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REFORM AND REBELLION IN ITALIAN PAINTING:
ANNIBALE CARRACCI AND CARAVAGGIO

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Rome, during the last ten years of the sixteenth century was again the home of two important painters: Annibale Carracci and Caravaggio. The work of their mature styles changed the course of Italian painting and provided the initial impetus for a richly varied, complex and international movement that would later receive the pejorative label Baroque.¹ The terms, "reform" and "rebellion", seem appropriate. Annibale's style, most notably in evidence at the Farnese Gallery, was a synthesis of the High Renaissance's concern for sound draughtsmanship, the north Italian and Venetian tradition of color, and, a warm, less distant, often mocking sensuality that was his own unique contribution. However, Annibale's sphere of influence was the conservative, classically-minded vanguard of the Baroque, a group that held dear all ideals of the high Renaissance. Juxtaposed to the stylistic artifices of mannerism, Annibale's paintings represented for his contemporaries an aesthetic reformation. Caravaggio, by the example of his personal life and, more importantly, through his daringly original compositions was the artist in rebellion.

The word, rebellion, carries today many existential overtones. Albert Camus' essay, The Rebel, immediately comes to mind. According to Camus, the rebel, like the artist, desiring unity, revolts against a chaotic world. But, since man alone

creates social order, a society's values do not exist transcendently outside man's creative imagination. Hence, the rebel's demands are not moral but in reality aesthetic: unity is beauty.

Camus writes that the artists of the twentieth century are ". . . bent on unity to the point of madness."² It is no wonder then, that twentieth century artists have admired ardently the art of primitive cultures. In the remarkable stylizations of primitive art, there is great unity but, at the expense of this cohesion, implicitly, there is an equally great rejection of the world's variety and detail. Mannerism too, was an art of stylization, of infinite variation within a small number of aesthetic conventions.³ But unlike primitive art, Mannerism was intellectually sophisticated. This combination of subjectivity and intellectualism led to a creation of a style accessible only to the select and learned circles of a royal court. For Caravaggio and Annibale, the Mannerist compositions of the preceding generation were bloodless. The paintings of Caravaggio, the works of his mature period being exclusively of Biblical subjects, reveal the artist's contempt for the arcane allegories of mannerism and the desire to bring content within the reach of everyone.

In 1590, much of life was still governed by the church. The church had weathered the devastating setbacks of the Reformation and the heretical discoveries of Copernicus and Kepler sufficiently well. By the end of the sixteenth century it had regained much of its lost power and began to rule with renewed vigor and strength.⁴ Caravaggio was no revolutionary as contemporary society understands the word; both Annibale

and Caravaggio welcomed the frequent patronage of the church. Caravaggio's revolt was against the vacuous canvases of the Mannerists and the rational and detached paintings of the Renaissance, although he had studied and admired the latter a great deal.⁵ With homely, unidealized figures and through uncontrived compositions, Caravaggio erased the barrier between the viewer and the painted space. But, with immediacy, there is stillness; the paintings of Caravaggio are removed from the flux of time not by perspective, drawing or allegory, but through light.⁶

Caravaggio's aesthetic rebellion does carry existential implications. His canvases void of complex theology portray on the level of the emotions, the Bible's essentially simple but profound messages. Whereas Mannerism and Renaissance art was created for a "latinized elite",⁷ Baroque art would touch all social levels. This precedent was set by Caravaggio.

Recognition of Annibale's importance to the history of art has only come recently.⁸ However, during his life the Farnese Gallery was hailed as the greatest fresco cycle to be created since Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling. The two men most responsible for the Gallery's popularity and who secured Annibale's legacy for the following century were two loyal Roman literatii, Agucchi and Bellori. Their writings would become the credo of the classical Baroque in France.

Agucchi, a contemporary of Annibale, was the closest the sixteenth century had to what is known today as the art critic. Unfortunately, like many twentieth century art critics, Agucchi's observations of Annibale's work proved to be as damaging to

the artists reputation as they were helpful. For Agucchi, Annibale "restored" painting back to the dignified ranks of High Renaissance art. The notion of "restoration" was passed down to Bellori, who, during the middle decades of the seventeenth century, gave it more memorable, written form.⁹ Alas, labels stick in people's minds with greater tenacity than the visual images themselves. In this case, the label, "restorer", endured until the nineteenth century when, in the hands of the Romantics, it degenerated to the undisguised, pejorative title of "eclectic."¹⁰ Only in the twentieth century, have scholars re-evaluated Annibale's role in the development of Italian paintings.

Although Agucchi felt that Annibale was the greatest painter of his day,¹¹ it is clear from his comments that he misunderstood the nature of his importance. Dennis Mahon writes in his Studies in Seicento Art and Theory that ". . . he was in essence a breaker of new ground, a reformer rather than a restorer."¹² Annibale's greatest achievement, the Farnese Gallery, ranks still as one of the milestones of Western art due to its synthesis of Renaissance classicism, frank sensuality and bawdy satire. Agucchi and Belloni, whose writings drew world attention to the Gallery, were in love with its classical elements and blind to its innovations. Hence, we have located the roots for the conception of restoration. More as antiquarians than art critics,¹³ these two men were bound to view the Farnese Gallery with prejudiced eyes. Their essentially reductive albeit praiseworthy comments would persistently impede objective criticism of Annibale's achievements for three centuries.

Art historians have critically re-assessed their positions on Annibale Carracci. Instead of a restorer of Italian painting, he is considered to be a reformer. Dennis Mahon, in the quote above, uses this very word, and Donald Posner titles his exhaustive monograph on his life and work, Annibale Carracci: A Study in the Reform of Italian Painting around 1590. One might ask, how does this change of labels improve Annibale's stature as an artist? Restoration implies revivalism or faithful reconstruction of a past style. Originality is not implied. A reformer, on the other hand, carries into the present certain elements from the past, in the case from the High Renaissance, that will be synthesised with more personal and timely ones. Simply put, synthesis can be a very creative process.

It must be said before proceeding that Annibale's reformation, his synthesis of High Renaissance elements to the emerging new trends of his times came about unconsciously, that is, theory did not precede practice. Moreover, he was a man of few words, more concerned with his painting than the composition of art theory. In fact, his reactions to Agucchi's very positive and influential commentary, ironically insensitive to his real innovations, were probably incredulous.¹⁴ But, from the very beginning of his career, Annibale's paintings indicate unmistakably a dislike for the artificiality of Mannerism. His early work was often criticized because it lacked Mannerist elegance and refinement.¹⁵ The diverse elements that helped shape his style -- northern genre paintings, Correggio, the Venetian masters of the sixteenth century,

Raphael and Michelangelo -- suggest by themselves synthesis and reform.

Caravaggio's work has been criticized and praised for the same reasons. His critics and admirers suffered under no illusions as to the nature of his innovations. In fact, although he could not approve of the coarse, rustic figures, open compositions and dramatic light, Bellori had to admit that Caravaggio's brand of raw naturalism had a compelling influence on the young artists of his day.¹⁶ Despite the storm of controversy that surrounded his life and work, Caravaggio was a sensation in Rome and received many important commissions.¹⁷ Dennis Mahon says that Caravaggio at first was probably held in higher esteem than Annibale. Only after the completion of the Farnese Gallery, during the second decade of the seventeenth century, was Annibale renowned as the greatest painter of the day.¹⁸ The reasons for this turn of events are political.

Not long after his arrival in Rome, Caravaggio was taken in by the Cardinal del Morte. Politically powerful, the Cardinal was probably instrumental in securing for him the Contarelli Chapel commission.¹⁹ The series of three paintings in the chapel on the life of Saint Matthew swiftly focused attention on the young artist. Although certainly controversial, if not outrageous, few could deny Caravaggio's genius. With incredible speed Caravaggio's sphere of influence became international.

It is interesting to note that the Cardinal along with other sympathetic Roman families, represented the liberal faction in Rome who helped elect Clement VII, the pope

responsible for reuniting France with the Church. Perhaps aesthetic liberation follows politically progressive ideas because these very Roman families, whose patronage Caravaggio enjoyed, made his name. In opposition to this liberal group was the conservative Farnese family who, during these very years, was the chief patron of Annibale Carracci.²⁰

France in the 17th century quickly consolidated its forces to become a modern nation/state, the first of its kind, and the major power in Europe. As the uncontested head of state, it was soon obvious to Louis XIV that an official art was necessary to reflect and proclaim the power and grandeur of the court. To meet this need, the French Royal Academy was established, its ideological source coming from the pen of none other than Bellori.²¹ In Bellori's eyes, the man whose work best represented the classical point of view was, of course, Annibale's. Caravaggio's work, however, because of its lack of idealization, mythological subject matter and harsh light, became a convenient "backdrop" to which the more "noble" art of Annibale was compared.²²

Contrary to the liberal spirit that helped establish her as the major power in Europe, France became the hub of the conservative, classical Baroque. Unlike Annibale's ideal style which grew organically from his experiments and synthesis of diverse influences, French artists, under the tutelage of an official state institution (the Academy), proceeded from a pre-conceived aesthetic, producing for the most part, an inferior art. It is ironic that Annibale, who was as loath to theorising as Caravaggio, would help foster a movement that

never lacked hot air for rhetoric.

