PAST-PRESENT

Essays on Historicism in Art from Donatello to Picasso

Irving Lavin

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A powerful current runs through the entire history of Western art—a complex, imponderable, paradoxical metaphor that defines visual terms the relationship between the world and Christian belief. The metaphor occurs in 1 Corinthians 13:12, where St. Paul explains the understanding that will come in the fullness of faith: “For now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face” (Videmus tunc per speculum in arrugmate, tunc autem face ad faciem). One of the principal interpretations of the passage was that it alluded to the presence of God in everyday, ordinary, even unworthy things. Paul’s dictum was thus related both to the ancient rhetorical tradition of rhetoricography, the art of portraying lowly and insignificant things, and to the Christian devotional tradition of the arma humiles, or humble style, both of which have important corollaries in the visual arts. These traditions enjoyed a great flowering in the Northern European Renaissance, becoming a veritable mode of thought, as well as of persuasion, among the major thinkers of the age, including Nicholas of Cusa, Erasmus, and Rabelais.

My subject here is really an episode in this millenial story, although a significant one, as I hope will become clear. Paul’s formulation in Latin involves a conundrum that is obscured in the King James translation. The glass is a mirror (speculum) though which we see, and what we perceive “darkly” is an enigma. The point I want to focus on particularly, however—because I believe Caravaggio did so, in an unprecedented and utterly devastating way—is the second part of the metaphor. “Face to face” is also a conundrum: the phrase may be taken both metaphorically and literally—and this is exactly how Caravaggio took it. Appropriating the Renaissance understanding of physiognomy as the outward manifestation of psychological and moral character (see pp. 109, 212 below). Caravaggio used the face in the second part of Paul’s metaphor to portray (the pun is deliberate) the enigma of the first. Justification for Caravaggio’s interpretation was provided by Paul’s use of the same metaphor in 2 Corinthians 3:18, where he relates the image in the mirror to the change of face wrought by the spirit of the Lord in those who believe: “But we, all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (Nos vero omnes sedetatis facies gloriae Dominii specularis in omnem imaginem transmutatur a claritate in claritatem, tantumque a Domino Spiritu).
A powerful current runs through the entire history of Western art—a complex, imponderable, paradoxical metaphor that defines in visual terms the relationship between the world and Christian belief. The metaphor occurs in 1 Corinthians 13:12, where St. Paul explains the understanding that will come in the fullness of faith: “For now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face” (Videmus nunc per speculum in enigmate, tunc autem facie ad faciem). One of the principal interpretations of the passage was that it alluded to the presence of God in everyday, ordinary, even worthy things. Paul’s dictum was thus related both to the ancient rhetorical tradition of rhapsody, the art of portraying lowly and insignificant things, and to the Christian devotional tradition of the *sermo humilis*, or humble style, both of which have important corollaries in the visual arts. These traditions enjoyed a great florescence in the Northern European Renaissance, becoming a veritable mode of thought, as well as of persuasion, among the major thinkers of the age, including Nicholas of Cusa, Erasmus, and Rabelais.¹

My subject here is really an episode in this millennial story, although a significant one, as I hope will become clear. Paul’s formulation in Latin involves a conundrum that is obscured in the King James translation. The glass is a mirror (*speculum*) through which we see, and what we perceive “darkly” is an enigma. The point I want to focus on particularly, however—because I believe Caravaggio did so, in an unprecedented and utterly devastating way—is the second part of the metaphor. “Face to face” is also a conundrum; the phrase may be taken both metaphorically and literally—and this is exactly how Caravaggio took it. Appropriating the Renaissance understanding of physiognomy as the outward manifestation of psychological and moral character (see pp. 109, 212 below), Caravaggio used the face in the second part of Paul’s metaphor to portray (the pun is deliberate) the enigma of the first. Justification for Caravaggio’s interpretation was provided by Paul’s use of the same metaphor in 2 Corinthians 3:18, where he relates the image in the mirror to the *change of face* wrought by the spirit of the Lord in those who believe: “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (*Nos vero omnes revelata facie gloriae Domini speculatam in tandem imaginem transformamur a claritate in claritatem, tanquam a Domino Spiritu*).
My immediate purpose is to offer a counterproof to arguments recently made to re-identify the figure of the Jewish tax collector Levi, whom Jesus calls to the apostolate in Caravaggio's painting of that subject executed for the left wall of the Contarelli chapel in San Luigi dei Francesi, the French national church in Rome (Figs. 99, 100; Plate IV). Besides the Calling of St. Matthew, Caravaggio painted three other canvases for the chapel between 1599 and 1603 at the behest of the executors of Cardinal Matthieu Cointrel, who had died in 1585: the Martyrdom of St. Matthew for the right wall (Figs. 101, 102) and two versions of the altarpiece showing Matthew composing his Gospel under the inspiration of his symbolic angel (Figs. 103, 104).² A tradition universally accepted since the early seventeenth century had identified as the publican the elegantly dressed bearded man who, bathed in Christ's light, looks toward the approaching figure of the Lord and points to himself, assenting to the divine command "Follow me."³ Caravaggio's paintings created an astonishing three-act religious drama in which—to judge by appearances—the chief protagonist played three completely different and incompatible roles.

