

CARAVAGGIO, EMPATHY AND CHRIST

Dan O'Brien

Oxford Brookes University

Abstract

In this paper I distinguish the range of empathetic relations that are experienced by viewers of the works of Caravaggio, and clarify the role that the body, physiognomy and gesture play in our experience and understanding of those works. Recent work in the philosophy of mind and cognitive science will inform the discussion. In §1 I explore presence and how Caravaggio makes his works alive to us. §2 considers how we come to empathize with the emotions, feelings and thoughts of those he depicts. §3 turns to empathetic relations between artist and viewer, and §4 considers the distinction between works that are intended for viewing in Church and those painted for private galleries.

As one approaches Caravaggio's *The Flagellation of Christ* down a long gallery in the Museo di Capodimonte in Naples, one's own body starts to tense as the tussling bodies come into focus, knotted muscles emphasized by the twisted loincloth, rope binding a switch, and crown of thorns.¹ Christ teeters, his body pulled in opposite directions, his knees buckle as the torturers pull his hair and kick his calf. One's own bodily reactions are involved in coming to know what it is like to be beaten—what it is like *for Christ* to be beaten. Such knowledge involves empathy: 'the sense of being emotionally and cognitively "in tune with" another person, particularly by feeling what their situation is like from the inside or what it is like for them'.² In this paper I will distinguish the range of empathetic relations that are experienced by viewers of the works of Caravaggio, and clarify the role that the body, physiognomy and gesture play in our experience and understanding of those works. Recent work in the philosophy of mind and cognitive science will inform the discussion. In §1 I explore presence and how Caravaggio makes his works alive to us. §2 considers how we come to empathize with the emotions, feelings and thoughts of those he depicts. §3 turns to empathetic

relations between artist and viewer, and §4 considers the distinction between works that are intended for viewing in Church and those painted for private galleries.

1. Presence

Caravaggio's revolutionary art was a reaction to late sixteenth-century mannerism in which the focus was on style and artifice: idealized figures, posed, and divorced from reality, had the appearance of classical sculptures rather than flesh and blood characters.³ Painting had become 'chokingly decorative'⁴ and, in response, various artists—notably Annibale Caracci and Vincenzo Campi—embraced naturalism, attempting to present, not idealizations, but immediate perceived reality. Painting directly from life, without preparatory drawings, Caravaggio gave life to Biblical episodes by transposing them to the Rome and Naples of his day, using a subdued palette for clothes and furnishings. As reported by Giovanni Bellori, an early biographer: 'when he is shown the most famous statues of Phidias and Glykon in order that he might use these as models, his only answer was to point toward a crowd of people, saying that nature had given him an abundance of masters'.⁵

This new language of painting, and particularly the specific approach of Caravaggio, was popular across Europe. Caravaggio did not have actual pupils, as many masters did, but his followers are referred to as his 'schola' and a wide range of painters embraced 'Caravaggism', including Francesco Buoneri (Cecco del Caravaggio), Artemisia Gentileschi and Jusepe de Ribera.⁶ Ribera would have seen Caravaggio's work in Rome, where he lived from 1606. Moving to Naples in 1616, he founded a Caravaggesque school and exported pictures to Spain, widening further Caravaggio's influence. These 'Caravaggista' adopted his methods, produced copies and imitations of his works, developed his subjects into genres (street life scenes of fortune tellers, card sharps and pickpockets), and, in some ways, moved beyond his achievements (some examples of which shall be noted below).

The contours and presence of objects and bodies is accentuated by chiaroscuro and his characteristic cinema-style lighting (provided, in the studio, by an overhead skylight). Since the Renaissance, artists had attempted to represent how things look from a particular, one-point, perspective. The picture frame can be seen as holding a transparent sheet through which viewers look, and from which, behind the painting, the scene recedes. Caravaggio is not constrained by this approach. We are drawn to become active in the scene. At the *Supper of Emmaus* we are tempted to

nudge the basket back onto the table.⁷ The stool in *The Inspiration of St Matthew* is about to topple into our world (we almost want to reach out to catch it) and in various works the corners of tables and masonry threaten to pierce the canvas.⁸ The sharp edge of the stone tomb in *The Entombment of Christ* thrusts into the space of the viewer, breaking down the divide between our reality and that of the picture.⁹ Bodies press up against the canvas; the frieze-like arrangement of *The Taking of Christ* is claustrophobic—with ‘space as crushing movement’.¹⁰ The effect would also have been accentuated by the now faded forest of trees and staves behind the action, which ‘would have reinforced the shallowness of the pictorial space’.¹¹ One feels the scrum on one’s shoulders as one is drawn into the melee.