In the eyes of Agucchi and Bellori, the work of Annibale Carracci represented an excellence of which only a few were capable. But they had to admit that Caravaggio's style had its merits, perhaps even a magnetic force which is as elusive of the clumsy brushes of artists as the composure of classical beauty. Regardless of their opinions, it is clear to us that the paintings of Caravaggio were possibly the greatest single influence to Baroque artists. One could call it a mute undercurrent, one that inspired numerous painters in Spain, Holland and France.

When stylization is exaggerated and obvious, the work becomes nothing but pure nostalgia; the unity it is trying to conquer has nothing to do with concrete unity. On the other hand, when unity is delivered over to unadorned fact or to insignificant stylization, then the concrete is presented without unity. Great art, style and the time aspect of rebellion lie somewhere between these two heresies. 23

Although Camus, addressing himself specifically to twentieth century art, seemed to summarize how modern scholars view Annibale's transitional role between late Mannerism and the Baroque. It might be said that Annibale's ideal style is exemplary of that very fine line that Camus implies. Indeed, Annibale's mature work typifies the perfect balance between abstract formalism and "unadorned fact." Caravaggio, despite his repeated claims that nature is the artist's best teacher, was no slave to nature. His highly naturalistic paintings owe their power not to his unerring command over the medium of paint, but to his masterful use of design.

What one means by design is "the union of form and content" and that is the hallmark of great art. Abundantly evident in the paintings of the Renaissance and Baroque, this principle takes on a special significance in regard to the works of Annibale and Caravaggio. Intended for the well-read, "Latinized elite", the allegories of Mannerism read more like books than paintings. Though never verbalized by either man, one can confidently assume that the well-practiced stylizations of their Mannerist predecessors represented a nostalgia for the Renaissance rather than the continued flowering throughout the second and third quarters of the sixteenth centuries. Vasari, himself, viewed the times in this way as well.²⁴ The more one learns about the lives of these two painters, Carracci and Caravaggio, many more similarities between them become apparent. They were both anti-intellectual and in agreement in their opinions toward Mannerism. But they shared some common ground in another important respect: the early development of their careers.

Annibale was born in Bologna, a northern Italian city, in 1560.²⁵ A Crucifixion (Fig. 1) is his first known work.²⁶ Even at this very early date it contains a taste of things to come. Compared to the works of his mature style, this painting evokes more convincingly youthful inexperience than the passion of the cross. But in the face of its obvious failings, the viewer is struck by the satisfying corpulence of the saints, a quality not found or admired by the Mannerists. However remarkable the work is when placed within the context of his age and the times, hindsight should not lead the viewer to the too



Fig. 1. Annibale Carracci
The Crucifixion with Saints, 1583
 S. Maria della Carita, Bologna.

convenient conclusion that Annibale decided in advance to create an anti-Mannerist composition, a feat far beyond the powers of a young, inexperienced painter. However, it's "undefined" qualities were soon brought to the attention of the artist by the members of the Bolognese Mannerist school. Once aware of the implications that this painting suggested, he built upon them, in defiance of his critics, in later paintings.²⁷

The Crucifixion With Saints, an innocent, naive work, indicates to the viewer which influences will play an important role in the development of Annibale's early style. Because of the coarse handling and unidealization of the figures, it's not surprising to discover that northern genre would make a strong impression on the young artist. During the years of his youth in Bologna, genre painting was still a novelty to Italian artists. When painted, genre provided a relief from the more "serious" and "noble" subjects of classical allegory and Biblical themes; it was an excuse for buffoonery and was never considered as suitable fare for important public and private commissions. Upon examination of another genre work of the time, for example that of Aertsen (1505-75) and Beuckelaer (c.1530-c.1574) whose work Annibale most likely knew, it is immediately evident that the aesthetic concerns of these artists were not at all humorous but more in keeping with the loves and earthly ambitions of the emerging bourgeoisie.²⁸ In northern Europe the Reformation was crucial in this regard: it obviated the need of infusing painting with nominalist symbolism and nearly prohibited all religious images as idolatrous. Suddenly, the depiction of daily, mundane life became sanctified and the object, now stripped of potential extra-terrestrial significance, is painted with a blatant affection (an affection that a painter like Van Eyck had to justify) more deeply felt than the finer points of theology. By the testimony of his genre painting, Annibale seems to have been sympathetic to the spirit in which genre works of his northern contemporaries were done.²⁹ A comparison of three genre paintings will illustrate this point.



Fig.2. Joachim Beuckelaer, MIRACULOUS DRAUGHT OF FISHES, c.1570, Pinacoteca Nazionale, Naples.



Fig. 3. Bartolomeo Passerotti, THE BUTCHER SHOP, c-1580, Galleria Nazionale, Rome.



Fig. 4. Annibale Carracci, THE BUTCHER SHOP, (c-1583/83), Christ Church, Oxford.

Joachim Beuckelaer's Fish Market with a Scene of the Miraculous Draught of Fishes (Fig. 2) is more an illustration of the bewildering variety of marine life than a figural composition set within an everyday, sixteenth century market scene. The innumerable species of fish, which nearly overwhelm the fisherman and his wife, are not the fanciful creations of the imagination, but the carefully rendered studies by an artist who has observed nature empirically. Here, the physical effects of man's daily existence play as an important a role as man himself. When Beuckelaer's work is set beside Bartolomeo Passerotti's The Butcher Shop (Fig. 3), an Italian genre piece, the clash of opposing moods claims more attention than the details of setting which might relate them. Moreover, the figures dominate the space belying the Italian, classical heritage of humanism. But humanism, in this case, must be taken in the most narrow and literal sense; two human beings who happen to be butchers dominate the composition. However, Beuckelaer's Fish Market is not absent of humanistic themes. By the equal balance between nature and man, Beuckelaer has portrayed the theme of acceptance of man's often lowly station in life and the necessity, if not the divinity, of all human callings. This theme of acceptance, certainly more profound than base comedy was the new humanism of the Reformation.

Annibale's Butcher Shop (Fig. 4) seems more in sympathy to Beuckelaer's work than that of his elder contemporary and fellow Bolognese, Passerotti. This scene did not present itself, as it did for many other Italian painters as a convenient backdrop for buffoonery. Far from it, Annibale painted genre themes

as a means for the exploration of the nascent possibilities found in his Crucifixion.³⁰ More striking than lack of idealization of the figures and the unglamorous setting is the sensitive drawing of the butchers in what one may assume are characteristic attitudes butchers take at their work. Yet, the butcher shop, though not a comic backdrop, is still a stage against which human interactions are posed. In this sense, the Butcher Shop of Annibale Carracci is not at all northern in spirit.

Another representative genre work executed during Annibale's early years in Bologna is the Bean Eater (Fig. 5).³¹



Fig. 5. Annibale Carracci, THE BEAN EATER, 1583/84, Galleria Collonna, Rome.

Rarely in the history of art has the peasant been portrayed as simply, honestly and without excuse. Unlike northern portraiture, i.e., that of Jan Van Eyck, Roger Van der Weyden and Holbein, where each blemish and pucker of skin is observed and recorded with scientific detachment, Annibale has not only rendered an individual but a type without stylization. The clumsy but earthbound figures of the Crucifixion have become in this painting more convincing. Although far apart from the genre work of the north, the creation of the Bean Eater would not have been possible without a careful study of the northern genre work available to him at the time.

At the outset of his career, Annibale unconsciously, but later deliberately, rebelled against the stylistic conventions of the time. Not until years later, in Rome, amidst the great achievements of Raphael and Michelangelo, did the tempering influence of the High Renaissance take effect to mold his ideal style, a style of reform. Caravaggio's development on the other hand, was rapid. Whatever the early influences that impressed him before settling in Rome, they were assimilated quickly, because, at an astonishingly young age, before his thirtieth birthday (c. 1595), he was producing work that would practically establish much of the aesthetic vocabulary for the Baroque. For us today, the rebellious quality of his work is intensified all the more by the knowledge that in thirty-seven years of life he produced a significant body of important paintings, an impressive output for a painter living twice his age. It seems that the development of genius follows no pattern; Annibale's

development was slow and steady while Caravaggio's creative energies burned with an intensity equal to that of the light that emblazons his canvases. Regrettably, that light spent itself too soon.