An alternative suggestion has been made that Levi—who-became-Matthew should be identified with the youth seated at the left of the counting table, unaware of Christ's approach, engulfed in
darkness, his head down, grasping a money bag close to his chest. The main arguments presented to support this interpretation, though reasonable, do not in themselves seem persuasive to me: that the pointing gesture of the seated figure could refer to his companions at the end of the table—in fact, the gesture seems clearly self-referential and not at all ambiguous; that the physiognomy of the youth is more readily reconcilable with the Socratic features Caravaggio gave the evangelist Matthew composing his Gospel in the original version of the altarpiece for the chapel— in fact, notwithstanding the difference in age, the evangelist’s features seem much coarser; and that the design of the chairs on which the two figures sit, the so-called Savonarola chair, is identical—in fact, Caravaggio also reused the bench under the youth with the sword (at right) for the evangelist in the second version of the altarpiece (Fig. 104), and he had already used both props in the London Supper at Emmaus (Fig. 105). The simple, unadorned pieces of furniture were just that, props, like the Capuchin’s frock and the pair of wings Caravaggio borrowed from the painter Orazio Gentileschi during the very period he was working on the Contarelli chapel. In any case, accepting this partial cure for the consistently split personality of Caravaggio’s hero would be worse than the disease, for we would then have to confront, without help from

Caravaggio’s Calling of St. Matthew
Fig. 103 (above). Caravaggio. St. Matthew Composing His Gospel. Destroyed in 1945; formerly Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum, Berlin (photo: Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, Munich 120584).

Fig. 104 (following plate). Caravaggio. St. Matthew Composing His Gospel. San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome (photo: Istituto Centrale del Restauro, Rome 9785).


the theory's proponents, the inconsistency of the same individual as Matthew in the first two scenes, but another in the third.

To my mind, however, the alternative identification is excluded *a priori* by other, more fundamental, considerations. A youthful beardless and hatless publican would contradict the worldly maturity universally attributed to this government official, however corrupt. The relative obscurity of the youth at the side as Levi would contradict the high drama of the composition as a whole, which focuses on the man in the center who looks toward Christ and points. A Levi oblivious to Christ's appearance would contradict the essential point of the episode, the publican's *response*—not lack of response—to the Call. A benighted Levi would contradict one of the most profound and innovative principles of Caravaggio's art, the use of light as a visual metaphor for divine illumination. Indeed, the metaphor has particular relevance in the *Calling of St. Matthew*, as a visual analogue to a passage connecting Matthew's conversion to his vision of Christ's radiance, in the liturgy for the saint celebrated in the chapel on his feast day. The breviary quotes St. Jerome's luminous response, in his commentary on this episode in the first Gospel, to the shadow of doubt cast on the authenticity of the conversion by the pagan philosopher Porphyry and the apostate emperor Julian. They claimed that either the story was false or it bespoke the folly of anyone who would follow without hesitation at a call. Jerome replied that "certainly the radiance and the majesty of the hidden divinity which shone out from the human face of Christ could draw to Him at first sight those who saw Him."

These points are obvious enough, perhaps even
self-evident. So too is the simple observation that the tax collector literally wears the sign of his profession, the gold coin attached to his hat as a brooch. Another of Levi’s salient features, however, requires special comment because, although it seems not to have been discussed heretofore, it is fraught with implications for the ultimate meaning of Caravaggio’s painting (Plate IV). I refer to the central figure’s auburn hair and beard. Red hair—<em>ruddiness</em> is the English term often used for the Latin <em>rubus</em>—is one of the physical characteristics most commonly, and opprobriously, associated with Jews, in works of art as in every other domain. The association is particularly significant since ruddiness, far from being a Jewish genetic trait, is relatively rare among Semitic peoples. Surely one factor above all contributed to the development of the idea: in the Old Testament, David is twice referred to as <em>rubus et pulcher</em>, so that what distinguished him in a positive way among the Jews came to characterize the Jews themselves in a negative way among Christians, who attributed David’s ruddiness to his lust. The extreme case of this ironic inversion, in which an unusual and attractive individual feature becomes an exemplary but repulsive genetic trait, is illustrated in the many works of art in which Judas, the archenemy of Christ and nefarious Jew <em>per excellence</em>, is shown with red hair and beard, often with a money bag. It is tempting to think that Caravaggio was particularly interested in a <em>Last Supper</em> by Pieter Coecke that has been described as one of the most popular Flemish paintings of the sixteenth century, known in more than forty versions and an engraving made in 1585 (Fig. 106; Plate V). Here the ruddy Judas points in accusation to himself with the index finger of his right hand while grasping the money bag in his left hand.

Caravaggio’s Calling of St. Matthew
hand; he seems stupified by Christ's revelation of the truth, overturning his bench in a striking anticipation of the action of Caravaggio's second St. Matthew the Evangelist.

In turn, the Jewishness of Levi the tax collector had special, twofold, significance. By virtue of his profession—Jews often served as tax collectors in the Middle Ages and after—he was egregiously associated with the main negative moral characteristics of his race, avariciousness and devotion to usury; this is the case in the Golden Legend, for example, the most popular of all hagiographies.11 (Usury did not mean lending at exorbitant rates of interest, but lending at any interest at all. Medieval Jews became moneylenders because they were excluded from other trades but exempted from the laws against usury because they were not Christian.) Levi was also quintessentially Jewish because his name coincided with that of one of the tribes of Israel. Thus, paradoxically, portraying Levi in all the depravity of his Jewishness illustrated the totality of his metamorphosis into Matthew. By heeding the call, even the lowest can attain the highest. The point is made explicit in the episode of the feast in the house of Levi, which follows the Calling in the Gospel narratives (Mark 2:14, Luke 5:27). Asked by the scribes and Pharisees why he ate and drank with publicans and sinners, Jesus answered, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." In the well-known compilation of the lives of the saints by Domenico Cavalca, Matthew is taken as the model for the conversion of that most depraved of females, Mary Magdalene, the prostitute.12