We do not see mere bodies—we see *persons*. At the beginning of a lecture I may look out at a sea of faces, but when I catch someone’s eye, or listen to their question, I come to see one of those faces as a person. I am not merely aware of my own first-person experiences, nor am I merely aware of that person’s objective, physical properties, those that can be apprehended from the third-person perspective; I am aware, rather, of their consciousness in the world—they become present to me as another person. They are present *to me* or *with me*. In coming to see them in this way I adopt the second-person perspective.¹² It is such a relationship we feel to the boys in *Boy Bitten by a Lizard*, *The Lute Player* and *Bacchus*, their eyes communicating to us, addressing the viewer.¹³ They are *here, now, with us*:¹⁴

[The] psychological distance between viewer and image is no void; it is, rather, like a spark gap; prodigiously charged, it is the bridge for a relationship which is, in both the human and aesthetic dimensions, phenomenally alive.¹⁵

And, of course, here’s the magic—there is no one there, just paint on canvas.

2. Empathy

Empathetic engagement with visual art was encouraged by the counter-reformation zeal codified by the Council of Trent (1545–63). Works should be painted in order to engage the emotions of viewers and thus to inspire piety; narrative elements, along with mannerist decoration, should take a back seat

to living bodies and those aspects of a scene that convey emotion. Caravaggio started his career in Milan in the studio of Peterzano, and one can see the influence of the naturalistic approach of artists from Lombardy and their focus on the direct observation of nature.¹⁶ In this section I will draw a distinction between low and high-level empathy in which, respectively, we come to share the emotions and thoughts of others.¹⁷

The emotions and feelings of others are contagious. One can, for example, be deflated by the sadness of those around you, or, as David Hume puts it in a letter to Adam Smith, a depressed person can throw a ‘Damp on Company’.¹⁸ We saw in *The Flagellation* how our muscles tensed with those of Christ. (It’s as if, in response to Christ’s instability, one is making sure that one’s feet are firmly planted on the floor.) Via low-level or affective empathy one comes to appreciate the suffering portrayed, which in turn leads to sympathy and compassion for Christ, Mary and others portrayed in anguish.¹⁹ In Ribera’s *The Trinity*, one’s skin stretches with that of Christ.²⁰ Ribera’s forte is stretched, wrinkled and wounded skin, moving here beyond Caravaggio, his thick impasto emulating furrows, creases and wrinkles.²¹ Javier Portus claims that ‘it would be difficult to find a seventeenth-century painter in whose work there is such an abundance of martyred flesh’.²² Such empathetic transmission of bodily feelings enables us to feel the presence of those on the canvas. Stretched skin and the blows of torturers are vivid, but depictions of the body can also enable us to empathize with subtler features of the phenomenology of our lived experience. In *The Crowning with Thorns* one first sees the flailing whips, but when one spots it, there is a particularly moving expression of Christ’s suffering.²³ Look at Christ’s hand on the reed: ‘it would be impossible to grip the reed less assertively, and yet it *is* gripped’.²⁴ One’s own hand goes limp. Caravaggio eloquently communicates sensations of touch. Feathers lightly brush a boy’s thigh in *Victorious Cupid*,²⁵ and the phenomenology of touch is even more developed in the Caravaggista, with, for example, the viewer feeling (empathetically) the sensation of stockinged legs being crossed, and the interestingly indeterminate phenomenology of not quite knowing where one’s arms are when taking off a shirt.²⁶

High-level or cognitive empathy is when the thoughts of another are adopted. In *The Taking of Christ*, passive to Judas’s kiss and the rush of soldiers, Christ looks downward (and inward), attempting to understand humanity, his hands expressing sorrow and anguish (his passivity reflecting the pre-ordained nature of the events to come). We do not see mere (non-cognitive) feelings, those that could be transmitted by low-level empathy; we see anguish *at his betrayal*—emotion with cognitive content.²⁷ Christ’s humanity is emphasized by the ‘reptilian’ touch of the soldier’s

gauntlet,²⁸ and we are close to Christ (empathetically); conversely, even though the head of Judas is thrust forward and almost touches that of Christ, '[n]ever has he been so close and yet so far from the Son of God'.²⁹

Francisco Ribalta's caravaggism was likely influenced by imported copies of Caravaggio at the Escorial.³⁰ In his *Christ Embracing St Bernard*, Christ appears to Bernard while praying in Church, detaching himself from the cross in order to embrace him.³¹ We see Bernard's sympathy for the suffering of Christ, and his love, but we also see Christ's reciprocal empathy and love for Bernard. Christ is not just aware of Bernard's love towards him, but also his pious beliefs, hopes and intentions concerning his life.³² Their joint-presence together is beautifully expressed.³³

Similarly, rich in theological content is *The Supper at Emmaus*. John Spike argues that Christ's pose is a reference to Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* where his hands divide those who are called from those who are damned.³⁴ His appearance at Emmaus on the day of his resurrection therefore foreshadowing his Second Coming. Judgement is also implied by the still life on the table. The fruit are—ominously—starting to rot. Two disciples are awestruck by the Saviour, but the inn-keeper eyes him sceptically. The painting, suggests Spike, asks the viewer: 'Would I have seen the miracle, too, or stood there in the dark?' (2001,116). We are asked to try each response on for size: are we the kind of person who would fling out our arms, or violently shunt back our chair—or would we be more circumspect...?

