiled in John Bulwer’s *Chirologia: or the natural language of the hand* and its

⁷⁵⁰ Norman, 151.

⁷⁵¹ Norman, 162-3.

companion volume *Chironomia* (both 1644). *Chiologia* is an illustrated manual collection of hand gestures (called *chirograms*), with simple descriptions of their meaning.⁷⁵² [Fig. 159]

[The hand] speaks all languages, and as universal character of Reason is generally understood and known by all Nations, among the formal differences of their Tongue. And being the only speech that is natural to Man, it may well be called the Tongue and General language of Human Nature, which, without teaching, men in all regions of the habitable world doe at the first sight most easily understand.⁷⁵³

Numerous paintings by Caravaggio contain hand gestures similar to those in the *Chiologia*. [Figs. 160, 58 & 12] Although Caravaggio never saw this text, he was familiar with gestures, because their use was documented as early as the ancient Romans and had been absorbed into the Renaissance and Baroque culture. They surely would have been known to Caravaggio's humanist patrons. In *seicento* Italy, the meanings of these simple gestures were known to a fairly wide audience through their usage by public speakers, preachers, artists, and actors. Caravaggio employed these hand gestures to serve as visual shorthand for his paintings in much the same way as he employed the stock character from popular secular and religious theater—all to more easily communicate with the viewer.⁷⁵⁴

Because the art of gesture was a skill that Roman orators sought to hone, it also occupied the minds of Roman humanists. Caravaggio's patrons and protectors knew Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* ('The Formation of a Public Speaker'), which explained that appropriately orchestrated gestures at the correct moment could rouse the crowd and achieve *psychagogia* ("win men's

⁷⁵² Bulwer's *Chironomia* described the gesture's effective use in public speaking, a usage that hail from the Orators of ancient Rome. Varriano, *Caravaggio*, 103.

⁷⁵³ John Bulwer, *Chiologia: or, The natural language of the hand, and Chironomia: or, The art of manual rhetoric, 1648-1654*. ed. James W. Cleary (Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press; London, Feffer & Simons, [1974]).

⁷⁵⁴ Varriano, *Caravaggio*, 101-13.

souls”).⁷⁵⁵ *Psychagogia* was the overall aim of the orator. “[They sought] to persuade and move the audience’s minds...done by the orator’s creating a favorable impression on his public—by general outward signs and in particular by gestures.”³ The visible gesture in the orators “performance” was directed toward the emotion, not the reason, of the audience: “all emotional appeals will fall flat, unless they are given that voice, look, and the whole comportment of the body can give them,”⁴

Oration was more than public speaking; it was acting. The body language of the speaker demonstrated his own emotions, which, in turn excited similar emotions in the audience. This emotion, however, had to be carefully controlled. Excessive gesticulation would be unforgivable for a well-bred Roman citizen. Cicero explained: “Every motion of the soul has its natural appearance, voice, and gesture; and the entire body of a man, all his facial and vocal expressions, like strings on a harp, sound just as the soul’s motion strikes them.”⁷⁵⁶ Everything about the orator’s external appearance was scrutinized—the nod of the head, the hand movements, the posture, the drape of their garments, even their perspiration—because the external movements of the body echo those of the soul. The actor, on the other hand, was free to express these emotions but, in doing so, was not considered in control of his passions. Caravaggio used these external signs as means to express the inner feelings of his protagonists just as they were employed by actors on the stage.

⁷⁵⁵ The first public professor of rhetoric in Rome was Quintilian (born Marcus Fabius Quintilianus in Spain about AD 35). He was the esteemed teacher of the sons and nephews in the house of the emperor Domitian. After retirement, Quintilian wrote the lengthy *Institutio oratoria*, ‘The Formation of a Public Speaker.’ In this encyclopedic work of twelve volumes, he instructs young orators in the fine art of speech writing and presentation. In his eleventh book, devoted to the memorization and delivery of the orator’s speech, he carefully describes which gestures to use and when.

⁷⁵⁶ Cicero, *De oratore*, 3.216 as quoted in *A Cultural History of Gesture*, eds. Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992).