Any characterization of the young Caravaggio is doomed to remain at the level of speculation because of the virtual non-existence of written material on the man. Scholars can only infer from the tenor of the early paintings that he must have been a sanguine youth who experienced life's emotions to their intense extremes. Still waters do not exclusively run deep, for co-existing beneath a seemingly stormy, extroverted personality was a highly reflective, introspective man.³² How else may we explain the profound religiosity and intimacy of his mature, Biblical paintings?

Similarly, the lack of surviving documents from the time makes any list of possible teachers and influences problematic at best. According to Friedlaender, it seems likely that Caravaggio studied under Simone Peterzano, a Mannerist living in Milan, by whom he received a solid grounding in drawing techniques, oil painting and fresco, but beyond that - little else.³³ There is no evidence to suggest he finished the customary four years of an apprenticeship. What is apparent from his pre-Roman paintings with their frank sexuality and hard-edged realism is that Mannerism and the little provincial Lombard town of his birth had little to offer this young artist already possessed with a revolutionary aesthetic mission. The village of Caravaggio is the point where the roads to Venice and Rome meet.³⁴ Undoubtedly,

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, eager for a city where the arts were thriving, found that the crossroads posed a difficult choice. Venice, still glowing from the careers of Veronese, Titian, and Tintoretto, remained as the principal art capital in Europe at the time. However, Rome, possessor of some of the finest achievements of the High Renaissance and home of recently excavated remnants from antiquity, was prime for the genesis of a new, international style. Whether Caravaggio finished his apprenticeship or not is a moot point and, in the end, insignificant. Of far greater importance is the historical fact that Caravaggio and Annibale had chosen to venture southward to Rome to pursue their careers.

Despite the veil of mystery that will forever obscure the details of Caravaggio's life before his arrival in Rome, scholars, most notably Friedlaender, have been able to advance some possible influences during these early years. Although he received a thorough training in the shop of Petrozano, his "grand manner" was evidently of negligible influence.³⁵ Among other Italian artists of the day to which Caravaggio probably had access, the work of Antonio Campi must have been of particular interest.³⁶ Campi's Visit of the Empress Faustina to St. Catherine (Fig. 6), 1583, might be called a prefigurement of seventeenth century tenebrist painting. Four "nocturnes" painted decades before The Visit by Salvaldo were possibly another source of inspiration for Caravaggio's revolutionary use of light.³⁷ More densely composed than The Visit, Salvaldo's St. Matthew (Fig. 7) has a quality of intimacy rarely found in any of the work of the High



Fig. 6. Antonio Campi , VISIT OF THE EMPRESS FAUSTINA TO SAINT CATHERINE IN PRISON, 1583, Sant'Angelo, Milan.



Fig. 7. Savoldo, SAINT MATTHEW, c-1535, Metropolitan Museum, New York .

Renaissance masters and Mannerist artists. Perhaps the ultimate source for all of the pre-tenebrist painters was Leonardo,³⁸ who spent many years in Milan. Unlike Raphael, who loved the more color-rich half-tones, Leonardo preferred the drama of value contrasts that characterizes the technique of chiaroscuro.

Of Caravaggio's pre-Roman works, the genre half-figures paintings are his best known and most successful. Though certainly remarkable compositions for their time in Italy, they are not, as originally thought, without precedent.³⁹ Having lived in the sub-alpine province of Lombardy, northern genre painting was not unknown to Caravaggio.⁴⁰ Quite probably he was familiar with the work of Jan Metsys whose Ill-Assorted Lovers (Fig. 8) is a composition of half-figures.⁴¹



Fig. 8. Jan Metsys, ILL-ASSORTED LOVERS, National Museum, Stockholm.



Fig. 9. Caravaggio, THE FORTUNE TELLER, Louvre, Paris.

Beyond the fact that Metsy's composition centers on the torso the Caravaggio paintings of half figures (Fig. 9) have an entirely different feeling. Like Annibale, Caravaggio approached genre painting not as a platform for buffoonery or moralizing, but as a means to experiment with different compositions. For one whose aesthetic convictions were set from practically the beginning of his career, genre, a style in diametric opposition to the idealism of Mannerist art, must have been in complete complicity with his down-to-earth naturalism. Even his mature Biblical paintings incorporate many genre elements. In short, genre was the perfect vehicle for rebellion.

For a writer of art history, the location of the small village of Caravaggio between Rome and Venice is symbolic. To the east is Venice; one finds there the great masters of color. To the south is Rome and great draughtsmanship. Oddly enough, Caravaggio's teacher, Petrozano, considered himself a disciple of Titian and perhaps had drawings and engravings of the Venetian master's work in his shop. In fact, there was in Milan at the time Titian's late work, the Crowning of Thorns (Fig. 10), a torch-lit scene unrepresentative of the more numerous, sunbathed works for which he is famous; this, because of its chiaroscuro might have made an impression on Caravaggio.⁴² That the more representative works by Titian did not lure him to Venice may be due to the fact that he had his own ideas about color which were unsupported, for the most part, by Venetian painting. Attracted to the nocturnal paintings of Campi and Salvaldo, the glowing half-tones of the Venetians did not add the drama and spatial



Fig. 10. Titian, CROWNING OF THORNS, c.1570-76,
Louvre, Paris.

compression he desired for his own work. Moreover, Caravaggio's penchant for juxtaposing relatively pure color against dark neutral voids is a knowledgeable use of color technique; the dark, empty passages serve to intensify the light, more purely colored and detailed ones.⁴³ If, as Matisse said ". . . a painting is simply an arrangement of shapes of color . . .",⁴⁴ then, all painters are colorists!

According to Friedlaender, the fluid handling of color by Titian and other Venetian masters anticipates what will be one of the salient characteristics of the Baroque style.⁴⁵ Rubens, himself, foremost master of the Baroque, was known to have admired Titian greatly. Credited as a proto-Baroque artist,⁴⁶ and studied by Rubens, Annibale Carracci, not surprisingly underwent a period where Venetian stylistic elements appear prominently.⁴⁷ However, before having succumbed to the sphere of Venetian painting, Annibale immersed himself in the work of the north Italian Renaissance painter, Correggio.⁴⁸

That Annibale sought the work of Correggio signaled a re-discovery at the time of this man's work. Annibale's elder Bolognese contemporaries, like Passerotti, although aware of Correggio (examples were to be found in Parma and Modena, cities not far from Bologna), were, naturally enough, more preoccupied with the current scene in Rome,⁴⁹ then the capital of Italian Mannerism. That Annibale studied seriously Correggio's work indicated, for a second time, his seemingly innate dissatisfaction with the status quo in Bolognese painting.

Annibale's conversion to a Correggesque style (c. 1584) was sudden.⁵⁰ But it seems safe to assume that he was well acquainted with the examples of Correggio's work found in the nearby cities of Parma and Modena long before Correggesque elements began to emerge in his own painting.⁵¹ Annibale's attraction to Correggio stemmed from his use of light and the delicate sfumato that gently envelopes the forms.⁵² The 'Notte' (Fig. 11) one of Correggio's paintings within easy access to Annibale, is representative of



Fig. 11. Correggio, 'NOTTE', c. 1540,
Gemäldegalerie, Dresden.

the above points and is more clearly spatially organized than the ambiguous compositions to which Annibale was more accustomed. In the two years that separate the Crucifixion with Saints (Fig. 1) and his first major, public commission, the frescos at the Palazzo Fava (painted in collaboration with his elder cousin, Ludovico, and his younger brother Agostino) reveal a remarkable maturation made possible by his experiments with genre and diligent study of Correggio. The figures move and exist comfortably in their space and are solidly conceived.⁵³ From the advantageous position of the art historian who can view the entire oeuvre of

an artist's career, the commission at the Palazzo Fava is the first significant indication of his enormous ability to synthesize diverse elements into a personal whole. Annibale was no mere imitator of another man's style; synthesis, the root of Annibale's genius and the basis from which reformations are made, is a process involving a creative leap. Donald Posner, having admitted the debt Annibale owes to Correggio's work, summarizes the transformation which Correggesque elements underwent by the creative powers of Annibale. "Correggio envisaged a world in which man and his environment, touched by divinity, became uncommonly beautiful and sumptuously, lyrically expressive in their formal orchestration. Annibale's vision was more homely and in his works the divine takes on the plain and pious attitudes of earthbound souls."⁵⁴

The Correggesque phase of Annibale's development ended as abruptly as it began. By 1583, he was receiving important commissions, like the Fava frescos, and had outgrown the sources in the environs of his native Bologna. It was quite natural that the city of Venice, unrivaled in the production of great art, even by Rome, during the second and third quarters of the sixteenth century, captivated Annibale's attention. But, in keeping with his synthesizing abilities and the growing confidence in his creative powers, the work of Annibale's "Venetianization" contains no particular inclination toward any of the three Venetian masters, Veronese, Titian or Tintoretto. Instead, Annibale approached the wealth of Venetian painting broadly studying the single, major element for which the Venetians were known: color.⁵⁵

Annibale's involvement in Venetian art placed him squarely in the middle of the most hotly debated issue of the time. Whether one feels color or drawing is the most important element in painting is probably of little cause for controversy today, but in Annibale's time the side to which one belonged was a matter of personal and regional identity.⁵⁶ The Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints, (Fig. 12), 1593, is exemplary of the depth of his involvement with the Venetian style in that Annibale's creative energies centered to a great extent on the effect of color as well as drawing.