The later works, those painted in Naples, Malta and Sicily, have a 'tragic grandeur',³⁵ with more extreme chiaroscuro (tenebrism); the shadows are deep and forbidding, the atmosphere sombre. Emotion weighs heavy on them, and, at the same time, is harder to grasp. Again, these are not mere feelings, but emotions with complex, although obscure, cognitive content. In *Salome with the Head of John the Baptist* '[a]ll three figures seem paradoxically to distance themselves from the scene and to solicit the pity and sympathy of the viewer in the face of such a pointless and cruel deed',³⁶ but more precise thoughts and emotions are hard to articulate.³⁷ One is conscious, though, of grasping for their content. *The Death of the Virgin* places Mary amongst the poor of Rome and, in so doing, Caravaggio 'has turned his back not only on Mannerism, but also on the whole of the High Renaissance. He has gone back to the beginning. He has asked himself what these poor people really looked like in their bereavement'.³⁸ The work does not elicit joyful celebration at the ascension of Mary to Heaven; there is something darker and, again, harder to articulate. There are no angels to accompany her, no swirling clouds...there is, perhaps, a sense that she is going nowhere: 'nothing in

the desolate chamber suggests that anything will happen next'.³⁹ Again we are asked to attempt to articulate the complex cognitive content of the mourners—to feel the profound human emotions depicted.

Bernard Berenson notes of Renaissance nudes that 'taughtnesses of muscle and those stretchings and relaxings and rippings of skin which, translated into similar strains on our own persons, make us fully realise movement',⁴⁰ and I have shown how such low-level empathetic phenomena occur when viewing the works of Caravaggio. Recently, cognitive scientists have found that mirror neurons play a role in low-level empathy, when, for example, one tenses as those around you tense. Before their discovery, the standard neuroscientific account was that there were separate parts of the brain for perception and action, and associate areas that coordinated the two. The motor cortex, that responsible for muscle movement and action, was 'considered to be the arrival point for the sensorial information processed by the associative areas, totally devoid of any perceptive or cognitive role'.⁴¹ Mirror neurons, though, are both motor neurons *and* perceptual neurons. The same neurons that are involved in the perception of the tensing of another's muscles also play a motor role in causing one's own muscles to tense. Greg Currie suggests the same mechanisms may be involved when viewing art, and this is plausible, given the direct, visceral responses we can have to it.⁴² Cognitive science can also, perhaps, illuminate our high-level empathetic engagement with such works. Human beings have a spontaneous tendency to project emotion and inwardness onto each other, and onto the figures we see in artworks,⁴³ even where there are minimal painted details of body and physiognomy. In *The Death of the Virgin*, the face of Mary Magdalene is concealed, but we nevertheless feel her pain and, in some measure, grasp her thoughts. This is mere 'empathetic projection to be sure, but try to rein it in'.⁴⁴ Of relevance here are debates concerning how we ascribe mental states to others, and whether this is through simulation or theory.⁴⁵ These suggestions are not meant to suggest a scientific reduction of art to neuroscience.⁴⁶ We will not discover the key to Caravaggio's art in the laboratory, but rather in the careful study of the historical, religious and sociological context in which it was created, in perhaps biographical details of the artist, and, of course, through looking at the paintings. Neuroscience may, however, be able to explain some of the mechanisms by which the art has the effect it does on viewers.

The contagious effect of low-level empathy is passive—it just happens to us—as is, to some extent, our second-person engagement with Bacchus or the lute player. Here, though, with respect to projection, we have started to look at more active forms of empathy. In *The Crowning with Thorns* a

deeper form of empathy is suggested: the man in armour is transfixed by Christ, his hand inching towards him: ‘in the grip of an impulse toward identification’ with Christ.⁴⁷ He wants more than to feel the kind of pains felt by Christ—he wants to know what it’s like *for Christ* to feel such pains. This painting is a depiction of the attempt to feel such deep empathy, but the works can also elicit such imitation on the part of the viewer and, in the next section, I shall go on to suggest, following Michael Fried, that a range of Caravaggio’s paintings involve the viewer identifying with the artist.⁴⁸