In addition to their expressive qualities, gestures were also easier to see than subtle facial expressions. Thus, the audience at the back of the theater could easily read what was happening in the play even if the actors' voices were inaudible. In 1598, Angelo Ingegneri published his *Della poesia rappresentativa e del modo di rappresentare le favole sceniche*, in which he considered “*il buon gesto*” central to any theatrical spectacle. According to Ingegneri, gesture included the movement of “especially the hands, more often the face, and above all the eyes.”⁷⁵⁷ At the end of the *seicento*, Andrea Perrucci's treatise on acting confirmed that “signs and gestures are so many words without sound, and all parts of the body can speak with wordless signs.”⁷⁵⁸ Painters long before Caravaggio saw the efficiency of using such gestures in their paintings. Lomazzo, in his *Treatise on the Art of Painting* (1584), discussed how the artist should “render the poses, facial expressions, and gestures of those experiencing nearly a hundred different emotional states.”⁷⁵⁹ Conventional gestures such as these were important for the artist whose paintings were often far from the viewer. While Caravaggio's carefully rendered facial expressions may not be clear at a great distance, the viewer could easily see his protagonists' hand gestures.

Preachers, the orators of the Catholic Church, went beyond gesture to give their sermons visual power; they used visual metaphor and detailed description to help make the holy “appear” to the people. Preachers carefully chose words to help their audience compose a mental picture, in much the same way Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* did. Cornelio Musso was described as “a master and model of ornament, who with both beautiful arrangement and infinite abundance of

⁷⁵⁷ Angelo Ingegneri, *Della poesia rappresentativa del modo di rappresentare le favole sceniche* [1598], reprinted ed. (Ferrara; M. L. Doglio, 1989), 31.

⁷⁵⁸ Andrea Perrucci, *L'arte rappresentativa premedita ed all'improvise* (Naples, 1699) as quoted in Richard Spear, *The Divine Guido: Religion, Sex, Money and Art in the World of Guido Reni* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1997), 36.

⁷⁵⁹ G. P. Lomazzo, *Trattato dell'arte de la pittura*, book 2 (Milan, 1584), 105-86; reprinted in Hildesheim, 1968, as quoted in Varriano, *Caravaggio*, 102.

examples'...which touched hearers by appealing to their senses and bringing subjects to life – manifesting the sacred to them.”⁷⁶⁰ Bernardino Tomitano wrote a brief description of Musso’s preaching that compared the preacher’s “word pictures” (*ekphrasis*) to the paintings of famous artists:

I do not know speaking truthfully, what Titian or what Michelangelo could do with the brush and colors on the canvasses to better depict bodies than he, who by the sublime spirits of his ingenuity makes appear to us with the senses the glory of that invisible life of heaven, which here through shadows and similitudes alone we judge.⁷⁶¹

Musso’s evocative *ekphrasis* “enabled his audience to look at the baby Jesus through Simeon’s eyes or witness the frightful scene of the Second Coming. By manifesting the sacred models to them, he not only put the word before them, he called them to partake of it, by identifying with the sacred models. In keeping with the affective devotional model of late medieval Italy, Musso drew his hearers into the biblical scene.”⁷⁶² Musso did this by giving elaborate descriptions of the protagonists or by taking the role of Christ and speaking directly to them:

[Speaking as Christ] My children, from this hour, I will know nothing but trouble and sorrow; all my joy is finished, no longer will I have any consolation, now begins my martyrdom, you won’t see me happy ever again, my sorrows will continue to increase until I come thus to death. My body you see here will be lashed, these my eyes, these my ears, this my face, all this my flesh will be full of torture. Have pity on me, my children, because *Tristis est anima mea usque ad mortem....*⁷⁶³

⁷⁶⁰ Norman, 152.

⁷⁶¹ Bernardino Tomitano, *Discorso sopra l’eloquentia e l’artificio delle predeche, e del predicare di Monsignor Cornelio Musso* (Venice 1554), 2, quoted in Norman, 152.

⁷⁶² Norman, 152.

⁷⁶³ Cornelio Musso, *Prediche sopra il simbolo de gli apostoli, le due dilettoni, di Dio, e del prossimo, il sacro decalogo, e la passione di nostro Signor Gesu Christo....* 2 vols. (Venice: Giunti, 1590), vol. 2.610. From a Passion Sermon Preached in Rome, 1542 as quoted in Norman 152-3.

