THE effeminate nature of the youths in Caravaggio’s half-length representations of figures with fruits, flowers, or musical instruments has frequently been remarked. Two youths, the Borghese fruit-vendor and the Hermitage lutenist (Figs. 2, 4), have at times even been thought to be girls, and the sex of the latter remains in fact a subject of debate in the Caravaggio literature.¹ But the sexual ambiguity of all these figures is generally disregarded after an initial comment, and the pictures are most often discussed in terms of their “plastic values.” Some authors, however, have attempted to explain the ambiguity away on formalistic or else biographical grounds. Longhi, “to forestall or confute distortions of interpretation,” discussed the matter and proposed that the adolescent, impoverished Caravaggio, unable to pay for models, used the free services of friends his own age, and, he explained, “given that particular age,”² there is “nothing to conjecture about concerning the naturally ambiguous appearance of the Bacchus or the Lute Player”³ (Figs. 4, 7). Friedlaender, taking a different approach, saw in the master’s early works evidence of a “slightly depraved” personality,⁴ but he did not investigate it further. Only a few writers have implied or suggested that this aspect of the paintings might be important for understanding them.⁵ The suggestion was given real substance, though, by Francis Haskell, who called attention to the apparent relationship between some of Caravaggio’s early pictures and the licentious life of the artist’s early patron, Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte.⁶ Following Haskell, Michael Kitson has declared that these paintings were made “by an artist of homosexual inclinations for patrons of similar tastes.”⁷
The nature of Caravaggio’s sexual tastes can hardly be questioned. His sudden departure from Messina in 1609 is reported to have been precipitated by his unnatural interest in watching schoolboys at play.⁹ Earlier, in 1603, Tommaso Salini gave court testimony in which he mentioned a certain Giovanni Battista, whom he described as a bardassia shared by Caravaggio and his friend Onorio Longhi.¹⁰ These reports refer to times later than the pictures that concern us here, but the pictures themselves, with their fleshy, full-lipped, languorous young boys, assure us that Caravaggio’s homosexual inclinations existed earlier. The critical question presented by these early paintings, however, is whether their homosexual content is merely a reflection of the artist’s erotic ideals and an incidental attraction for his audience or is expressively purposeful.¹⁰a The boys who appear in Caravaggio’s Fortune Teller and Calling of St. Matthew, or the angel violinist in his Rest on the Flight to Egypt—suspiciously sensuous and curvaceous for a supposedly asexual and grammatically masculine creature—might also be said to reveal the pederastic propensities of their creator, and they have probably always had a special appeal for certain spectators. But, needless to say, the contexts in which these figures appear make it plain that their sexual character does not determine or in any way explain the essential meaning of the pictures. In the case of Caravaggio’s half-length compositions of youths with still-life elements, however, I believe we are forced to recognize the androgynous character of the figures as central to the artist’s intended aesthetic statement. For in these works not only the types, but also the presentation, action, and significant details, are redolent of homo-erotic content.

Caravaggio’s youths do not merely address themselves to the spectator—they solicit him. Bacchus, in the Uffizi (Fig. 7), does so with uninhibited openness and unmistakable intent. Holding the spectator with his languorous gaze, he proffers a glass of wine. In the foreground is a basket of tempting fruits. Bacchus is already half-undressed, and with his right hand he begins to loosen the knot of the sash around his waist. The picture urges orgiastic surrender to the delights of the senses. Its bacchic imagery is of course entirely appropriate for a general invitation to sensual pleasure, and one imagines that the people who first enjoyed the painting found this imagery specially opposite in terms of a narrower homosexual focus. They would certainly have known such characterizations of Bacchus as Ovid’s, where Bacchus appears as an effeminate boy, “whose weapons are scented locks, soft garlands . . . ;”
or one of the many references to Bacchus’ womanly nature in Cartari’s hand-
book of mythology, where the god is described, for instance, as “delicate, soft,
and rubicund of face.” Caravaggio’s initial audience very likely also knew
Nonnus’ story of how wine, “the earthly image of heavenly nectar,” owes its
origin to Bacchus’ love affair with the beardless, long-haired youth Ampelos. But I do not think that one should insist too much on possible learned allusions
in this picture. They are at best only poetic flourishes, and the painting
represents, after all, not so much Bacchus as a special “bacchic type.” Without
the vine wreath the identification as Bacchus would fade; the overfed,
cometized youth would, however, be just as depraved, his proposal would
be just as indecent, and the painting would surely be just as effective. The
Uffizi picture is in fact unique among the known, certain works of this kind by
Caravaggio in its overt use of classical allusion. It may be that because of the
outrageous directness of its lascivious statement the painting was thought to
need a mythological veil.