3. Empathy with the Artist

Caravaggio’s paintings evoke their relationship to the painter in various ways.⁴⁹ First, Caravaggio includes recognizable self-portraits in various paintings. He holds a lantern in *The Taking of Christ*, and he appears as a spectator in the *Raising of Lazarus* and *The Martyrdom of St Ursula*, amongst others.⁵⁰ Second, Fried has argued that a range of Caravaggio’s works are disguised self-portraits of the artist in the act of painting, with swords, violins and glasses of wine acting as ersatz palettes and brushes. He came to this conclusion by noticing structural parallels between *Boy Bitten by a Lizard* and mirror-reversed self-portraits such as Matisse’s of 1918,⁵¹ those where the artist paints the image they see of themselves (in the act of painting) that is reflected in a mirror at right angles to their canvas.⁵² The raised hand on the right of *Boy Bitten* (the depicted figure’s left hand) is a representation of the artist’s right hand reflected onto the right side of the mirror. This is a reading that can meet resistance, but I have come to find it persuasive. On working through Fried’s explanation, alongside reproductions of the paintings, I was hit with a jolt—finding myself staring Caravaggio in the eye! For Fried, this ‘deep structure’ is prevalent across Caravaggio’s works. Bacchus’s wine glass, held out to the viewer, is his brush hand in the act of painting—an interpretation supported by a tiny painted reflection in the glass of an artist at his easel. The angel in *Rest on the Flight to Egypt* is the artist, the violin bow his brush.⁵³ Consonant with this interpretation, it is no coincidence that the right-hand side of this painting is where the more ‘bravura’ passages of paint are located, painted, as it were, by the angel/artist and their violin bow/brush. At times, though, Fried’s interpretation is not so persuasive: he suggests that the archer is the artist in *The Martyrdom of St Ursula* (Caravaggio thus appearing both as the archer and as himself, peering over Ursula’s shoulder), and that Judas’s kiss in *The Taking* is playing the same self-referential role. At the very least, Fried is—in his own lovely phrase—

'interpreting at full stretch here'.⁵⁴ This does not, though, undermine his hypothesis. It is still a striking claim about *some* of the paintings, even if not as many of the paintings can (or should) be interpreted in this way.

Interpreters highlight Caravaggio's focus on the fleeting moment—the intense raking light, that of a flashbulb: 'This instant is seized the way a snapshot instantaneously captures a flash of a second. In other words the action is immobilized and made into a statue'.⁵⁵ It is undeniable that at times this occurs—the *Boy Bitten* a clear case—but we should resist thinking of all his works in this way. Some convey movement and thus extended time: Christ writhes before us in *The Flagellation*. Bacchus's wine is extended to the viewer, ripples lapping in the glass and—an exquisite detail—the glass has just been filled since the wine in the carafe continues to slosh, as indicated by its deviation from the horizontal.⁵⁶ There are also scenes where the empathetic relations are too complex to be communicated in a flash. This is particularly so in the later, more intense works.

The central theme of Fried's *The Moment of Caravaggio* is the temporal tension at the heart of these paintings. *Boy Bitten*, for example, should be seen as capturing two distinct time-frames or 'moments'. One, the 'immersive moment' in which the artist (the boy) engages in the careful act of painting, and, most vivid here—triggered, as it were, by the bite of the lizard—the 'specular moment', or point of detachment, where the artist pulls away and the work emerges as an autonomous, complete object: 'Caravaggio...finds himself compelled to dramatize the very shock of separation and withdrawal from the representation'.⁵⁷ The claim is that:

such a double or divided relationship between painter and painting—at once immersive and specular, continuous and discontinuous, prior to the act of viewing and thematizing that act with unprecedented violence—lies at the core of much of Caravaggio's art.⁵⁸

Both moments involve embodied actions—those of painting and withdrawal—and, I argue, one can *feel* their presence in oneself as one views the works.

4. Spaces Sacred and Profane

The theatricality of Caravaggio's large religious works is well-suited to Church interiors, and it is for this reason he secured highly prestigious contracts in Rome (from 1600), and later in Naples (from 1606), Malta (from 1607) and Sicily (1609–10). His first was for the *St Matthew* paintings in the Contarelli Chapel in San Luigi dei Francesi.⁵⁹ This commission was Caravaggio's breakthrough. 1600 was a jubilee year in Rome and more than a million pilgrims visited, many of them seeing Caravaggio's first large religious works. They were a sensation.⁶⁰ Spotlighting and chiaroscuro is more dramatic in dark spaces, the edges of the paintings dissolving into the darkness of the walls upon which they are hung, figures standing out as if standing among the congregation. *The Entombment* hung (and a copy still hangs today) above the altar of Chiesa Nuova in Rome and thus, in the Mass, we see the dead Christ being lowered before our eyes into the tomb, just as the 'body' of Christ in the form of the Host is raised above the altar.⁶¹