Fig. 12. Annibale Carracci
MADONNA AND CHILD ENTHRONED WITH SAINTS, 1593,
Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna .

However enamored Annibale was with Venetian painting, he was Bolognese and therefore, by birth, a child of Roman-Tuscan tradition. It appears inevitable that Annibale would eventually settle permanently in Rome and that the Eternal City would witness his greatest achievements and his greatest synthesis. Annibale's mature style is a successful reconciliation of the Roman tradition of disegno and the Venetian tradition of colore, of idealism and naturalism.

Before the complete fruition of Annibale's and Caravaggio's epoch-making contributions, the art market (c. 1580) was already showing signs of change. Partly due to the ramifications of the Council of Trent and, no doubt, to a natural unarticulated weariness of the long-lived Mannerist style, the market was no longer flooded solely with Mannerist paintings. Artists and patrons were intrigued and impressed with the work of northern artists which began at this time to filter across the Alps in greater numbers.⁵⁷ The importance of northern genre to the development of Annibale's style has been noted. The times, as they say, were ripe for a change, a factor as important for the genesis of a new style as individual genius. Because of their pivotal position between Mannerism and Baroque, an intelligent investigation of the paintings of Annibale Carracci and Caravaggio must include an examination of Mannerism from a socio-historical and aesthetic point of view. The new stylistic development of these two artists was, in a sense, a process of selection and rejection, the latter often vehemently so of Mannerism, an international albeit aristocratic style.

"Mannerism is the artistic expression of the crises which convulses the whole of Western Europe in the sixteenth century and which extends to all fields of political, economic and cultural life."⁵⁸ Two significant events are credited as the major causes for the transition from a still largely medieval world of the Renaissance to the all-too-familiar modern age. Arnold Hauser has named these two events, so crucial in the intellectual and spiritual development of Western man, the Copernican Revolutions I and II.⁵⁹ Both are named, of course, for Copernicus (1473-1542) and his literally cosmos-shattering discovery. Perhaps for the first time in Western history one finds a scientific discovery that was made independent of theological concerns, a discovery where, in fact, a theology was constructed to fit the new science. That the earth, and hence, man, was no longer the center of Creation, was no doubt a shocking revelation. Man, demoted to the significance of an afterthought, now dwells on a miniscule piece of dust set into endless motion. The static medieval world, a world to which the Renaissance still largely belonged, was abruptly set into perpetual movement and until Newton, a movement characterized, it seemed, without regularity or order.

Reflecting a world in disarray is the work of Pontormo (Fig. 13), Rosso Fiorentino (Fig. 14), and Parmagianino (Fig. 15). Along with these three early Mannerists, many of Michelangelo's mature and late works contain Mannerist elements as well. From his mature period, Michelangelo's spandrels on the Sistine Ceiling, in their uncomfortable compression of space, violate the



Fig. 13. Jacopo Pontormo
THE DEPOSITION 1525 .

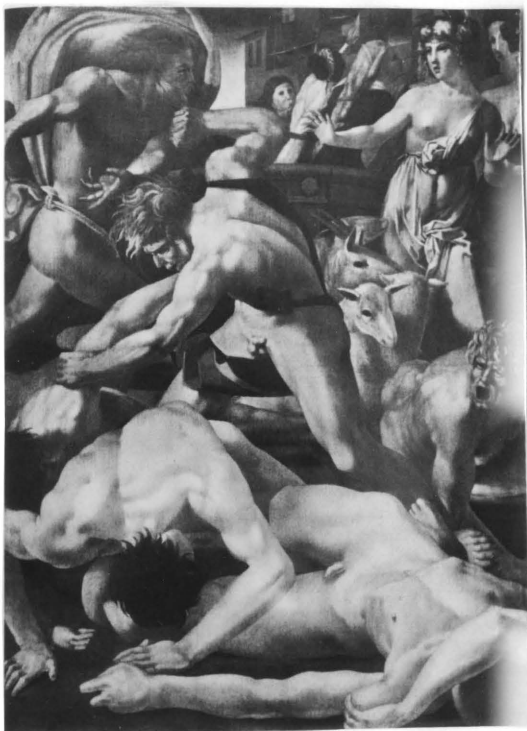


Fig. 14. Rosso Fiorentino,
MOSES AND THE DAUGHTERS OF JETHRO,
1523 , Uffizi, Florence.



Fig. 15. Parmagianino,
MADONNA WITH THE LONG NECK, 1530-45,
Pitti Palace, Florence.

Renaissance compositional canons of beauty and logical order. From the later work of Michelangelo, the Last Judgment (1536-41), is a full-blown expression of Mannerist doubt and anxiety.

Walter Friedlaender was the first to recognize the works of Pontormo, Rosso and Parmagianino not merely in the context of a "mannered", late Renaissance style, but in the light of an opposing, independent style created by artists well-versed in Renaissance aesthetics.⁶⁰ He has named the style of Rosso, Pontormo and Parmagianino as "anti-classical". "Anti-classical" avoids the semantic difficulties of Mannerism and captures its negative quality. At the same time, "anti-classical" indicates that Mannerism is a style in its own right and not simply degeneration of Renaissance aesthetics. In short, the "anti-classical" style was a rebellion against the all-too-beautiful manner of Raphael⁶¹ and a vehicle for the expression of a metaphysical rebellion against an all-too-beautiful, and all-too-well-ordered Renaissance cosmos. However, unlike Caravaggio's rebellion, the means of rebellion for the anti-classicists -- their stylistic conventions -- had their roots in the Renaissance. Anti-classicism was a self-conscious movement, it was self-consciously anti-Renaissance and here one finds an ironic turn of events. Due to its international status, it was the means by which Renaissance achievements were spread.⁶²

Compositionally, the anti-classical revolt centered on the use of space by Renaissance artists.⁶³ In this regard, Rosso's Moses and the Daughters of Jethro (Fig. 14) reads like an anti-classical manifesto. Despite the layering of figures moving

from foreground to background the painting seems flat. The space is crammed with muscular, corpulent figures yet paradoxically, they lack weight and density. Aside from spatial considerations, Rosso's painting is representative of the anti-classical's use of color. The Renaissance practice of primary colors as the basis for a color scheme has been replaced by a pattern of acidic hues and off-beat tints. This bizarre color scheme is more suddenly in evidence in his version of the Deposition From the Cross (Fig. 16).



Fig. 16. Rosso Fiorentino
THE DEPOSITION FROM THE CROSS 1521
Pinacoteca, Volterra .

Another stylistic convention common to all three painters is figure elongation.⁶⁴ In Rosso's Deposition (Fig. 16) the lamenting figure on the right with his head in his hands has been stretched to twelve or thirteen head-lengths, a good four head-lengths greater than the classical norm of eight. Vasari chided Pontormo for having left his beautiful manner to take up the late Gothic style of Durer . . . "lock, stock and barrel."⁶⁵ What were the inherent psychological⁶⁶ qualities of the elongated figure that attracted these classically trained Italian artists?

Elongation, as Gothic artists had sensed, gives the figure an air of spirituality, of other-worldliness. These attenuated figures belong in the compressed spaces of anti-classical paintings. Along with their use of color, the systematic anti-classicising of their art was complete. The net effect brings to form the most profound aspect of rebellion in the Mannerist art - its subjectivism.⁶⁷ But it is a subjectivism, a self-conscious spirituality of which Gothic artists were incapable. In this regard Pontormo's work, as Vasari would have it, is not simply a revival of the Gothic style. The awareness of one's contingency, a feeling unknown to Gothic artists, made the objectivism of Renaissance art untenable.