Musso then continues by urging the listener to “Feel, feel that sadness in you, transfer that sorrow to your heart. Don’t just understand, don’t just meditate, feel it, experience it, taste it!”⁷⁶⁴ This emphasis of sensual experience echoes that of Teresa of Avila and Ignatius of Loyola’s writings, so popular in Spain and Italy during this time. Musso gave his monologue in the role of the captured and betrayed Christ speaking directly to the audience—a popular dramatic technique. The preacher’s portrayal of Christ’s sorrowful and helpless situation is as immediate as that of an actor or a skilled artist. Musso’s direct language and detailed description have the realism and immediacy seen in Caravaggio’s paintings. I call to mind his *Capture of Christ*, *Ecce Homo*, and two *Flagellation* paintings where the viewer is thrust into the scene and becomes a participant. [Figs. 28, 46, 131 & 132]

5.3 VISUAL MEMORY MODELS FOR PREACHING AND TEACHING

Musso wanted the image of the sorrowful Christ to be etched in the mind of his audience permanently, so they would feel its power long after the sermon was over. Preachers increasingly used verbal imagery to help “visualize” their subjects; some going so far as to utilize an image rather than a biblical narrative or excerpt of scripture as the sermon’s central theme. The vividness of the “visual” imagery was thought to heighten the spiritual experience and make the ideas presented by the preacher more memorable. This approach to religious education follows current folk theories on memory that were popular at this time, theories that I

⁷⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

argue had a profound effect on Caravaggio's art and were a major motivation for his appropriation of theatrical models.

The art of memory has a long history, traces of which extend back to ancient Rome. These classical models were known to medieval scholars and later embraced by the humanists. The Catholic Church used memory aids in public and religious education and its spiritual direction and preaching. In ancient Rome, the *Ad Herennium libri IV* (86-82 BCE) discussed *memoria* as one of the five parts of rhetoric. This ancient text was used during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and was the basis for many 16th-century theories on memory.⁷⁶⁵ Of the two types of memory defined in the text, natural and artificial, my research is concerned with the latter.

Artificial memory is a construction that the individual consciously creates as a memory aid, often derived from familiar places and images.⁷⁶⁶ The student was to take care in choosing the *locus* (mental space) for the memory image. Cicero recommended, “[One] must select places and form mental images of the things they wish to remember and store those images in the places, so that the order of the places will preserve the order of the things.”⁷⁶⁷ As one mentally traversed this memory architecture, the order of the “rooms” reflected the order of the list, speech, or sermon to be memorized. Each main idea had a separate memory space, a place easily grasped by the memory, such as a house, an intercolumnar space, a corner, an arch, a cathedral.⁷⁶⁸ The more complex the item to be memorized (speech, dramatic script, excerpt from literature), the more *loci* were needed. Quintilian, like Cicero, wrote for the orator and included his own method for increasing one's memory:

⁷⁶⁵ This text was erroneously thought to have been written by Cicero in the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

⁷⁶⁶ Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 1-17, 52-8, 89-90.

⁷⁶⁷ Cicero, Marcus Tullius. *De oratore*. Ed. Kazimierz F. Kumaniecki. Leipzig : B. G. Teubner, 1969.

⁷⁶⁸ Yates, 3-4, 46-7, 107-8, 129-59.

...memory can be assisted if localities are impressed upon the mind....sites which are as extensive as possible and are marked by a variety of objects, perhaps a house divided into many separate rooms....What I have spoken of as being done in a house can also be done in public buildings, or on a long journey, or in going through a city, or with pictures. Or we can imagine such places for ourselves. We require therefore places, either real or imaginary, and images or simulacra which must be invented.⁷⁶⁹

These memory spaces were a sort of underlying structure for the fine details, a floor plan of sorts in which to place the content, or the “images” that occupied these memory spaces. To form the *loci*, the student was to choose a deserted and solitary place, be sure the spaces are not too similar, were of a moderate size, and were not too brightly lighted, nor too dark. For the preacher, these “rooms” could be broad sections or paragraphs of the sermon; for an actor, each room could be a different scene; and for an artist, the space defined in the painted narrative or the picture frame itself could delineate the confines of the memory *locus*. I emphasize here Quintilian’s mention of “pictures,” because Caravaggio’s works serve that role within their respective churches. They are memory images housed within ecclesiastical architecture, which is in turn a large multi-roomed repository for sacred knowledge.