There are, though, as we have seen, other kinds of paintings in Caravaggio's oeuvre, those not intended to play a role in religious devotion. We can turn to these by considering one of Caravaggio's seeming obsessions—severed heads and decapitations. There are three paintings of the detached head of Goliath, three of John the Baptist, one each of Holofernes and Medusa, and radiography shows that Lucy's head was originally severed in *The Burial of St Lucy* before he rethought the composition.⁶² Such decapitation is, Fried argues, a further manifestation of the specular moment—the ultimate excision, as it were—not just representing the artist's completion of the particular work, but 'the decisive emergence or coming into prominence of a new artistic and artefactual entity (a new medium of painting)', this medium being the gallery picture.⁶³ These were intended for a new class of spectator, and for one world in which Caravaggio was immersed (along, of course, with his usual haunts of bars and brothels). Caravaggio's patron in Rome was Cardinal Francesco Maria Del Monte, a mover in cultivated, erudite and wealthy circles, employed by the Medici and friends with Galileo. Caravaggio moved to his palace, Palazzo Madama, in 1595 and Del Monte set up the Contarelli Chapel commission and encouraged his friends and associates to buy the smaller works. Paintings were displayed in the long galleries of palaces, a far-cry from the dark devotional spaces of the city's churches, and without the altar and devotional chapels as centres of focus, the works needed to have *that something* to catch and hold the attention of these Renaissance Romans.⁶⁴ Caravaggio's smaller works had just this something: there were the eyes of boys to catch, glasses of wine to accept, beheadings to transfix the viewer, and details to contemplate—a reed, for example, held impossibly lightly.

I have, then, considered various forms of empathy elicited by Caravaggio's naturalistic rendering of the body, and how these contribute to one's aesthetic and epistemic responses to his art in the context of worship and in the secular context of the gallery. His subjects and the world within which they live are present to the viewer and we are drawn to empathize with their feelings, emotions and thoughts. Further, Caravaggio himself is manifest in his works in complex ways. There is, it should be noted, a certain modernist flavour to the self-referential nature of these works that could seem to be in tension with Caravaggio's naturalism. Look closely at *Bacchus*, for example, and you will see his suntanned hands and dirty fingernails. This is no god, this is a Roman youth dressed up, on a scruffy mattress hastily covered with a white sheet, and it is clearly intentional that the picture be seen in this way. This, one could suppose, supports the interpretation that the subject of these paintings is not (at least not only) Bacchus, but the act of Caravaggio painting his friend Mario Minniti as Bacchus. The experience of being addressed by Bacchus/Caravaggio/Mario is dizzying.

A distinct form of empathetic engagement with another involves joint attention. A badminton player is aware of the flight of the shuttlecock and she is also aware that her opponent is tracking this object in the same way as her. They jointly attend to the shuttlecock, and in sports arenas many people are jointly aware of the action—watching the game *together*. Such joint attention plays an important role in child development, from early parent-child relations involving pointing and gaze-following, through more sophisticated awareness of attention in social relations, ultimately to the ability to infer the thoughts of others from their behaviour.⁶⁵ Such a phenomenon is also manifest in those viewing paintings. We approach *The Flagellation together* down the long gallery, and we wait, *together*, with baited breath as the next euro is dropped in the box to illuminate the Contarelli Chapel where the *St Matthew* paintings have hung since 1600. We are not only aware of the paintings, we are aware of looking at the paintings with others, and, as we leave the gallery or church, enriched by the dizzying density of empathetic relations that the paintings have drawn from us, we jostle past others in the streets of Rome or Naples, our bodies inhabited by those low and high-level empathetic relations we have had, a few moments before, with the depicted Christ and his entourage, the poor of Trastevere who posed for the artist under the skylight 400 years ago, and Caravaggio himself.⁶⁶