Caravaggio was by no means the first to express this paradoxical meaning of the subject. He derived his basic interpretation from Netherlandish artists of the sixteenth century. Reacting to the phenomenal growth of trade that made Antwerp the leading commercial center of Europe, the painters of that city in particular had made a specialty of scenes depicting banking and money exchange, including the Calling of St. Matthew.13 In almost claustrophobic images of covetous self-interest, these works gave powerful form to the strictures against the unrestrained pursuit of material gain that characterized the ascetic morality of the Devotio moderna, whose leading protagonist was that archironist Erasmus. Erasmus was actually rather tolerant of usury as such, but he fully grasped the import of Levi's conversion to Matthew; he declared that "suddenly to turn into another" (repente vertere in alium) a man devoted to infamous profit and involved in inexplicable affairs (inexplicabilibus negotiis) was a more signal miracle than to restore the nerves of a paralytic.14

Caravaggio's indebtedness to Northern depictions of the Calling has often been emphasized, and he must surely have been aware of a portrayal like Jan van Hemessen's of the dandified red-headed and red-bearded moneymonger responding to Christ's sudden command (Fig. 107; Plate VI).15 Caravaggio's figure, however, is much more sympathetic and, apart from his ruggedness, far less crudely "ethnic" than such predecessors; in this respect he conforms to Italian tradition and expresses his underlying (or nascent) nobility. Two other differences, quite unprecedented, are especially noteworthy because they reflect Caravaggio's subtle but fundamental reinterpretation of the story. The changes reflect the two salient moral features, both supremely ironic, attributed to Matthew in popular tradition, as in the Golden Legend.16 Matthew was credited with humility, because in his own Gospel (10:3) he says he is a publican, an unsavory fact that the other evangelists who mention him omit. Matthew's self-referential humility is expressed in the painting by the self-referential gesture of his left hand. Matthew places his hand on his breast in certain versions of the subject that Caravaggio may have known (Fig. 108),17 but these are traditional gestures of devotion rather than of reference. Normally interpreted as a bewildered "Who, me?" the accusatory action of Caravaggio's protagonist is better understood as a self-deprecating, "Me, a publican?" Matthew's humble confession—for that is what it was—also had another, deeper, implication important for Caravaggio's understanding of the evangelist's role in the history of salvation. The idea was formulated as follows by St. Jerome, whose text was incorporated in the liturgy for St. Matthew: "Out of respect and honor for Matthew, the other Evangelists did not wish to give him his usual name. They called him Levi: for he had two names. But Matthew (according to the saying of Solomon, "The just man is the first to accuse himself") and again, 'Confess your sins that you may be justified') calls himself Matthew and a publican, to show his readers that no one need despair of salvation if he is converted to better things, since he himself was suddenly changed from a publican into an Apostle."18 Matthew's reference to his sinful past was therefore not simply an act of
humility; it was also an exhortation—himself being the example—to those who had converted to remain firm in their faith. This was the very same motivation which, according to St. Jerome, inspired Matthew’s equally extraordinary act of writing his gospel in his native Hebrew, the inspiration that Caravaggio explicitly illustrated in the first version of the altarpiece for the chapel. It is indicative of the depth of Caravaggio’s response to and transformation of the Netherlandish tradition that his own ruddy Levi-Matthew, centrally placed and self-incriminating, was soon understood and adopted by Hendrick Terbrugghen (1621; Fig. 109; Plate VII).19

Matthew was also especially noteworthy for the virtue of generosity, because after his conversion he offered a great feast in his own house for the Lord and his followers. This event is recorded in the Gospels (and the breviary) directly after the Calling; hence it was the newly converted disciple’s first Christian act. Matthew’s immediate renunciation of his wealth—an emphatic counterpoint to his previous greed as Levi—had been alluded to by van Hemessen, whose Matthew doffs his elaborate red hat with his right hand and rejects with his open left hand the money bags on the table before him.20 Caravaggio’s Matthew demonstrates his generosity specifically by the gesture of his right hand, which is clearly not taking in the money but counting it out. This motif also occurs frequently in the Northern works, as in van Hemessen’s, where accounts are being settled, but never in the hand of the apostle himself. It is as though Matthew, having put down his last coin, were meting out in saving grace the thirty pieces of silver gained by the other often red-headed apostle, whose faith was infirm. In fact, Matthew’s gesture is pointedly juxtaposed and contrasted to the closed,
coin-hoarding hand of the youth at the left, who also conceals the money bag, as does Judas in scenes of the Last Supper.

This interpretation of Matthew’s action in turn helps to clarify what is perhaps the most obvious visual citation in Caravaggio’s picture. Christ’s right hand conspicuously reverses the left hand of Adam in Michelangelo’s Creation scene in the Sistine ceiling, where Adam receives the gift of life from God the Father (Fig. 110). It is clear, therefore, that Caravaggio’s Christ, the New Adam, not only beckons to Levi, signaling his new life as Matthew, but also receives the penance that Matthew pays for his sins with symbolic coins. In this sense, the reciprocal relationship seems explicitly to illustrate the lesson in the breviary on the feast in the house of Levi. The former publican is again taken as a model of conversion, now also of penance, and Christ repeats his call, now to all sinners and for mercy: the assembled publicans and sinners “saw that the publican converted from his sins to better things had found

Fig. 108 (opposite, top). Attributed to Giuseppe Cesari, Calling of St. Matthew, drawing. Graphische Sammlung Albertina, Vienna.