However, the theory that Mannerist art is replete with existential overtones and that the period itself represented an existential crisis, a crisis that gave birth to modern man, is not shared by all scholars. Craig Hugh Smyth, in his book, Mannerism and Maniera, has a quite different view of the period. For Smyth, the anti-classical style was not a rebellion against classicism, nor an expression of a spiritual crisis, but rather an attempt to try something new. "It was, it seems to me, an experiment with

other possibilities, then, claiming attention more than out-and-out revolt.⁶⁸

The basis for Mannerism was not the negation of Renaissance aesthetics, of the all-too-beautiful, but the carved reliefs found on fourth century Roman sarcophagi.⁶⁹ There is no dispute between scholars in the identification of Mannerist stylistic devices, only in the ultimate sources of these devices. Spatial compression, separation of figures, lack of compositional focus, rhythmic use of limbs, endless variation within fixed aesthetic boundaries, subjectivism, these elements usually associated with Mannerist art were part of the visual vocabulary of a group of artists twelve hundred years before.⁷⁰ Considering the antiquarian spirit which, since the Renaissance, continued unabated for centuries, these fourth century carvings were within access to anyone living in Rome. For Smyth, Mannerist artists found another source of inspiration from the abundant remnants of their antique past, not unlike the Renaissance artists had done before them.

Presented with these two conflicting opinions concerning the stylistic origins of Mannerist painting we are forced to choose a more credible theory. It cannot be denied that the theory of Mannerism as an expression of some deeply felt existential trauma is supported by only a few works, some of which were executed before Copernicus' theories were published. However, one would be hard put to classify many paintings as purely High Renaissance. Nor is it possible to isolate during any period in the history of Western art many works as pure expressions of a given style. In addition, there were ever-increasing exchanges of art and ideas

across Europe's borders in the sixteenth century making any form of artistic provincialism virtually impossible. And lastly, when one confronts the Baroque, it is necessary to deal with relatively well-defined nations and peoples that gave rise to differing, although related styles within one period.

There is little doubt that the impact of Copernicus' theories and the Reformation in Italy, as well as the rest of Europe, was devastating, beyond calculation. We have only to look at the changes wrought on art by the theories of Einstein for an idea of the potential influence of science over the creative mind. The social and philosophical upheavals of the sixteenth century may also help explain inconsistencies of style within the careers of many of the sixteenth century artists. A fluctuation between a brand of anti-classicism and a more High Renaissance manner strikes us as another, broader manifestation of a dislocation: a dislocation that occurs within the artist himself, and not as Smyth would have it, further evidence of the relatively minor impact that the spiritual crisis exerted on these artists.

One wonders if Annibale or Caravaggio knew anything at all of the work of Pontormo and Rosso. Long dead before Annibale and Caravaggio were born, Rosso's and Pontormo's careers were probably overshadowed by the formidable geniuses of Michelangelo and Raphael, and although Michelangelo's Last Judgment is replete with anti-classical compositional elements, the whole exudes the unmistakable aura of one dynamic creative mind, not as one work among many that nearly fits within a given style. In defense of Smyth's argument, one must admit that none of the Mannerist paintings of which Caravaggio and Annibale were familiar has the vehement

anti-classical bite that fires the work of Rosso and Pontormo or Michelangelo. Stylistically, the work of Passerotti and Petrozano bears more resemblance to that of Vasari and Bronzino, the two Mannerists that Smyth feels are more representative of the period. In the case of all four painters, anger and dislocation has evolved to overly-refined elegance, for they do employ many of compositional devices of Rosso and Pontormo. The elegant style of Bronzino and Vasari does indeed predominate during the period, spreading across Italian boundaries. It is the overly refined manner against which Annibale and Caravaggio rebel.

Having read Friedlaender's and Smyth's opinions on Mannerism, one feels that the anti-classical style of Rosso and Pontormo belongs to the initial phase of Mannerism. The works of this first phase, are indeed, expressive of an existential dilemma. But, the more refined and elegant style of Vasari and Bronzino, of which Smyth writes, represents a later phase of Mannerism, the phase that was to dominate the sixteenth century and spread to the workshops of Passerotti and Petrozano, and beyond, to France and Germany. This later phase is indeed a hermetic, self-contained style, as Smyth indicates, with its own set of aesthetics, but whatever compositional elements Bronzino and Vasari inherited from the anti-classicists, their expressive intents are different or, at least, less polemical in nature.

Friedlaender has described this post-anti-classical phase of Mannerism as "mannered" Mannerism. No where can one find a more glaring example of the inherent limitations and ambiguities of labels used to describe the styles between the High Renaissance

and the Baroque. Nevertheless, the label, "mannered" Mannerism, conveys Friedlaender's feeling that the later phase of Mannerism was more or less a vitiated version of anti-classicism. By the testimony of the work of Annibale, and Caravaggio, it seems that Friedlaender's theory is substantiated historically. For the reform and rebellion initiated by Annibale and Caravaggio, Friedlaender has coined the term, "anti-mannerism".

The social and political scene which Annibale and Caravaggio found in Rome in the final decade of the sixteenth century was supportive of the artistic reform and rebellion that was about to take place. During the years when the Mannerist style flourished, the concerns of the papacy were humanism, classicism, archaeology and church dogma. With the reign of Sixtus V, a new spirit of pragmatism and naked self-preservation took hold of the city.⁷¹ As proof that the intellectual climate of Rome had made an abrupt about-face, one needs only to point out that the once prolific output of literary works during Mannerist years comes to a complete halt after 1590.⁷² Sixtus V and his successor, Clement VII, were men not of words but of action during a period when the Church's political and theological authority were under attack. In an effort to hold ground, they sought to enforce the religious doctrines that the papacies before them had so rigorously and voluminously defined.

The spirit of pragmatism that suffused the papacies of Sixtus V and Clement VII might be seen as the final expression of the Council of Trent. It has been stated how the Council during the early phases was a Mannerist institution. However, during its final period (ending 1563), it made possible what Sypher calls the

Baroque reintegration:

Thus the Council, which had convened in a climate of Mannerist doubt, laid the foundation for a settlement in theology and a reintegration of style in the arts, the Baroque acceptance of secular pomp and sufficiency of the flesh.⁷³

In theology, the most conclusive evidence that the church had arrived at a reconciliation between the body and spirit is the doctrine of transubstantiation.⁷⁴ The equivocation between spirit and flesh that characterised Mannerist theology and art is resolved, reintegrated in this doctrine.⁷⁵ Images, sensuous images are now sanctioned by the church for the didactic purpose of educating the illiterate masses in strict Catholic dogma.⁷⁶

Obviously, the immaterial figures and ambiguous compositions of Mannerist artists were unsuitable for the expression of Catholic dogma on the sensuous level. The Council of Trent and the papacies of Sixtus V and Clement VII supported indirectly the artistic reform.⁷⁷ However, Annibale and Caravaggio are not Baroque artists. Friendlaender has chosen to name them anti-Mannerist. They entered Rome during the transition between Mannerism and Baroque styles and "transitional" aptly describes their styles. But to label them simply as anti-Mannerist fails to acknowledge the creative, positive and synthetic aspect of Annibale's reform and the singular, creative leap of rebellion that is the root of Caravaggio's genius.

Annibale and Caravaggio arrived in Rome at about the same time (c. 1589).⁷⁸ Rome, at that time, was a city without a major artistic personality. Painting as it had been in Milan and Bologna, "... was too inoffensive and passionless to capture the interest of the spectator".⁷⁹ But Rome had a glorious and

unequaled past, examples of which were to be found on every street. For Annibale, especially, the masterpieces of the High Renaissance had a profound effect. The diverse influences that had made up his artistic training -- northern genre, Correggio, and Venetian painting -- suddenly coalesced before the works of Raphael and Michelangelo. The change from his Venetian period to what Posner has called his "ideal style" was immediate.⁸⁰ To the sweetness of Venetian color and the subtle modeling of Correggio, Annibale has added stable, geometric structure, a compositional device so loved and so characteristic of the High Renaissance.⁸¹ Annibale's Toilet of Venus (Fig. 17), 1594/95, a canvas embodying all of the above elements, has been described by Mahon as Poussinesque.⁸² But, the range and depth of Annibale's reform is best seen in his greatest statement, executed at the height of his powers, the Farnese Gallery (Fig. 18).

The exact theme of the Farnese fresco cycle has been a point of debate for quite some time. According to Bellori, writing in 1672, the theme is "... sacred love triumphant over profane love".⁸³ In twentieth century scholarship this traditional reading of the Gallery is supported by John Rupert Martin. However Charles Dempsey, has reached quite the opposite conclusion: the Gallery cycle is one grandiose satire where, in fact, love of the most carnal sort triumphs and the course of the good life is not a gradual purge of material and fleshy interests but a drunken, Dionysian dance to the grave.⁸⁴ Dempsey's argument is persuasive and, one must admit, this reading of the Gallery is most in keeping with the spirit of the Baroque and late phases of the Council of Trent.