While the *loci* give the memory model its structure, the images held within these mental spaces contain the content and detail of the thing to be memorized. Because ordinary things slipped too easily from the mind, students were advised to use striking and novel images in their memory spaces. These *loci*—a term also so used in theater meaning a playing space—were like memory stages upon which humans engaged in some sort of action. The most extreme examples were considered the best. The figures should possess extreme characteristics—very beautiful or

⁷⁶⁹ Quintilian, *Quintilian’s institutes of oratory, or, Education of an orator : in twelve books*, book 11., trans. John Selby Watson (London : George Bell and Sons, 1899-1902).

ugly; highly ornamented or disfigured (i.e. dirty, bloody, damaged...); or highly comic or obscene.

...one must employ a large number of places which must be well lighted, clearly set out in order, at moderate intervals apart; and images which are active, sharply defined, unusual, and which have the power of speedily encountering and penetrating the psyche.⁷⁷⁰

In the Middle Ages, when we see theater being frequently used in Catholic liturgy to teach the masses, *De inventione* and the *Ad Herennium* were the basis for medieval memory models.⁷⁷¹ Education in the monasteries emphasized the practice of the artificial memory as a part of the virtue of Prudence, a display of mind/fantasy control, believing that one who could control the wondering mind could also control their passions. Thus, learning and memory moved from the realm of the rhetoricians into the monasteries and were thereafter linked to religious devotion and salvation, an idea that continued in Caravaggio's day. In medieval liturgical theater, the Church adopted the idea that striking action framed in separate spaces would aid the public in remembering biblical narrative and church doctrine. The mental *loci* were made manifest in the settings of the liturgical drama, the architectural forms of the churches, and later, the "mansions" of mystery plays.

The Church, through its use of theater, provided the public with the memory spaces and the images housed within—all carefully designed with striking imagery and action to delight and move the viewer. In the case of the Easter liturgy, the memory *loci* was the sepulcher and the "striking image" was Mary finding the tomb empty. When the religious dramas moved outside

⁷⁷⁰ Cicero, *De oratore*, II, book XXXVII.

⁷⁷¹ Both texts were thought to have been written by "Tullius" or Cicero.

of the churches, the mansions of the passion plays and processional carts served a similar function. [Fig. 161] Personal devotions also used similar spatial models to aid in the memorization of prayers, scripture, and biblical narratives. Bernardino of Siena taught an illiterate peasant how to remember the *Pater Noster* by using memory images of building and gates within a walled city. Saint Dominic used the structure of the beads to help the devotee meditate on the fifteen “mysteries” of the Rosary in much the same way as the memory student constructed a complex memory cathedral to house various sections of text.

When Renaissance thinkers sought to create their own “memory architecture,” they used classical and medieval memory models for sources for their own memory studies, which employed a variety of architectural forms: villas, palaces, cathedrals, and theaters. Theater was a particularly good choice because it not only provided a model in its architectural construction, but also the extreme and exaggerated action and appearance of its actors. Thus, the theater was the architectural construction of choice for Robert Fludd’s *Ars memoriae*, in which the main room had the typical appearance of a seicento theater with three main doors on the lower level and a series of windows on the second. [Fig. 162] His model also included smaller secondary rooms that were attached to the main memory space. [Figs. 163 & 164] Giulio Camillo also based his model on the theater, but used a more abstract version for his memory space, placing the items to be memorized on the various levels and “seats” of the theater.⁷⁷² [Fig. 165] Playwrights Giordano Bruno and Gian Battista della Porta both wrote treatises on memory. Giordano’s complex system was made up of multiple levels and divisions similar to Camillo’s but in concentric rings, more like an ancient amphitheater.⁷⁷³ [Fig. 166] Della Porta’s memory

⁷⁷² Yates, *Art of Memory*, 129-59.

⁷⁷³ *Ibid.*, 293-9.

models were architectural places—palaces or theaters.⁷⁷⁴ Matteo Ricci was another memory scholar active during Caravaggio’s day. In 1596, he wrote a treatise on memory that described his “memory palace” in which he used groups of images, each fixed in a specific location in the palace and mentally “visited” them in sequence.⁷⁷⁵

The value of these mental constructions was recognized by many outside monastic life and began to be used with the laity. Religious literature with a wide audience such as the aforementioned *Spiritual Exercises* promoted the use of mental spaces filled with various sensory stimuli to enhance one’s prayers and devotions. Saint Teresa of Avila uses architectural imagery in her *Interior Castle*, “I began to think of the soul as if it were a castle made of a single diamond...in which there are many rooms, just as in Heaven there are many mansions.”⁷⁷⁶ She describes the various rooms of this castle (with their varying degrees of purgation and continual strife) through which the soul on the quest for perfection must pass before reaching the innermost chamber, a place of complete transfiguration and communion with God.