Fig. 109 (opposite, below). Hendrick Terbrugghen, Calling of St. Matthew. Centraal Museum, Utrecht.

Fig. 110 (above). Michelangelo, Creation of Adam, detail. Sistine Chapel, Vatican Palace, Rome (photo: Anderson 3789).
Quid prodest homini, si uniuersum Mundum lucetur, animæ autem suæ detrimentum patiatur?

**Matt. XVI.**

Che gioua al’ huom, che tutto’l mondo acquisti,
Se l’alma sua poi ne riceue danno?
Onde ne i luoghi tenebrosi, & tristi
Pianga dannata à sempiterno affanno.

Fig. 111. Hans Holbein, *The Gambler* (from Sinodari, 1569).
an opportunity for penance; and so they themselves did not despair of salvation. Nor did they come to Jesus as remaining in their former vices, as the Pharisees and Scribes complained, but as doing penance. The Lord’s words which follow indicate this: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice. For I have come to call sinners, not the just.’

With the two gestures of Levi-Matthew, Caravaggio gave unprecedented expression to that process of enlightenment whereby the selfish, money-grubbing Jew, the most execrable of the damned, becomes the charitable, poverty-loving Christian, the most exalted among the saved. This understanding of the picture as calling the iniquitous to faith makes particular sense of the one visual reference to an earlier work of art that has always been recognized as a factor in the genesis of the composition. Already in the seventeenth century Joachim von Sandart observed that Caravaggio based his young man with the money bag at the left on the figure seated at the right of the gaming table in Holbein’s woodcut portraying gamblers in the Dance of Death series (Fig. 111). It is clear from what has been said here, however, that there is much more to the relationship than a simple borrowing of a motif; Caravaggio’s whole conception of his subject is indebted to, and is in turn illuminated by, Holbein’s portrayal of the “calling” by Death and the Devil of a greedy sinner who, in his lust for money, “gamble” with his life. The figure at the left in Holbein’s composition sees, understands, and is alarmed by what is happening while the huddled and benighted man at the right, intent upon raking in the pot, remains oblivious. The relevance to Caravaggio’s interpretation of the story of St. Matthew is evident also from the caption to the illustration that appears in many editions of the work, including one of 1549 with the Italian translation below. The caption quotes the familiar passage in the Gospel of Matthew (16:26) in which Christ denounces worldliness ironically in terms of an exchange of values: “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Quid profest homini . . . ) Caravaggio grasped Holbein’s meaning as well as his design, and this relationship also makes clear who is Caravaggio’s protagonist. Holbein’s protagonist, the bearded figure at the center of the composition, shows what happens when the avaricious moneygruber does not heed the call; Caravaggio’s shows what happens when he does. No less significant is the context established in the preceding, even more familiar, passage of the Gospel, where Matthew, in effect, recounts his own metamorphosis. Addressing His disciples, Christ exhorts a total transformation of the self (16:24–5): “Then Jesus said unto his disciples: If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever shall save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it.” In the Gospel, therefore, worldly renunciation and self-sacrifice follow directly from personal mutation; this was the basic spiritual idea that the physical permutations through which Levi-Matthew passes in the Contarelli chapel paintings made visible.

It might be said that in the Calling Caravaggio’s characterization of the protagonist illuminated and transformed by Christ’s appeal gave metaphysical form to two opposite states of moral existence: the avaricious Jewish publican Levi and the generous Christian apostle Matthew. Both persons have leading and heretofore unappreciated roles in the context of the commission for this great narrative cycle in which Caravaggio’s art was itself transformed into maturity. Among the critical issues of the early church that were revived in the period of the Counter-Reformation was the conversion of the Jews. Although the number of people involved was small, the matter acquired new symbolic importance during the church’s struggle to combat heresy, and the effort was greatly intensified in the course of the sixteenth century. Adrienne von Lates has noted in connection with Caravaggio’s work that the parish priest of San Luigi dei Francesi was a zealous participant in this effort. I need not emphasize the relevance of this fact, which I had overlooked, to my argument some years ago in a paper on the Hebrew text Matthew the Evangelist composes in Caravaggio’s first altarpiece for the chapel. Apart from reaffirming the tradition of the church concerning the divine inspiration “in the pen” of the first Gospel, the text echoes the report of St. Jerome that Matthew had composed his Gospel in the language of his fellow Semites so that those of them who had converted might remain firm in their faith. The metaphorical relevance of the message in the much more formidable struggle with the Protestants also needs no emphasis. Gregory XIII, Matthieu Cointrel’s patron, was particularly solicitous of converts, founding the Collegio dei Neoitj for former Jews and Muslims who wished to further their

Caravaggio’s Calling of St. Matthew
Christian education. Precisely in this context, it becomes significant that the idea of conversion may already have been uppermost in Matthieu Cointrel's mind in 1565 when he made his original testamentary prescription for the chapel: he provided that Matthew baptizing the Egyptians, a scene emphasized in the Golden Legend, be the subject represented in the center of the vault (subsequently changed to a miracle scene). These facts, in turn, reinforce the suggestion that the seminude figures shown at the edge of a sunken basin in the lower part of Caravaggio's depiction of the martyrdom of St. Matthew are neophytes. The reference to baptism makes the Martyrdom a testimony to the transforming power of faith comparable to the Calling.