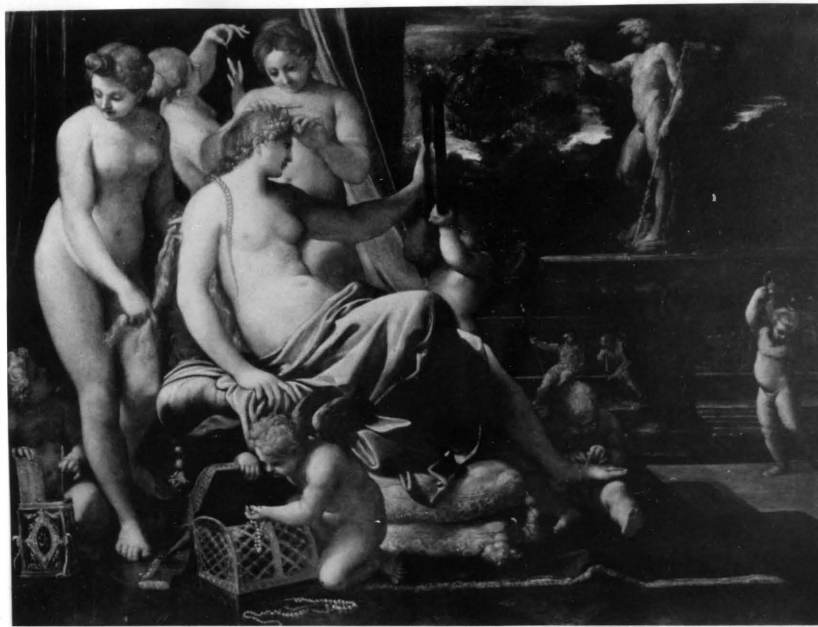


Fig. 17. Annibale Carracci, TOILET OF VENUS 1594/95 ,
National Gallery of Art, Washington .



Fig. 18. Annibale Carracci, THE FARNESE GALLERY 1597/1600,
Farnese Palace, Rome .

The basis for Dempsey's disagreement with traditional interpretation lies in his conviction that the ceiling (1597-1600) and the walls were painted some seven years apart, the latter executed by the hand of Domenichino, not by Annibale.⁸⁵ Hence, Bellori and in our own day, J. R. Martin, have mistakenly viewed the Gallery as the fruition of one, unified scheme. "The ambiguities of his [Martin's] account stem from the fact that he has telescoped two campaigns into one."⁸⁶

There is no doubt that the theme of the Gallery's walls concerns sacred love.⁸⁷ How then, may we explain the conflict in theme between vault and wall frescos? Logically, the answer is directly related to the Gallery's function. Originally, the Cardinal Odoardo Farnese conceived the Gallery principally as a showplace for his extensive collection of antique statuary for which Annibale was commissioned to design an appropriate decorative scheme in fresco. However, the Duke Rannuccio, titular head of the Farnese family, was to be married (c. 1600). Perhaps, Dempsey has speculated, the original decorative scheme was altered to fit the occasion. There is evidence for this theory, and when visiting the Gallery one need only look upward to find it, for Annibale has depicted the amorous activities of three couples from the Greek Pantheon: Aurora and Cephalus, Bacchus and Ariadne, and Peleus with Thetis.⁸⁸ During the wedding celebration for the Duke and his bride perhaps a guest or two cocked a half drunken eye upward and said: "Et nos cedamus amori? (and what of our loves?)"

A wedding, of course, is a specialized function. But the overall Bacchanalian spirit is in keeping with the Gallery's original purpose as a center for sculpture and music. There is also an historical perspective to keep in mind. The Farnese Ceiling was the first major ceiling fresco cycle to be executed since the Sistine Ceiling (Fig. 23). Annibale was obviously intimately familiar with Michelangelo's visual epic on the power of divine love. That spirit of optimism, of the heroic that is embodied in the Sistine Ceiling was as early as the end of the sixteenth century, a long, lost dream - a laughable dream. Rather than execute a slavish, empty emulation of Michelangelo's achievement, Annibale revived those Renaissance compositional elements and added to it a more frank sensual and satirical treatment of mythic themes. The result is a fresco cycle that, on the one hand, pays homage to Michelangelo yet satirizes the auspicious spirit of the Renaissance fresco cycle and the abstruse cerebral allegories of later Mannerism as well. The composition of the vault of the Farnese Gallery was aimed to fit the period, a period of pragmatism, not of idealism; of the flesh, not of the intellect.

Cardinal Farnese must have recognized that the depiction of the amoral activities of the gods was not exactly commensurate with his position, hence the addition of the thematically conservative wall frescoes.⁸⁹ But, unlike their northern contemporaries, the Italians have never flushed too red over the subject of sex. Although the theme of the wall frescos concern the virtues of sacred love, the overall feeling of the room remains unchanged.

Dempsey finds the Farnese Gallery an apt beginning of the Baroque style. Sarcastic, playful and witty, the vault fresco reflects the climate of an age, a transitional age that did not hold a naive reverence for classical themes and was unmoved by the intellectual exercises the Mannerist allegory. It's refreshing to find in the history of art an artist and patron who seemingly did not take themselves too seriously. "It is in its way satisfying to see the Baroque age dawning not in the crabbed formulations of the theoreticians grammar, but with a loud and hearty, long, hoarse, laugh."⁹⁰

Although the theme of the vault is a panorama of the excesses of the flesh, thematically the Gallery shows conservative and sober restraint. Annibale, in collaboration with the Cardinal and his personal librarian, Fulvio Orsini,⁹¹ were not given over to moralizing about the content of the cycle nor did the ceiling attain the giddy, religious fervor of later Italian Baroque ceiling frescos such as those by Bacciccio (Fig. 19) and Andrea Pozzo (Fig. 20). They make no attempt to reconcile Neo-Platonism with Christian themes either. This is in keeping with Annibale's reform of Italian painting.

Annibale's reform is more clearly evident in the composition of the vault's fresco. As stated earlier, the Gallery's permanent function was to serve as an exhibition space for the Farnese antique sculpture collection. These pieces were of the in-the-round variety, favored by Renaissance artists and patrons. Mannerist artists, had leaned toward reliefs, their cue, as Smyth argues, from fourth century Roman sarcophagi. Annibale, desiring to create an atmosphere suitable for the display of the Farnese collection,

referred back to Michelangelo and Raphael. Their influence is present everywhere. The composition of the Gallery is based on an architectonic system, which of course is the very method employed by Michelangelo in the Sistine Ceiling. Also present in the vault are the ignudi (Figs. 19 and 20), another Michelangelesque device. In short, Annibale revived Renaissance compositional devices for the clarity and structure of design it provided, qualities lacking in Mannerist art.⁹²



Fig. 19. Annibale Carracci, IGNUDI, FARNESE GALLERY, 1597-1600 , Farnese Palace, Rome.



Fig. 20. Annibale Carracci: IGNUDI, FARNESE GALLERY, 1597-1600 , Farnese Palace, Rome .

On a broader plane, the Gallery is the scene of the reconciliation of the colore/disegno controversy. Before arriving in Rome, Annibale had studied Venetian art which preferred beautiful color to the linear arabesque of Mannerist art. However, the art of Raphael showed the possibilities for structure and clarity of design through the use of sound draughtmanship.⁹³ Of course, the development of good draughtmanship had been an integral part of Annibale's training. He favored drawing from life, a Renaissance artistic tradition, and encouraged his students to do so. In the Gallery, the Mannerist fashion of "quotation",⁹⁴ the lifting of figural poses from well-known High Renaissance compositions, is absent. All in all, there was a conscious feeling by Annibale as well as others to re-examine the achievement and technique of the "old masters," a term coined not insignificantly during this very period.⁹⁵

Since "reform" has been defined as a creative act, let us examine the personal innovations Annibale incorporated with High Renaissance composition in specific reference to ceiling design. As the Renaissance ceiling fresco par excellence, let us use the Sistine Ceiling (Fig. 23) for comparison. Anyone familiar with the Renaissance and Baroque ceiling frescos will note that the Farnese vault (Fig. 18) is visually more complex than Michelangelo's design for the Sistine Chapel. However, it still relies on a tectonic "skeleton" for structure, a Renaissance innovation, whereas a Baroque ceiling, i.e., the St. Ignatius in Glory (Fig. 22) by Fra Andrea Pozzo (ca. 1691) is held together through one point perspective. Of course, if the viewer steps away from the center

point, the whole composition appears askew. Although Pozzo has used architecture to reinforce the feeling of converging orthogonals, the architecture is really nothing more than a system of trellises from which bodies are suspended as so much garland. In the Farnese and the Sistine Ceiling, architectural motifs play a role of paramount importance in the overall design.