Let us now imagine that this castle...contains many mansions, some above, others below, others at each side; and in the centre and midst of them all is the chieftest mansion where the most secret things pass between God and the soul. You must think over this comparison very carefully; perhaps God will be pleased to use it to show you something of the favours which he is pleased to grant to souls, and of the differences between them...⁷⁷⁷

Actual physical manifestations of these memory spaces were being used to aid not only the intellectuals, but also the illiterate. One cannot ignore the similarity between Memling’s *Passion*, Romberch’s abbey memory system, and the Sacro Monte of Varallo. [Figs. 161, 167 &

⁷⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 205-6.

⁷⁷⁵ Jonathan D. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984).

⁷⁷⁶ Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, ed. and trans. E. Allison Peers, (New York and London: Doubleday, 1989), 28.

⁷⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

40] This “visionary” experience was a dominant characteristic of Spanish spirituality, evident in the striking realism of the polychrome statuary, naturalistic painting, and drama of the Spanish Golden Age.⁷⁷⁸

In 1606, the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci added to his general memory palace model by using religious paintings depicting episodes from Christ’s life and hung in sequential order to aid the Chinese court’s memorization of important biblical facts.⁷⁷⁹ Here, one finds documentation of paintings being used as memory images, but not every painting was suitable. There were specific types that were best suited as memory images. Johannes Romberch, in his *Congestorium Artificiose Memorie* (1533), described the best memory images as having figures that fill the space with just an arm’s length of space surrounding the figure.⁷⁸⁰ [Fig. 168] There is no background decoration, for that would distract from the main memory image. The need for a simple composition is echoed in the design of the memory theater or “repository” of ideas from J. Willis, *Mnemonica* (1618). [Fig. 169] These simple spaces are similar to those of Caravaggio’s limited undecorated spaces filled only with the protagonists and a few items necessary for the comprehension of the painted narrative. Caravaggio rejected the popular trend that included complex backgrounds.

This benefit of uncluttered imagery for clear communication of ideas may explain the use of simple compositions for illustrations in popular printed editions of literature. While the lower expense must be considered also, the fact that all extraneous distractions were removed—leaving a close-up rendering of engaging physical action—may have also been motivated by the desire to aid the novice reader’s comprehension. [Fig. 19] Beyond being mere decorative embellishments,

⁷⁷⁸ Victor I. Stoichita, *Visionary Experience in the Golden Age of Spanish Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 1995).

⁷⁷⁹ Spence, 1984.

⁷⁸⁰ Yates, *Art of Memory*, 117.

these illustrations were memory aids, promoting literacy and culture among the lower classes. Similarly designed images are also used in the religious pamphlets of the day that were targeting the same audience. All of these images were meant to be inscribed on the mind for future recall.

Gian Battista della Porta's commentary followed the classical models of Cicero and Aristotle, but was unusual for its aesthetic quality.⁷⁸¹ He believed that the imagination drew images in the brain like a pencil on paper. Della Porta continues to link memory with the visual arts by saying that Virgil's description of the pictures that Dido showed Aeneas was really the revelation of the memory system by which she remembered her ancestors. Della Porta echoed other memory scholars by emphasizing that memory spaces should contain humans with exaggerated appearances. He later recommends using paintings of talented artists as memory images because these are "more striking and move more than pictures by ordinary painters and gave Michelangelo, Raphael, and Titian as examples."⁷⁸² Ludovico Dolce, like Della Porta, saw the value of art as a memory aid.⁷⁸³ In his treatise on memory, written in 1562, he updated Romberch's ideas by suggesting one use contemporary artists' works as models:

If we have some familiarity with the art of painters we shall be more skilful in forming our memory images. If you remember the fable of Europa you may use as your memory image Titian's painting: also for Adonis, or any other fabulous history, profane or sacred, choosing figures which delight and thereby excite the memory.⁷⁸⁴

⁷⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 206

⁷⁸² Yates, *Art of Memory*, 206.