In the Metropolitan Museum’s Concert (Fig. 3), which Friedlander rightly
interpreted as an allegory of love and music, and in the Hermitage Lute
Player (Fig. 4), androgynous youths wear no disguise. With their soft mouths
open in a show of desire and in their suggestive state of dress and undress, they
clearly mean to tempt the spectator. Their seductive allure is appropriately
complemented by music. As Vasari explained in 1568, love is born of music,
and from music love never departs. In these pictures, though, the theme of
the musical performance also serves as the basis for a nice dramatic conceit.
Both paintings share one striking detail, a violin and bow at the front edge of
the picture. The neck of the violin faces outwards, toward the spectator. The
motif of the foreshortened instrument makes an attractive display of artistry,
but in context it also carries meaning. The point is plain—the boys in these
works are merely less obvious than Bacchus in making their solicitations. The
Hermitage lutenist invites the spectator to take up the violin and join him in
making “beautiful music.” The Metropolitan youths have not yet begun their
concert. They prepare: the lutenist tuning his instrument, the youth holding a
wind instrument pausing in his practice, the vocalist studying the score. All
wait for the spectator to pick up his instrument so that the music can begin.
Interestingly, the same dramatic idea is found, in a heterosexual context, in
works by Vermeer. In the Dutch master’s Lady at the Virginals in the National
Gallery, London, where a courtesan waits for the spectator to take up a viol
and join her in a musical harmony, a picture of a Procuress appears on the wall

303
as a marginal note on the theme of the painting. In Caravaggio’s Concert the naked youth at the left, once a winged amor with a quiver of arrows, plucks a bunch of grapes. The bacchic enticements of the “concert” are thus made clear.

The fruits and flowers placed alongside the Hermitage lutenist heighten the sensuous appeal of the representation, complementing the visual beauty of the youth and the sweet sounds of his music with the tempting suggestion of fragrant aromas and delicious flavors. It is possible that the specific fruits and flowers represented here were chosen to serve as a gloss on the sensuous theme of the picture. Without embarking on a discussion of the vast subject of flower and fruit symbolism, I might just note that flowers in general are commonly associated with luxuria or voluptas, that figs are a traditional symbol of lust, that pears, like apples, are fruits of Venus, and that cucumbers make an obvious sexual reference. We cannot be sure, however, to what extent Caravaggio intended specificity of meaning for his still-lifes. Probably, the flowers and fruits which are given special prominence were meant to carry symbolic weight, but the vases and baskets filled with an abundance of pretty and good things were primarily intended just to make a display that alludes to, as well as stimulates, the sensual appetite.

The painting in the Borghese Gallery (Fig. 2), which has come to be called the Fruit-Vendor, does not at first glance seem problematic. But a moment’s reflection is enough to convince one that the subject of the picture is no everyday green-grocer’s boy. His tousled hair and warm, impassioned gaze can hardly be meant to advertise vegetables. Nor can his shirt have slipped down by chance to reveal his smooth flesh and rounded shoulder. The boy is evidently offering himself; and the basket of fruit, a not uncommon symbol of “sexual gluttony,” represents the delectable pleasures that await the taker.

In the Boy Bitten by a Lizard (Fig. 8) the youth wears his shirt in the same seductive off-the-shoulder style as the Borghese boy, who might be taken to represent his slightly younger brother. The action in this painting is more complex than in Caravaggio’s comparable works, and the homosexual character of the figure is more pronounced than in any except the Bacchus. A lizard, which had been concealed among the fruits on the table, bites the finger of the youth who has reached for the delicacies in front of him. The boy starts back with understandable surprise. But what is remarkable is the squeamishness and effeminacy of his reaction. His hands do not tense with masculine vigor in response to the attack; they remain limp in a languid show
of helplessness. His facial expression suggests a womanish whimper rather than a virile shout. These details, like the precious manner in which Bacchus holds his wine glass—with crooked little finger—leave no doubt about the kind of youth Caravaggio represents. Nor does the boy’s elaborate coiffure, which, possibly corresponding to a queenly fashion of the time, recalls in a general way descriptions of Henri III’s *mignons*, who wore their hair “longuets, frisés et refrisés par artifice.”