Notes

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- ¹ Caravaggio (1607), *The Flagellation of Christ* [oil on canvas], Museo di Capodimonte, Naples.
- ² S. Blackburn, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 3rd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 152.
- ³ See J. Shearman, *Mannerism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967).
- ⁴ M. Fried, *After Caravaggio* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), p. 1.
- ⁵ G. Bellori, *Le vite de' pittori, scultori e architetti moderni* (Turin: EVELINA Borea, 1672 [1976]), p. 202. [Translation here by Howard Hibbard in *Caravaggio* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), p. 362.]
- ⁶ For detailed discussion of Caravaggism, see Fried, *After Caravaggio*; L. Treves, *Beyond Caravaggio* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016); B. Nicolson, *Caravaggism in Europe*, Revised edition, (London: Umberto Allemandi, 1989); A. Zuccari, *I Caravaggeschi. The Caravaggesque Painters. A Catalogue of the Artists and Works* (Skira Editore, 2010); B. Ebert and L. Helmus, *Utrecht, Caravaggio and Europe* (Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2019).
- ⁷ Caravaggio (1601), *Supper at Emmaus* [oil on canvas], National Gallery, London. See Treves, *Beyond Caravaggio*, p. 60.
- ⁸ Caravaggio (1602), *The Inspiration of St Matthew* [oil on canvas], Contarelli Chapel, San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome.
- ⁹ Caravaggio (1603–4), *The Entombment of Christ* [oil on canvas], Pinacoteca Vaticana, Vatican City. Such prominent display of this cornerstone is a reference to Psalms (118: 22) and to Christ: ‘The stone which the builders rejected, has become the chief cornerstone’. Below the stone is death; above, salvation—Christ’s white burial shroud a lifeline between the two realms, bringing a plant it touches back to life. A more abstract portrayal of the same theme is *Still Life with Fruit on a Stone Ledge* ([oil on canvas], Private collection, 1603). See J. Spike, *Caravaggio* (New York: Abbeville, 2001).
- ¹⁰ M. Fried, *The Moment of Caravaggio* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 215. Caravaggio (1602), *The Taking of Christ* [oil on canvas], National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin.
- ¹¹ Treves, *Beyond Caravaggio*, p. 66.
- ¹² See E. Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 108–28.
- ¹³ Caravaggio (1595), *Boy Bitten by a Lizard* [oil on canvas], National Gallery, London; (1596), *The Lute Player* [oil on canvas], Hermitage, St Petersburg; (1596–7), *Bacchus* [oil on canvas], Uffizi, Florence. Ribera’s saint even more searchingly stares out at us in his *Martyrdom of St Bartholomew* ([oil on canvas], MNAC, Barcelona, 1634) (X. Bray and E. Payne, *Ribera: Art of Violence*, London: D. Giles, Ltd., 2018, p. 62).
- ¹⁴ Our confrontation with such embodied thought is in tension with Cartesian dualism and Descartes’ claim that the mind is entirely distinct from the body. Fried (*The Moment*, p. 130) thus suggests that ‘it is as if

Descartes' arguments for mind-body dualism 'were designed to counter the radically other vision of human subjectivity as fundamentally and inextricably embodied that lies at the heart of the Caravaggesques' collective achievement'. It is not entirely clear what Fried has in mind here. The claim is not that Descartes is reacting to these paintings in particular, but to the 'larger, more collective vision' of which, presumably, the paintings are a manifestation. But what exactly is this vision? Further, Fried suggests that Descartes' account of the mind 'resonates' with the embodied minds of Caravaggio's figures in that, contrary to the received view, Descartes takes various aspects of the mind, such as sensation and imagination, to depend on the body. Various writers have stressed this more nuanced interpretation of Descartes' dualism, but this would seem to be in sympathy with an embodied account of subjectivity and not counter to it (as Fried first claimed).

¹⁵ S. Freedberg, *Circa 1600: A Revolution of Style in Italian Painting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 59.

¹⁶ For the influence of Lombard painters, see W. Friedlaender, *Caravaggio Studies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955).

¹⁷ A. Coplan and P. Goldie, *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) is a useful anthology on empathy and its relevance to debates in contemporary psychology, cognitive science and philosophy of mind.

¹⁸ D. Hume, *Letters of David Hume*, 2 volumes, ed. J.Y.T. Greig (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932), vol. 1, p. 313.

¹⁹ It is important to distinguish empathy and sympathy, the former being the mechanism by which we come to understand and share the mental states of others, whereas the latter is an affective response to the suffering of others, what we might call pity or compassion. 'Empathy' is a surprisingly recent addition to English: it is an early twentieth-century translation of the nineteenth-century German word 'Einfühlung', used in aesthetics to refer to when works of art elicit emotion in the viewer.

²⁰ J. Ribera (1635), *The Trinity* [oil on canvas], Prado, Madrid.

²¹ Treves, *Beyond Caravaggio*, p. 119.

²² J. Portus, *Ribera* (Barcelona: Poligrafa, 2011), p. 84.

²³ Caravaggio (1602–3), *The Crowning with Thorns* [oil on canvas], Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

²⁴ Fried, *Moment*, p. 90.

²⁵ Caravaggio (1601–2), *Victorious Cupid* [oil on canvas], Gemäldegalerie Staatliche Museen, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin-Dahlem.

²⁶ Fried, *Moment*, pp. 42, 166.

²⁷ By 'cognitive' I refer to mental states or thoughts that are conceptually structured, the understanding of which requires we talk in terms of what they are about or what they are directed at. Non-cognitive feelings, in contrast, are mere feelings, characterized by descriptions of what it is like to experience them.