Specifically, Annibale has utilized a system of over-lapping circular and rectangular picture frames - quadri riportati (transferred pictures) ⁹⁶ - to order his composition. For example, the two vertical, rectangular panels of Polyphemus and Galatea (Fig. 24) and Polyphemus and Acis (Fig. 25) curve up and beyond the painted coffered rectangle that seems to run the length of the barrel-vaulted ceiling because it too has been interrupted by other panels, namely the large central panel of the Bacchanalian procession. Similarly, flanking the top and bottom of the large central panel of the Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne (Fig. 18) are two horizontal rectangles of Thetis Carried to the Bridal Chamber of Peleus (Fig. 18), and Aurora and Cephalus (Fig. 18) that overlap two painted medallions in a simulated bas relief. The quadri riportati focuses attention to the central and largest picture frame in the entire design which, logically, summarizes the theme of the Gallery.

Michelangelo's design for the Sistine Ceiling (Fig. 23) is well known. A great procession of panels leads the eye the length of the Chapel to directly overhead the altar. Flanking one side of this Neo-Platonic version of Genesis are Greek



Fig. 21. Bacciccio, TRIUMPH OF THE NAME OF JESU, 1676-79
Il Gesu, Rome .

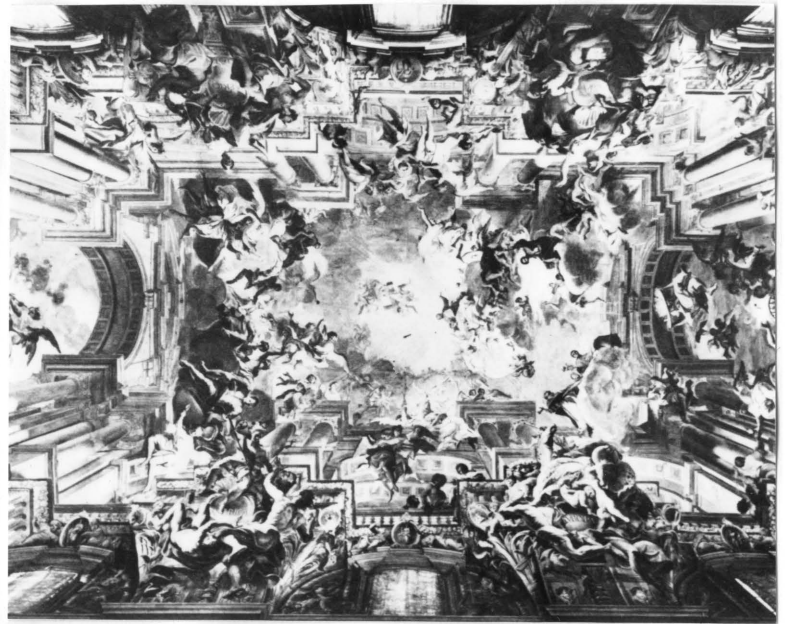


Fig. 22. Andrea Pozzo, SAINT IGNATIUS IN GLORY
1691-94 , St Ignazio, Rome .

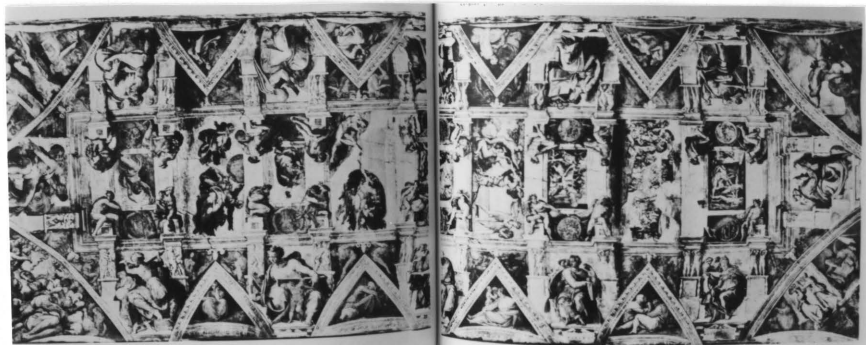


Fig. 23. Michelangelo SISTINE CEILING 1508-1512
Vatican, Rome .



Fig. 24 Annibale Carracci, POLPHEMUS AND GALATEA from FARNESE GALLERY, 1597-1600 Farnese Palace, Rome.



Fig. 25 Annibale Carracci, POLYPHEMUS AND ACIS from FARNESE GALLERY 1597-1600 Farnese Palace, Rome.

sibyls and other Hebrew prophets. The prophets and Sibyls are themselves flanked by two pairs of ignudi who, though not completely inanimate, are in a semi-state of "consciousness" similar to the Greek caryatids. Some of Annibale's ignudi do perform a strict architectural role. These inanimate ignudi are, in fact, terms which will become a favorite motif in Baroque and Rococo art. The other and more numerous ignudi are very much alive covering a whole range of human emotions. They react to the amorous and sometimes clumsy cavortings of these over-sexed Greek gods; some cover their faces, some look away, while others confront the viewer with a knowing grin or open snicker. In addition to the obvious satirical reference to Michelangelo, Annibale's ignudi complement brilliantly the scenes depicted in the quadri riportati and at the same time reinforce the architectural quality of the vault composition.

It has been stated that Annibale was a transitional artist. In other words, scholars have refrained to label him a Baroque artist outright. A study of the Farnese Gallery once again provides clues for this turn of events. Except for the Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne, the compositions of the quadri riportati have the stability of Renaissance design. However, the placement of these picture frames and the use of the animated but sculptural ignudi contribute to an overall visual ambiguity that was an important aim of the Mannerists. Of course, this "visual ambiguity" is beautifully appropriate for the playful and satirical theme of the vault while the themes of many equally ambiguous Mannerist compositions were intellectual. The composition of the Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne (Fig. 17) in many ways anticipates full-blown

Baroque painting. There is a fluidity of mass and light that will be the trademark of Ruben's deft brush. One look at the Triumph reveals how far removed from Renaissance and Mannerist composition Annibale has come. Yet the entire scheme of the vault though thoroughly cohesive is somewhere between three movements. Annibale's genius lies in the groundwork he provided for future Baroque artists. He was able to unite in the Farnese Gallery many diverse elements of the rich Italian painting tradition of the past eighty years and suggest at the same time where those traditions might lead. Examining the Farnese Gallery has only increased the belief that reform is a highly creative act. Finally, his reform must have been an invaluable achievement to the artists of the seventeenth century.

The import of Caravaggio's rebellion can be best appreciated within the context of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Luther's threat to papal authority and established Christian dogma was met finally with only rhetoric and a lavish display of the Church's wealth through the commissioning of more churches and decorative projects. Images, mistrusted by the North, were condoned enthusiastically by the Church; they were the perfect means of mass indoctrination. The import of the Reformation was Luther's belief that the Church's role as an intercessor between *man and God* was unnecessary; that religion was really a personal, individual affair between the created and the Creator. In short, the Reformation interiorized religious experience while the Catholic church clung to and even expanded the exterior spectacle of God. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio was the first major painter of

the subjective religious experience. In this way, he aligned himself, perhaps unwittingly, with the religious rebellion in the north.

To Protestants, St. Paul was a favorite writer of the New Testament. The letters to the Galatians and the Romans were the Biblical justification for their conviction that faith, not works, is the way to salvation. The Conversion of St. Paul (Fig. 26), by Caravaggio, 1601-60, a subject infrequently painted by the Italian in the past, is one of the first major paintings to express personal religious experience. St. Paul, on his back, arms outstretched, is overcome by a blast of light from a source outside the canvas. The upper reaches of the canvas are not filled, gone are the more conventional Saints being seated on billowing clouds with Christ in the middle; but rather, the