⁷⁸³ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁷⁸⁴ Ludovico Dolce, *Dialogo nel quale si ragiona del modo di accrescere et conservar la memoria*, Venice, 1562 (also 1575, 158), 86 *recto*, as quoted in Yates, *Art of Memory*, 164.

In this last section of my research, which explored the art of the orator, the preacher, the actor, and the memory student, I have shown that the ability to delight and move was seen as essential to communicate, educate, and entertain. Apologists for theater and art cited their respective arts' efficacy at evoking such emotions, thereby defending its presence in the Church's arsenal against the dangers of Protestantism and general moral corruption. Church leaders also saw art as available for memory images, praising them when thoughtfully composed and sharply criticizing (or even removing) those that fell short of their expectations.

To prevent sacred imagery from misleading the public, Carlo Borromeo commented on the representation of sacred events in church decoration and stipulated that punishments for painters and sculptors were necessary for those who did not follow his guidelines for decorum and biblical accuracy.⁷⁸⁵ Other authors of the period had similar concerns, as seen in Gabriele Paleotti's *Discorso intorno alle immagini sacre e profane* (1582) and Andrea Gillio da Fabriano's *Degli errori e degli abusi dei pittori circa l'istorie* (1564). Carlo's nephew, Federico Borromeo, shared the elder Borromeo's wariness of the painted image. In his *Della Pittura Sacra* (1624), he advised church leaders and artists to be careful when decorating churches because church decoration with doctrinal errors will perpetually contaminate the minds of the public. Here, we see an acknowledgement that churches served as repositories of sacred knowledge, as physical manifestations of memory architecture and that the art within served as memory images. Although Federico saw the dangers of ill-composed artwork, he knew the value of imagery in reaching people's hearts. Like the preachers mentioned earlier, Borromeo made a point of saying "bishops must teach not only with words, but with images." Again, striking images and the imagination were key elements in engaging the viewer/audience/ believer and

⁷⁸⁵ Carlo Borromeo, *Instructionum fabricae et suppellectilis ecclesiasticae* (Milan, 1577).

facilitating a transformative state in which those attending would be moved to penance, contrition, and—ultimately—salvation. Caravaggio’s work in their side chapels were memory spaces within a larger, more complex model of memory.

5.4 CARAVAGGIO’S PAINTINGS AS MEMORY IMAGES

Caravaggio was aware of the effectiveness of the “delight and move” approach, if not directly by reading it in treatises, at least through observing the public’s reaction to famous preachers, playwrights, actors, and artists who increasingly employed the method. A more traditional artist than Caravaggio would have been more careful to follow the laws of poetics, but there was a growing trend that transcended the limits of all art forms, one that cared less about tradition and more about emotional engagement. This avant-garde approach was supported by many in Caravaggio’s circle (Cardinal Del Monte, the Colonna, Ottavio Costa, and Vincenzo Giustiniani). There was a shift from “delighting” (although still important) toward “moving” the audience to impress an image upon their minds that would stay with them long after their initial exposure. This innovative approach was one of hybridization, blending old with the new, and brought the rougher aspects of contemporary culture into the refined world of the arts. This was accomplished by using one or a combination of methods such as evocative descriptions of familiar situations, characters drawn from street life, or dialects heard from Italy’s many immigrants and pilgrims. Success was not measured so much by how closely one adhered to tradition, but how effectively the art touched the hearts of the public.

Caravaggio wanted his works to be remembered, because unforgettable images would make him famous and earn him impressive commissions. The artist, ever searching his world for

inspiration, looked to other fields to help him work out a success strategy for his own art. The common denominators in these various sources were: focused attention on human interaction, heightened emotion, and careful recreation of familiar elements drawn from quotidian life. While Caravaggio could have looked to literature, preaching, and artistic masterpieces for the keys to success, why did he so readily embrace theater? Why was it so special?

As previously mentioned, there was a conscious looking back to the late medieval church for “new” ways to reform the shaken Catholic Church. Medieval ideas concerning imagery were also being adapted to fit the needs of the early “modern” Church. As Caravaggio was painting for a Catholic world, both for the Church and pious individuals, he would have to embrace this new trend to achieve the fame he desired. Memory is a prerequisite for fame. No painter would become famous if a day after one saw his painting it was forgotten. A famous painter was one whose works lingered in the viewer’s mind and continued to communicate its message. I suggest that Caravaggio wanted to create “memory images” that he believed surpassed those of past painters. By choosing theater, the artist modeled his work after “quick” images rather than “dead” ones. Caravaggio had easy access to these “quick” images, for they were the dramatic performances that were readily available to him in the streets, churches, and confraternities. These “living” images were thought to have had the strongest impact their viewers. His choice was a wise one because the effect of his “quick” images can still be felt today, some 400 years after his death.