²⁸ Fried, *Moment*, p. 210.

²⁹ S. Schutze, *Caravaggio: The Complete Works* (Cologne: Taschen, 2015), p. 154.

³⁰ F. Domenech, *The Paintings of Ribalta 1565–1628* (New York: Spanish Institute Inc., 1988), pp. 44–5.

³¹ F. Ribalta (1625), *Christ Embracing St. Bernard* [oil on canvas], Museo del Prado, Madrid.

³² This painting is explored in D. O'Brien, 'Art, Empathy and the Divine', *Heythrop Journal* (2019; Early view: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/heyj.13054>) where it is argued that religious art can reconfigure our conception of God's omniscience. This should be seen in terms of divine understanding, empathy and love, instead of in the kinds of terms used in contemporary analytic philosophy of religion. Anthony Kenny defines omniscience as the 'doctrine that, for all p , if p , then God knows that p ' (*The God of the Philosophers*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979, p. 10). In Ribalta's *St. Bernard*, however, we see an all-knowing Christ, but his is not an omniscience happily characterized by the claim that 'if p , Christ knows that p '. Also see D. O'Brien, 'God's Knowledge of Other Minds', *European Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 5(1) (2013), pp. 17–34.

³³ For discussion of joint-presence, see E. Stump, 'Omnipresence, Indwelling, and the Second-Personal', *European Journal for the Philosophy of Religion*, 5(4) (2013), pp. 29–53, p. 41.

³⁴ Spike, *Caravaggio*, pp. 116–18.

³⁵ Schutze, *Caravaggio*, p. 220.

³⁶ Schutze, *Caravaggio*, p. 218.

³⁷ Caravaggio (1608), *Salome with the Head of St John the Baptist* [oil on canvas], National Gallery, London.

³⁸ Caravaggio (1606), *The Death of the Virgin* [oil on canvas], Louvre, Paris. R. Hinks, *The Death of the Virgin*, Charlton Lectures on Art, no. 35 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 78. It seems, though, they were too poor. This painting was rejected by the Carmelite Fathers of Santa Maria della Scala as it did not portray Mary with the requisite gravitas. It has been suggested that the model for her was a local prostitute who had drowned in the Tiber (hence the distended stomach).

³⁹ Spike, *Caravaggio*, p. 155.

⁴⁰ B. Berenson, *The Florentine Painters of the Renaissance* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1896), pp. 86–7.

⁴¹ G. Rizzolatti and C. Sinigaglia, *Mirrors in the Brain—How our Minds Share Actions and Emotions*, translated by Frances Anderson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 8.

⁴² G. Currie, 'Empathy for Objects' in Coplan and Goldie, *Empathy*, pp. 82–95, pp. 86–7. G. Scholl, 'Pictures of Pain: Their Contribution to the Neuroscience of Empathy', *Brain* 138(3) (2015) pp. 812–20, reviews the scientific evidence for this claim. For an up-to-date overview of what has come to be called neuroaesthetics, see J. Huston, M. Nadal, F. Mora, L. Agnati, and C. Conde, *Art, Aesthetics and the Brain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁴³ Fried, *Moment*, p. 77.

⁴⁴ Fried, *After Caravaggio*, p. 46.

⁴⁵ See A. Goldman, *Simulating Minds: The Philosophy, Psychology, and Neuroscience of Mindreading* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2006).

⁴⁶ For criticism of this kind of project, see J. Hyman, 'Art and Neuroscience' in R. Frigg and M. Hunter (eds.), *Beyond Mimesis and Convention* (Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science, 2010), pp. 245–61.

⁴⁷ Fried, *Moment*, p. 95.

⁴⁸ Fried, *Moment*.

⁴⁹ J. Robinson, 'The Missing Person Found. Part II: Feelings for Pictures', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 57(4) (2017), pp. 349–67 argues that viewers empathize with an artist's emotional perspective. We feel *with* the artist, and in doing so we go beyond a purely cognitive understanding of the works. This raises questions concerning Caravaggio's sexuality and his piety, questions concerning his feelings towards his models and the figures he painted, and those towards the Biblical episodes he portrays. I shall not consider these controversial issues here.

⁵⁰ Caravaggio (1609), *The Raising of Lazarus* [oil on canvas], Museo Regionale, Messina; (1610), *The Martyrdom of St Ursula* [oil on canvas], Palazzo Zevallos Stigliano, Naples.

⁵¹ H. Matisse (1918), *Self-Portrait* [oil on canvas], Matisse Museum, Le Cateau.

⁵² For recent work on the Renaissance use of optical aids in painting, such as mirrors and camera obscura, see D. Hockney, *Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old Masters* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006) and C. Whitfield, *Caravaggio's Eye* (London: Paul Holberton, 2011).