Caravaggio's interpretation of the Calling of St. Matthew also reflects what must have been a much more personal concern of Matthieu Cointrel's executors, who actually commissioned the work from Caravaggio in fulfillment of the cardinal's legacy. In their view Matthieu Cointrel must have had far more in common with the apostle than a name. Cointrel, who died in 1585, had been one of the most powerful figures in the church hierarchy. The son of a blacksmith, he met as a young man Ugo Buoncompagni, later Pope Gregory XIII, who became a close lifelong friend. Pope Gregory made Cointrel, his protégé, a cardinal and appointed him to the key post of papal datary, which gave him control over all church benefices—the often richly endowed offices whose revenues it was his responsibility to confer, in good faith and gratis, upon worthy recipients. The position, which lent itself easily to corruption, was extremely sensitive, and when the great fortune Cointrel had amassed came to light at his death, he was accused by Gregory's reforming successor, Sixtus V, of simony, the selling of church benefices. This was the most execrable of ecclesiastical crimes, in direct contravention of Christ's charge to his disciples—recorded in a key passage in the Gospel of St. Matthew itself—that they give freely the spiritual benefits they had received freely (gratis accipitis, gratis date; 10:8). The papal datary was, in effect, the ecclesiastical equivalent of the ancient publican; he had the moral obligation, sometimes honored in the breach, to collect and transmit revenues fairly and honestly. The simonian datary was thus the equivalent of the double-sinning Levi, who embodied both the avarice of his race and the guilt of the administrator who breaches the trust—a sacred trust in Cointrel's case—of his public office for personal gain.

Pope Sixtus appointed a commission; after diligent investigation it found so many simonies that one of the datary's assistants, called to testify, fled and thereby incriminated himself as well as his former patron. The inquest continued and uncovered "very aromatic material" (materia molto aromatica) in which many officials of the datary were implicated, even Pope Gregory himself, who, it was suspected, had known of the malfeasance of this foreigner and his ministers. There was a threat to confiscate the entire legacy. The heirs evidently offered, in vain, a settlement of 30,000 scudi. It was discovered that a certain Domenico Atton had usurped the income from seventy French monasteries; the pope had destined the money for the construction of the church of San Luigi dei Francesi, which received, instead, only 3,000 scudi. It also emerged that Cointrel had assigned pensions from Spanish benefices to nonexistent persons, which he then canceled, retaining the income for himself. The investigation discovered so much aromatic material, in fact, that it risked jeopardizing the Holy See's relations with France. Pope Sixtus finally thought best to suppress the whole issue, though not without a stern warning of prosecution to the officials of the datary, whom he expected to provide a model for others.

Matthieu Cointrel's numerous charities were legendary. He built the Jesuit church at Tivoli, and at San Luigi dei Francesi, besides commissioning his own chapel, he contributed to the construction of the facade, as well as paying for the decoration of the high altar. His munificence, which must have helped to arouse suspicion in the first place, was the main theme of the eulogy delivered at his funeral, and no doubt it figured largely in the efforts of his heirs to defend him and their patrimony. Caravaggio's reinterpretation of the Calling of St. Matthew can be understood in this context. Focusing on Matthew's humility in confessing his evil past and his charity in expending his earthly wealth, Caravaggio portrays the model for redemption for the patron of the chapel. The model is also universal, however, and the same call is made to the spectator, toward whom Christ gestures from the darkness with his left hand.

The full import of Caravaggio's meaning, and perhaps his most important innovation, would have been grasped only in the context of the chapel as a whole, where the three different personas of this

Caravaggio's Calling of St. Matthew
divine drama would have been patently juxtaposed. The spectator would have been dumbfounded by the physiognomical manifestations of the spiritual progression he beheld taking place in the chapel, from the arrogant Jew-becoming-Christian at the left, through the humble philosopher-becoming-evangelist at the altar, to the venerable priest-becoming-martyr on the right. Caravaggio had made a comparable break with tradition in the Supper at Emmaus, where he portrayed the altered—that is, rejuvenated and beardless—face of the resurrected Christ, whom the astonished apostles recognize “in another form,” in alia effigie, according to the Gospel, at the sacramental blessing and breaking of bread (see Fig. 103). The paintings of the Contarelli chapel offer, in an almost cinematographic sequence (see Figs. 99, 103, 101), the same opportunity: to behold and recognize the mysterious power of faith to illuminate and transform those able to see. The lateral scenes, with the conversion of the Jew by Christ and the conversion of the pagans by Matthew, complement each other as visual expressions of the salvific action of God’s word. They embrace in narrative terms the same portentous message embodied in the emblematic icon of Levi-Socrates-Matthew that Caravaggio originally intended as the chapel’s altarpiece: the great promise of the early church to triumph ex circumcision et ex gentibus.