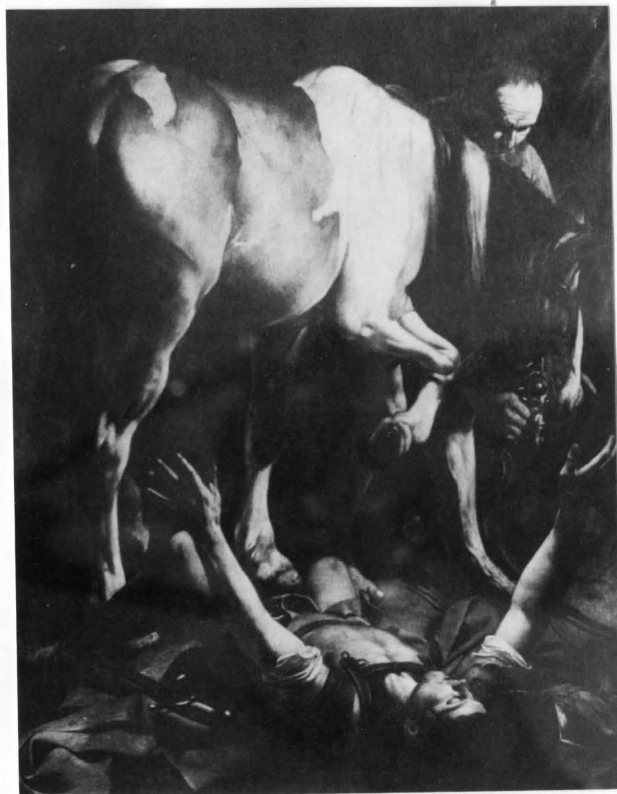


Fig. 26. Caravaggio, THE CONVERSION OF SAINT PAUL, 1600, Sta. Maria del Popolo, Rome.

generous posterior of an undistinguished looking horse looming toward the spectator. The isolation of Paul's experience is reinforced by an attendant whose mind is obviously fixed on other, more mundane matters. A dark void fills the background space. Unlike many religious paintings that Caravaggio must have seen, the action of the Conversion lies outside of time. The Conversion of St. Paul is an unprecedented masterpiece of the subjective, spiritual experience. It is a rebellious painting signifying change.

The Conversion is Caravaggio's most extreme expression of the inner experience. The action of the other major paintings of his mature period seem to transpire in less psychologically isolated places. Yet, despite the addition of more figures, who all appear engaged in the action, the scenes occupy a space removed from time through the extremes of light and dark.

It is no surprise that Caravaggio's paintings were a source of inspiration for painters of the Protestant North. The radically original yet highly religious feeling of his paintings must have seemed supportive of their relationship to God. But, Annibale, despite his many important reforms, remained true to the tradition of Italian painting, a tradition that is characterized by a celebration of the flesh, of the open and moving spectacle of religious faith.

In closing, it is perhaps useful to restate the major points that have been made in this paper. Annibale Carracci and Caravaggio were two Italian artists whose mature styles spanned

the last decade of the sixteenth century. Working in Rome, at this time, each man's art represented a response to the prevailing style, Mannerism, a period that originated as a revolt against the all-too-beautiful manner of the High Renaissance but, as the century progressed, was transformed to a coldly elegant, overly intellectual maniera. Faced with an international style that had long since lost its teeth, Annibale's and Caravaggio's response was one of reform and rebellion respectively. Best seen in the Farnese Gallery, Annibale's reform was essentially a synthesis of diverse influences - northern genre, Correggio, Venetian and High Renaissance art - coupled with a personal vision that anticipates the Baroque. Caravaggio's vision however, was unique, almost without precedent. Through the use of light and dark voids, Caravaggio created the effect of intimacy which, in his Biblical paintings becomes a subjective religious experience. Within the context of Italian art and history these qualities represented a break with the canons of High Renaissance and Mannerist art and the spirit of the last phases of the Council of Trent. Finally, perhaps the true import of Annibale's and Caravaggio's art may be measured by its effect on seventeenth century art. Annibale's art, because of its conservatism and revival of re-integration of classical aesthetics made an ideal precedent for the art of an absolutist state like France. Not surprisingly, the intimacy and absence of idealism in the work of Caravaggio played a crucial role in the development of art in the Protestant North, where the concept of an absolute and infallible authority, such as a Pope or a king, was first seriously questioned.

FOOTNOTES

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³Craig Hugh Smyth, Mannerism and Mariera (Locust Valley, N.Y.: J.J. Augustin Publishers, 1963), p. 24.

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⁷Hauser, The Social History of Art, 2: 104.

⁸Donald Posner, Annibale Carracci: A Study in the Reform of Italian Painting (London: Phaidon Publishers, Inc., 1971), p. viii.

⁹Dennis Mahon, Studies in Seinto Art and Theory (London: Warburg Institute, University of London, 1947), p. 197.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 199.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 140-41.

¹² Ibid., p. 199.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 182-183.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 197.

¹⁵ Posner, Annibale Carracci: A Study in the Reform of Italian Painting, p. ix.

¹⁶ Freidlaender, Caravaggio Studies, p. 60.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 101.

¹⁸ Mahon, Studies in Seinto Art and Theory, p. 182.

- ¹⁹Friedlaender, Caravaggio Studies, p. 101.
- ²⁰Ibid., p. 102.
- ²¹Mahon, Studies in Seinto Art and Theory, pp. 182-184.
- ²²Ibid., pp. 182-183.
- ²³Camus, The Rebel, p. 272.
- ²⁴Smyth, Manerism and Maniera, p. 21.
- ²⁵Posner, Annibale Carracci: A Study in the Reform of Italian Painting, p.3.
- ²⁶Ibid., p. 3.
- ²⁷Ibid., p. 24.
- ²⁸Ibid., pp. 9-11.
- ²⁹Barry Wind, "Annibale Carracci's 'Scherzo': The Christ Church Butcher Shop", Art Bulletin 58 (December 1976): 93-96.
- ³⁰Posner, Annibale Carracci: A Study in the Reform of Italian Painting, p.24.
- ³¹Ibid., p. 19.
- ³²Friedlaender, Caravaggio Studies, p. 117.
- ³³Ibid., pp. 34-35.
- ³⁴Ibid., p. 56.
- ³⁵Ibid., p. 34.
- ³⁶Ibid., pp. 39-40.
- ³⁷Ibid.
- ³⁸Ibid., p. 55.
- ³⁹Ibid., p. 82.

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 80-81.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 82.

⁴²Ibid., p. 50.

⁴³Ibid., p. 16.

⁴⁴From a lecture by Ingolf J. Qually, Prof. of Art, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, Pa., October 15, 1975.

⁴⁵Friedlaender, Caravaggio Studies, p. 50.

⁴⁶Walter Friedlaender, Mannerism and Anti-Mannerism (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), p. 81.

⁴⁷Posner, Annibale Carracci, p. 44-45.

⁴⁸Ibid., p.27.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 25.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 32.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 27.

⁵²Ibid., p. 30.

⁵³Ibid., pp. 28-29.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 32.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 44-47.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 48.

⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 36-38.

⁵⁸Hauser, The Social History of Art, 2:106.

⁵⁹Arnold Hauser, Mannerism: The Crisis of the Renaissance and the Origin of Modern Art (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965) p. 65.

- ⁶⁰Friedlaender, Mannerism and Anti-Mannerism, p. 43.
- ⁶¹Ibid., p. 25.
- ⁶²Hauser, The Social History of Art, 2: 105-106.
- ⁶³Ibid., pp. 102-103.
- ⁶⁴Ibid., pp. 105-106.
- ⁶⁵Friedlaender, Mannerism and Anti-Mannerism, p. 3.
- ⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 3-4.
- ⁶⁷Hauser, The Social History of Art, 2: 105-106.
- ⁶⁸Symth, Mannerism and Maniera, p. 29.
- ⁶⁹Ibid., p. 14.
- ⁷⁰Ibid.
- ⁷¹Friedlaender, Caravaggio Studies, p. 58.
- ⁷²Ibid., pp. 60-61.
- ⁷³Sypher, Four Stages of Renaissance Style, p. 180.
- ⁷⁴Ibid., pp. 188-189.
- ⁷⁵Ibid., p. 187.
- ⁷⁶Ibid., p. 181.
- ⁷⁷Posner, Annibale Carracci, p. 35.
- ⁷⁸Friedlaender, Caravaggio Studies, p. 57.
- ⁷⁹Ibid., p. 74.
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- ⁸¹Posner, Annibale Carracci, p. 51.
- ⁸²Mahon, Studies in Seinto Art and Theory, p. 185.
- ⁸³Charles Dempsey, "Et Nos Ce Damus Amori": Observations on the Farnese Gallery" Art Bulletin 50 (December 1968): 363.
- ⁸⁴Ibid., p. 363.
- ⁸⁵Ibid., p. 365.
- ⁸⁶Ibid., p. 366.
- ⁸⁷Ibid., p. 365.
- ⁸⁸Ibid., p. 372.
- ⁸⁹Ibid., p. 374.
- ⁹⁰Ibid.
- ⁹¹J.R. Martin, The Farnese Gallery, p. 52.
- ⁹²Posner, Annibale Carracci, p. 105.
- ⁹³Ibid., p. 87.
- ⁹⁴Ibid., p. 107.
- ⁹⁵Ibid., pp. 87-88.
- ⁹⁶Mahon, Studies in Seinto Art and Theory, p. 70.

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