⁵³ Caravaggio (1595–6), *Rest on the Flight to Egypt* [oil on canvas], Galleria Doria Pamphilj, Rome.

The large eye of a donkey looks out from behind Joseph. There's something unsettling about this. This is not an eye that addresses the viewer, and it's not clear that one has a second-person response to it. This, I suggest, is not merely because it's an animal and not a human being, but perhaps because the sentience suggested here is playing a different role. I was struck by what John Berger says about the still eyes in Velasquez's portraits of court 'buffoons' (dwarves, jesters): 'They simply find themselves—after the laughter—beyond the transient. Juan the Pumpkin's still eyes look at the parade of life and at us through a peephole from eternity' (J. Berger, *Portraits: John Berger on Artists*, London: Verso, 2017, p. 136). There is something of this in the eye of the donkey. The donkey does not have a particular point of view, with which we can empathize; the large eye, rather, embodies what Thomas Nagel (*The View from Nowhere*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) calls the view from nowhere or, perhaps appropriate in the context of this painting, the God's eye view.

⁵⁴ Fried, *Moment*, p. 54.

⁵⁵ L. Marin, *To Destroy Painting* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago & London, 1995), p. 161.

⁵⁶ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, p. 40.

⁵⁷ Fried, *Moment*, p. 45.

⁵⁸ Fried, *Moment*, p. 39. There is no need, of course, to take this as the *only* subject of the paintings. There are layers of meaning and a range of further interpretations. *Boy Bitten* has been seen as an allegory of the sense of touch, a warning of the perils of love, a vanitas (the rose representing the transience of life and beauty), and a study of extreme expression (in the tradition of Leonardo) (see R. Spear, 'The Critical Fortune of a Realist Painter'. *The Age of Caravaggio* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, 1985), pp. 22–7). I suggest there are also similarities with respect to the position of Christ's hands in Michelangelo's *The Last Judgment* (above, this pose was suggested by Spike as a model for *The Supper at Emmaus*). Caravaggio has a complex relationship with Michelangelo. Elsewhere he is quoted: Christ's limp hand in *The Calling of St Matthew*, for example, refers to Adam's hand in the 'Creation of Adam' on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. It's also been suggested, though, that Caravaggio's quotation of the latter's work is at times mocking (Friedlaender, *Caravaggio*, p. 91). Could the pose in *Boy Bitten* also be a mischievous reference to *The Last Judgment*?

⁵⁹ Caravaggio (1599–1600), *The Martyrdom of St Matthew*, *The Calling of St. Matthew*, *The Inspiration of St Matthew* [oil on canvas], Contarelli Chapel, San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome.

⁶⁰ Spike, *Caravaggio*, p. 92.

⁶¹ Schutze, *Caravaggio*, p. 121.

⁶² Caravaggio (1608), *The Burial of St Lucy* [oil on canvas], Chiesa de Santa Lucia alla Badia, Syracuse. Spike, *Caravaggio*, p. 217.

⁶³ Ribera's depictions of pain are even more extreme than those of Caravaggio, and he too has a ghoulish obsession, that of flayed skin. He painted St Bartholomew and Marsyas multiple times, both of whom were skinned alive. Fried (*After Caravaggio*, p. 207, fn.7) notes Hannah Friedman's suggestion that Ribera identifies skin with the canvas of the painting, and this complements his specular interpretation. The suggested parallel between these two 'skins' was further explored in the recent *Ribera: Art of Violence* exhibition in Dulwich: 'The split in Marsyas' canvas skin turns the painting into a commentary on the medium of painting itself, as it underscores the proximity between the refinement of the painted surface and the rawness of its reverse' (Bray and Payne, *Ribera*, p. 140).

⁶⁴ Given Del Monte's interest in the new science and his friendship with Galileo, it's not too fanciful to see the *Crucifixion of St Peter* ([oil on canvas], Cerasi Chapel, Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome, 1601) as influenced by discussion of the mechanics of fulcrums and levers (Spike, *Caravaggio*, pp. 106–9).

⁶⁵ For philosophical, psychological and neurophysiological aspects of joint attention, see N. Eilan, C. Hoerl, T. McCormack, J. Roesler (eds.), *Joint Attention: Communication and Other Minds: Issues in Philosophy and Psychology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005) and A. Seeman (ed.) *Joint Attention: New Developments in Psychology, Philosophy of Mind, and Social Neuroscience* (Cambridge, MA: MIT press, 2011).

⁶⁶ For the claim that art can build our capacity for empathy with others, see D. Lopes, 'An Empathetic Eye' in Coplan and Goldie, *Empathy*, pp. 118–33.