Recalling the metaphor of St. Paul—“For now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face”; “with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, [we] are changed into the same image”—we can see clearly that a key to understanding the Contarelli chapel lies in another text in the liturgy for St. Matthew, a passage from Gregory the Great quoted in conjunction with that from St. Jerome mentioned earlier. Gregory comments on Ezekiel’s momentous vision of four creatures with faces, one with the face of a man, on which the tradition of the symbols of the evangelists was based. Matthew enjoys the pride of place among the evangelists not only because he was the first called and the first to write his Gospel but also because he recounts the genealogy and birth of Christ, that is, the incarnation in human form of God’s only Son. Jerome therefore assigned to Matthew the man-creature, which ultimately became the evangelist’s angel. What Gregory says, reflecting the conundrum of St. Paul’s image, is this: “Now surely the face is the symbol of recognition . . . You recognize a man by his face . . . and by the same token the face is concerned with faith . . . and it is by our faith that we are recognized by almighty God. As he said of his sheep, ‘I am the good shepherd, as I know my sheep, and mine know me.’ And again he said, ‘I know whom I have chosen.’”
istic studies: "Cum dispersa primum ac passim vagans hominum multiduo eloquentiae ac sapientiae viribus intra urbes ad civilem cultum coacta ferinos illos mores exuerit, ac deinde paulatim manu est facta doctrina animis ad florentissimum vitae statum sit perdacta, facile intellectum est literarum studiis nihil ad tundam aut ornandam mortuam societatem antiquius, nihil aptius, nihil denique praestabilius inventi posse, beatasque respublicas illas esse, in quibus literarum cultus non postremus habeatur" (Tuttle, "Bononia," 1987, 238); "When first the dispersed multitude of wandering men gathered into cities by the powers of eloquence and wisdom had cast off those savage ways and then, their spirits tamed by education, gradually been led to a flourishing state of life, it was readily understood that to safeguard and adorn human society nothing could be found more ancient, more apt or preferable than the study of letters, and that those nations are blessed in which letters are not held in least regard."

47. "Delphinos autem esse ingenus hominum natura propensiores, ut verosimile sit cum illis pueros loci, idem factum ubique historiae, dum eorum beneficio Arionem, Palemonem, Phalan- tum, Tarantem, Telemaclum et pleroquse alios servos commemorant" (Tuttle, "Bononia," 1987, 243); "Many stories attest that dolphins have an innate propensity toward human beings, whence it is natural that young boys play with them, and record that Arion, Palemon, Phalanthus, Tarantis, Telemaclus and many others were saved by the benevolence of dolphins."

48. On the dolphin see Tertullian, 1559, II, 141ff.

49. "Sirenes quamquam apud aliquos illecebrarum loco habentur, non inepte tamen ab aliis ad significandam orationis dulcedinem flectuntur; unde illud Martialis Catu grammaticus latina Siren, ut praeterea aureas sirenum illecebras in Apollonios templo apud Philostratum suspensus legi" (Tuttle, "Bononia," 1987, 243); "Although according to some Sirens are considered beguiling; they are aptly constricted by others to signify the sweetness of speech, whence Martial calls Cato the Grammarian the Latin Siren, and I also read in Philostratus that the golden lures of the Sirens were hung up in the temple of Apollo. Moreover, since our Sirens express their breasts they seem to indicate that they excel not only by the delight of the voice, but also offer something more solid from within themselves. Therefore the artful construction and ornament of the leaping water speaks thus: the highest leisure and pursuit of peace thrive most if the ruler himself assumes the task of administering the realm."

50. Emphasis on Giambologna's absorption of the classical tradition has tended to obscure this fundamental debt to his Northern background. Holderbaum found evidence of a medieval revival in Giambologna's late religious works, which he also sees as Counter-Reformatory in spirit (1983, 207, 211ff., 274f., 290).

There is some evidence that Giambologna himself may have had Protestant leanings during the 1560's (Holderbaum, 1983, 196–98); if so, he must later have returned to the Catholic fold, as his funerary chapel in SS. Annunziata in Florence testifies.

51. The relationship between Giambologna's art and contemporary political development was another enduring contribution of Holderbaum, 1983, 149ff.


4. Caravaggio's Calling of Saint Matthew: The Identity of the Protagonist

First presented in a session on Irony and Paradox in Northern Art at a meeting of the College Art Association in February 1990.

1. For the early history of Paul's metaphor, see Hugedé, 1957. For the exaltation of the lowly, see the pioneering and still fundamental studies of the paradoxical encomium by Colli (1966) and of the sermo bunidis by Auerbach (1965). This essay is a sequel to an earlier study in which I discussed the Socratic irony embodied in Caravaggio's first altarpiece for the Contarelli chapel (Lavin, "Divine Inspiration," 1974).
consternation of rabbinical disputation. The last two verses of the Italian subscription seem strikingly to anticipate the meaning of Caravaggio’s “tenebroso” lighting: “whence in dark and melancholy places the damned soul wall in eternal affliction.”

25. Lates, 1989, 33–38. According to Armailhacq, 1694, 30, the parish registers of San Luigi record many conversions. On October 4, 1604, amid great solemnities, ten Jews who had been instructed by the parish priest were baptized by the bishop of Sidon, and the same ceremony was repeated the following year.


28. On the vault scene see Acqua and Cinotti, 1971, 186 n. 249. The suggestion that the lower figures in the Martyrdom are neophytes (Marini, 1974, 29, and 1989, 42) was confirmed in an article on the painting by Trinchieri Camiz, 1990, that appeared after the present essay was completed. The author argues convincingly that the figures allude to baptism and adduces some of the same evidence cited here concerning the conversion of the Jews. The “crucified” pose of Matthew in the Martyrdom, which recalls the evangelist’s report, cited in the text above, of Christ’s call to his disciples to take up the cross, follow him, and give up their lives, may also be related to the theme of Baptism; the tradition linking the blood of Christ to the waters of baptism was illustrated in a print by H. Wierix, labeled “Fons Vitae,” showing Christ seated on the edge of a baptismal basin into which his blood flows (Maquoy-Hendrickx, 1978–82, L. 102, fig. 581). Calvesi, 1990, 279–84, linked Caravaggio’s Calling to Henry IV’s conversion to Catholicism in 1595.