Medieval memory theorists, when searching for imagery for their memory exercises, classified images as “quick” or “dead;” that is, moving or static. Visual *tableaux*, religious plays, paintings and sculptures were all considered “external versions of those images necessary

to the psychological processes of memory and understanding.”⁷⁸⁶ The broad category of imagery was called *phantasmata* by Thomas Aquinas. In this Thomist model of cognition, these external images served as “the link between body and soul, sense and understanding, a sort of bridge between the sensory world and intellectual understanding.”⁷⁸⁷ According to Aquinas “‘fantasy or imagination is, as it were, a treasure-store of forms received through the senses’The memorative power (*vis memorativa*) exists for the preservation of such forms.”⁷⁸⁸

Painted images were considered “dead” and living (*tableaux vivants*) and performed drama were “quick” images. “Living images,” were perceived as signs that could move one to compassion and devotion—and even the weeping of “bitter” tears.⁷⁸⁹ The enacted image (living) was considered better than the painted (dead) image for facilitating understanding and enhancing devotion because the viewer could more easily empathize with a living being than a painted facsimile.⁷⁹⁰ Like a complex memory image, drama, with both its visual and spoken dimensions, impressed complex ideas and situations on its audience’s minds—it was a memory theater. Caravaggio knew power of the “living” image and seems to have painted what moved him.

Caravaggio’s paintings “delight” and “move” viewers just like those of the master painters recommended by memory theorists Della Porta and Dolce. Caravaggio, however, adhered to the “memory image” more closely than most painters. Unlike his predecessors, he chose to eliminate distracting scenery and reduce the background to an area just beyond the figure. His close-up view and side-lighting focuses one’s attention on the figures so that the viewer can easily see recognizable, realistic details that transported the painted reality into their

⁷⁸⁶ Theodore K. Lerud, “Quick Images: Memory and the English Corpus Christi Drama” *Moving Subjects: Processional Performance in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* eds. Kathleen Ashley and Wim Hüsken (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 2001), 213.

⁷⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁷⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁷⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 220, 224.

own. Caravaggio does not make the space too bright or too dark; he carefully directed the lighting so that it only catches the most important elements and allows the rest to fall into shadow—all to aid one’s comprehension and affix the imagery in the mind.

Familiar characters, costumes, and references to famous literature and paintings served the painter just as dialect served the author, playwright, and preacher. It served as a bridge between the sensory world of the image to the mental world of the viewer’s imagination and intellect. He also chose figures that were striking in their extreme appearance or their dramatic action. In his *Judith and Holofernes*, the beauty of Judith, the caricature-like aged face of her servant, and the writhing, blood-spurting body of Holofernes attest to the vivid quality of his images, a horrific scene not easily forgotten. [Fig. 14] Caravaggio, as a student of memory images, then looked to the “living pictures” of the theater to impress his images on the mind further, thus assuring the fame of his work and the life of his reputation. His took care to give life to his figure, painting them so naturalistically that they looked as though they could speak.

Although the “speaking likeness” was a familiar concept in Italy, the Spanish had a sense of the performative power of the image that exceeded that of the Italians.⁷⁹¹ Stories of miraculous images such as that represented in Antoine Wiericx’s *The Miracle of Segovia* (1591) were common, but this sort of “living image” became a central part of Spanish devotion.⁷⁹² [Fig. 69] Saints Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and Ignatius of Loyola emphasized the idea that imagery both external and internal could delight and move one to spiritual enlightenment. These spiritual visualizations would become an integral part of the Counter-Reformation spirituality

⁷⁹¹ Stoichita, “Visions and Paintings,” *Visionary Experience*, 45-77.