29. For a biographical sketch of Cointrel, see Fragneto (in Dizionario, 1960–, XVIII, 688E), who, following a clue in Pastor, 1923–53, XXI, 129, recovered and described the reports of Cointrel’s malefactions in the Avvisi di Roma, which I quote here in extenso.

“Dopo una diligentissima inquisizione fatta da certi deputati da Palazzo sopra l'amministrazione del Card. San Stefano nel Datario di Gregorio, si sono trovate tante simonie, che chiamato da loro al sindacato un certo Pietr'Antonio dellisstituti di detto Datario, et a presentare alcune scritture, sen'e fuggito di qua avvisando se stesso, et il gia suo Prone con tal fuga, et il Papa per haverlo ha per piu vie spediti Corriri, procedendosi in qua a causa con esquisita curiosita”... “Il Friziolio sec. della congregazione del concilio, et gia delle sustituti del Card. Santo Stefano sta sequestrato in casa d'ordine delle superiori” (July 16, 1586, Biblioteca Vaticana, MS Urb. Lat. 1054, fol. 321v-ff.).

“E così chiara, che l'Isico pretende il giusto possesso di tutti i beni del Card. le S. Stefano per simonia, et per altre cose scoverte nelle suoi libri secreti, et nelle scritture deli suoi sustituti, per le quali cose, i diuotati sono intorno con le male parole a mons.re Rubustiero aderiva a quel-l'anima negra in dispense, et risegne molte brute” (August 13, 1586, ibid., fol. 38o).

“Si va innanzi tuttavia nella causa del gia Card. San Stefano, con un travaglio di nuova persone, ch'erano interessate seco, et perche si scopre materia molto aromatica, in un libro intitolato Nemini ostendatur, per il quale Pro Anto è stato presentato alla corda, si vede che le cose andaranno in lungo, et per q.to gli eredi si lasciano intender de composit.ne offrendone 30 m. scudi. Altri sono d'opinione che per esser stato scritto in Ispagna che venghino di là scritte, et testimonij per ca di tanti pensioni ritrovate estinte, et ricevute, N. Sre sta in pensiero di deputare una congreg.ne per decidere utro Pontifex potueri esse simoniacus, dubitandosi in qualche parte Gregorio possi havere havuto inditter della ribaldarie di q.to Ultramontano, et de suoi ministri” (August 20, 1586, ibid., fol. 393).

“Hanno i deputati sopra la causa del Card. San Stefano assegnate la casa per carcare à Donco Astron. Agente del Duca di loreno interrogato sopra le sepedizioni di 70 Monasteri in Francia.
per via segreta passate per man sua con dare ad intendere à Gregorio, che servivano per la fabbrcia di San Luigi, secondo che S. Bne haveva de
stinato, et poi si trova, chégli à detta fabbrcia non ha dati più di 3 m scudi di tanti, che ha riscossi per dette spedizioni. Et Pietro Antonio è interrogato sopra le pensioni, che si mettevano sì le Chiese di Spagna, per huoi (?), de quali mai ser' ha possuto havere cognizione, et poi si facevano estinguere in utile (per q nto si trova) di detto Datario, il qual veniva ad esser lui quel solo delli tanti, che'avevano havute le pensioni’ (August 30, 1586, ibid., fol. 424).

"Dicono alcuni, che per altro non si procede adesso nella causa del Carle San Stefano, che per dubio, che l'Ambre di Francia non faccia officio caldo col Papa in suo favore et che poi non sia in potere di S. Bne di negargli ogni gra
tia per l'amore eccessivo, che mostrà portare à q.ti ss.ri Galli” (September 17, 1586, fol. 454).

"Se il Papa troverà cosa alcuna di mal fatto nella istituitori del Datario, come ha presentitio possono essere sicuri di non andare senza acqua calda, perché vuole S. Sta che siano, i suoi sempre i primi à dar norma agli altri” (January 24, 1587, MS Urb. Lat. 1055, fol. 28; cf. Pastor, 1923–53, XXI, 129).

30. This text is also cited by Treffers, 1895, 255, in a different context.
31. This claim on the part of the apostolic camera is alludid to in one of the documents concerning the executor’s delay in completing the work (Mahon, 1952, 206).
32. It may be relevant that the Jesuit Jacobo Laynez, who had been a close associate of Coindrel (Doizmmari, 1969,–88, 68), was the author of an important treatise on simony (published in Lainé, 1886, II, 322–82).
33. The eulogy, by the Jesuit François Rémon, is published in Chacon, 1677, IV, cols. 96 ff.
34. Although she identifies the man as a taxpayer, Hass (1988, 250) perceives that his gesture may allude to Coindrel’s charities and suggests that he may actually represent the cardinal.
35. These physiognomical differences are so con
spicious that they must be deliberate and cannot be explained simply by the sequence in which the pictures were executed. The second version of the altarpiece established a compromise with Caravaggio’s original, radical, differentiation: the evangelist and the martyr were now recogniz-
ably the same person, and what remained was the visible transformation of the Jew into the Christian.