⁷⁹² In 1588, a painting of Christ crowned with thorns and carrying the cross, placed by Saint John of the Cross above an altar in Segovia, Spain, spoke to the saint: “Brother John, tell me what you desire that I may repay the service you did me?” The saint replied: “Lord, give me your sufferings to bear that I may be diminished and count for very little.”

that Caravaggio and his patrons embraced, an innovative approach that was a blend of old and new, reflecting the experimentalism found (and heartily promoted) by Spanish and Neapolitan writers and dramatists and sought after by pro-Spanish families such as the Costas, Herreras, and Colonnas, who embraced Iberian culture's enthusiasm for arts that actively blurred genres and bent laws of poetics to more readily engage with the public.

5.5 PUBLIC MEMORY AND ARTISTIC REPUTATION

Just as Dido's paintings helped her remember her family ancestry, Caravaggio's works served as potent images for public memory of the life of the artist and his reputation. His beautifully painted, yet shocking, images capture one's imagination even today. His striking paintings delighted some, angered others, and certainly moved many to tears. He carefully crafted his image, not only as a skilled painter driven by unbridled passion, but also as a rebel, knight, and actor. He constructed his "reality," one in which the public was invited to enter and participate.

Caravaggio's realism is a naturalistically painted artifice. As in Lope de Vega's meta-theatrical play *Lo fingido verdadero* (known as *True Pretense* or *Acting is Believing*) reveals, we all play the role types God has assigned to us, whether a poor man or a King, and we ought to play the roles with great verisimilitude.⁷⁹³ Yet, the person who realizes this may come to the paradoxical realization that playing our parts well means being false in some sense. Living is true

⁷⁹³ This text was written around 1608 and published 1621.

pretense or a type of naturalistic artifice.⁷⁹⁴ Here, Lope significantly extends the *theatrum mundi* metaphor also seen in De'Sommi, Shakespeare, and Calderon:

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
... And so he plays his part...
—from William Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, (1599/1600)⁷⁹⁵

Yes, Caravaggio was an actor in his own drama. In his paintings, he frequently painted himself within his carefully directed narratives. He played many roles: a beautiful youth in a concert [Fig. 96], an inebriated Bacchus [Fig. 98], a witness fleeing from a martyrdom scene [Fig. 6], an witness/illuminator of Christ's betrayal [Fig. 28], and the severed head of a vanquished villain [Fig. 2]. In his real life, he played the roles of precocious painter, fearless swordsman, and mad genius. Just as Caravaggio painted pícaro-types, ruffians, and cheats, as lead characters in his painted dramas [Figs. 94, 20, 87 & 100], the painter himself adopted the role of the wandering picaresque hero, a popular genre in Spanish literature, making him an unforgettable character on the *theatrum mundi*.⁷⁹⁶ Yet, the "world theater" was more than a metaphor for Caravaggio tragic life. He painted mankind's roles as he saw them, but personally

⁷⁹⁴ Lope's Marcela asks, "Gines, are you acting? Gines says, "Yes." Diocleciano realizes, "I think it is artifice of the great actor . . ." William Egginton, *How the World Became a Stage: Presence, Theatricality, and the Question of Modernity* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), 117.

⁷⁹⁵ William Shakespeare, *As You Like It* [1599/1600], ed. Horace Howard Furness (Philadelphia and London: J.B. Lippincott, 1890), 121-27.

⁷⁹⁶ [The pícaro is] a rootless, unattached individual who must secure his own survival and psychological well-being in a society which openly espouses traditional ideals, while actually sanctioning the most humanizing modes of behavior.[this outsider] inherits no place which can be considered a home, no trade by means of which he can sustain himself, and no social position to provide him with well-defined relationships to other people.Because he lacks the strength and absolute integrity to impose his will on a hostile world, he adapts himself to diverse situations by serving different masters, inventing clever ruses, or wearing a variety of clever masks during a peripatetic life of alternating good and evil fortune. Richard Bjornson, *The Picaresque Hero in European Fiction* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), 6. For Caravaggio's "picaresque" figures, see: Charles Preston McLane, "Alessandro Magnasco and the Painterly Picaresque," Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 2006, 277-8.

he was caught in the shallow space and spotlight of theatrical performance.⁷⁹⁷ Thus, the artist's work serves as a lens that focuses, with illuminating intensity, on the wide range of dramatic forms found in Spanish Italy.

⁷⁹⁷Charles Dempsey, "Caravaggio and the Two Naturalistic Styles : Specular versus Macular" *Caravaggio : Realism, Rebellion, Reception*, ed. Genevieve Warwick (Newark, DE : University of Delaware Press, 2006) 91-100.

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