36. See the essay on this painting by a former student of mine, Scribner (1977). Caravaggio’s preoccupation with this idea in the Contarelli chapel is attested by newly discovered docu-
ments indicating that the London picture must be virtually contemporary with the first St. Mat-
thew (see Corse, ed., 1990, 41, 77).
37. See Lavin, "Divine Inspiration," 1973, 28. To my mind it cannot be coincidental that the bald and bearded head of Matthew in the Martyrdom distinctly recalls the standard image of St. Paul. The reference would be appropriate not only because of Paul’s general importance for the imagery of the chapel but also because of the specific traits he had in common with Matthew: Paul was also converted suddenly by Christ’s call; his name was also changed along with his char-
acter (Caravaggio had given the Jews’ red hair and beard to Saul-becoming-Paul in the first
version of the Conversion for the Cerasi chapel; see n. 18 above); and he also died by the sword. Moreover, Paul invokes the same paradoxical notion of Socratic ignorance that Caravaggio applied to Levi-Matthew in the first version of the Contarelli altarpiece ("And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know” [1 Cor. 8:2]; see Lavin, "Divine Inspiration,” 1973, 66ff). And whereas Matthew by his Gospel was the apostle of the Jews, Paul by his mission was the apostle of the Gentiles. (In the apse mosaic of Santa Pudenziana, Paul and Matthew had evidently been related in this same context: Paul holds a book inscribed with the opening words of the first Gospel; ibid., 78 n. 66.)
38. Quid per faciem, nisi notitia . . . Per faciem quippe unusquisque conscientur . . . Facies itaque
ad fidem pertinet . . . Per fidem namque ab omnipo
tenti Deo cognoscimur, sicut ipsa de suas
ovibus dicit: Ego sum pastor bonus, et cognosco
oves meas, et cognoscent me meae. Qui tursus
aet: Ego scio quos elegerim" (The Hours 1964, III,
1568).

5. Bernini’s Portraits of No-Body

First presented in March 1987 in a colloquium at the
University of Maryland honoring my friend George
Levittine, to whom it is now sadly dedicated in
memoriam.

2. See Lavin, “Five Youthful Sculptures,” 1968,
239f., and Appendix A, pp. 125–29. New docu-
mentary evidence presented here supports the
1619 date proposed by Wittkower for the Anime
busts on stylistic grounds.

3. On the coins, see Head, 1911, 805; G. F. Hill,
1914, lxxxvii, 182f., pl. XX, 1–3. The few
instances of coins with facing heads on both
sides (Baldwin, 1908–9, 130) nearly all involve
male–female confrontations. For the mosaic,
found on the Aventine in Rome, see Bieber,
1920, 162, no. 137. Theater masks were some-
times actually associated with portrait busts, as
on a Roman sarcophagus in the Camposanto at
Pisa that shows three masks, a youth, a female,
and a grizzled Pan, beneath a medallion contain-
ing busts of a man and his wife (Aries et al.,
1977, 114ff.). Among the classical precedents
revived and much illustrated, often as bust por-
traits, from the Renaissance on were the philoso-
phers Democritus and Heraclitus, who, respec-
tively, laughed and wept at the foibles of the
world (see p. 268, n. 58).

4. I have discussed the revived Ars moriendi tradition
and Bernini’s profound relationship to it in life
and death (1972). On the Ars moriendi, see

On the Quattuor novissima, see Lane, 1985. My
own remarks on the visual tradition of the Four
Last Things, including Bernini’s busts, offer only
modest supplements to those in the excellent
article by Malke, 1976.

5. See Franza, 1958; Turrini, 1982. The illustrated
catechisms have been studied by Prosperi, 1985.

6. On the engravings by Theodor Galle after
Maarten van Heemskerck and a painting of the
same theme by Heemskerck, see Grosshans,
1980, 214–43. Other important suites are by
J. B. Wierix after Martin de Vos (Mauquoy-
Hendricks, 1979, II, 271ff.), Hendrik Goltzius
after Johannes Stradanus (Strauss, ed., 1980,
309ff.), Jan Sadeler after Dirck Barendsz (Judson,
1970, 64f., 74, 140–42).

7. In these instances, it seems the purpose was to
establish a deliberate link between the universal
character of the Quattuor novissima and the indi-
vidual focus of the Ars moriendi.

8. Although the moral component of Bernini’s
interest in expression was diluted, his position in
this development is clear. So far as we know,
Leonardo’s drawings do not portray any particu-
lar emotions or pattern or system of emotions.
Della Porta’s physiognomies are consistent, but
they are not really devoted to expression; they
attempt, instead, to link various physiognomi-
tical types with corresponding character types,
based on counterparts in the animal kingdom.
Descartes was the first to study human emotions
systematically, and it was Le Brun’s contribution
to relate that effort to the visual tradition repre-
sented by Leonardo, Della Porta, and Bernini,
producing the first systematic exploration of the
facial effects of emotion.

The most recent interpretation of Bernini’s
sculptures in this vein, which entails charac-
teristically a focus on the Anima Damnata as a
"self-representation," will be found in a fine essay
by Preimesberger, 1989, with further references.

On Messerschmidt’s character studies, see
Behr et al., 1983.

9. Mai’s engravings are reproduced in Hollstein,
1954–, XXIII, 146ff., with further bibliography.
Johann Conrad (1561–1612), who had lived for
several years in Italy, was a great patron of the
arts and maintained close ties with the Jesuits;
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