It is often assumed that the curious action in this painting was designed merely as an excuse for the representation of violent facial and bodily expression. However, the picture evidently conveys a specific message: it tells us that unsuspected dangers lurk beneath beautiful appearances. Of course, this bit of worldly wisdom is about as astute as the saying “Every rose has its thorns.” But the illustration of this aphorism is here given a special, rather witty twist. The rose worn behind the ear is a traditional advertisement of amorous intent. The rose and cherries for which the youth reaches are a flower and a fruit dear to Venus. Clearly, then, the picture is about love. The lizard, emerging from the beguiling fruits, must allude to the disappointments of love, suggesting by its action the rejection of the youth’s overtures. Indeed, the cold-blooded lizard appears in sixteenth-century art and emblematic literature as a symbol of shyness or coolness in love. For instance, Louis Dominique, in his book of 1561 on military and amorous devices, explained that the lizard, unlike all other animals, never falls in love; therefore it figures, with the motto “Quod Huic Deest Me Torquet,” as the device of Frederico Gonzaga. In Lorenzo Lotto’s beautiful, melancholy *Portrait of a Young Man* in the Accademia in Venice, the mood of the picture is explained by the objects strewn on a table: a letter, a ring, the fallen petals of a rose, and a lizard—a love affair ended. In Garofalo’s allegory, *Amor—Pulchritudo—Voluptas*, the lizard appears as the temperamental opposite of the libidinous goat. What Caravaggio’s picture says, then, is that beauty sometimes conceals a cold heart, and that the young lover will find this a painful discovery. It is interesting that the youth looks, not, as one might expect, at his injured finger, but at the spectator. Is it not the spectator who is accused of being the unfeeling, cold-hearted tempter?

The novelty of the works by Caravaggio I have been discussing is their homo-erotic content, not their pictorial typology nor even their fundamental relationship to reality. Representations of one or more half-length figures, of
lutenists, musical parties, figures with fruits or flowers or malicious little animals (Fig. 12)—all can be found in Italian painting before Caravaggio, mainly in Giorgionesque and related pictures. However, the figures and happenings in Caravaggio’s works diverge sufficiently from those in earlier (and later) paintings to make them seem eccentric products of an otherwise familiar tradition of genre painting. The Concert (Fig. 3), for example, is remarkable (although not unique) for containing only male figures; still more remarkable is the costume of the players in it, whether we wish to interpret them as plebeian or patrician musicians.27 Obviously, this is no everyday concert and these are no ordinary musicians. Yet, the representation is surely not without a firm connection to the real world. There is a contemporary report about a party given by Cardinal del Monte (for whom the Concert was painted) at which young boys, dressed as women, entertained the company with music and dance.28 I am not suggesting, of course, that the appearance of those boys corresponded to what we see in Caravaggio’s picture. But, just as many Giorgionesque works represent an imagined everyday reality, often nostalgic and evoking an idyllic life of the past, so Caravaggio’s painted images must correspond closely at least to the fantasy, and perhaps the sometimes real, life of his patrons. In this connection it is significant that the boys he shows wear everyday shirts,29 but in a way—tied about with a sash, open and pulled off one shoulder, or partly covered by drapery—that suggests all’antica costume. The clothing thus denotes a present time while evoking what we might call a “Platonic” past.

Caravaggio’s homosexual proclivities and a market of people like del Monte,30 who appreciated and were willing to support the artist’s excursion into a new realm of visual content, were necessary conditions for the creation and development of these early works. However, the pictures are only special variants of a familiar north Italian genre type that Caravaggio had produced still earlier in his Roman career. The lost Boy Peeling Fruit, known from four copies, is generally conceded, on grounds of style, to be the earliest of Caravaggio’s paintings for which we have visual evidence (Fig. 1).31 In itself the picture presents no special problems and, while its poetic originality should not be overlooked, it fits quite nicely into the company of such naturalistic representations of everyday activities as Bassano’s Boy Blowing on a Firebrand or Annibale Carracci’s Boy Drinking.32 Caravaggio’s delicate young boy is charming, and the mood of the painting is sweetly lyrical, recalling the tenor of images like Giorgione’s Boy with a Flute at Hampton Court, but there is
certainly nothing specifically erotic about it. The question of whether Caravaggio introduced this kind of naturalistic genre painting into the Roman art world need not concern us here. 33 Whether it was a novelty in the city or not, for a time he had no great success with it. It was only after a perspicacious art dealer brought Caravaggio to the attention of Cardinal del Monte that the artist’s fortunes changed. But by that time the character of his half-length representations had changed, too.

The transition from the winsome appearance of the boy peeling fruit to the seductive allure of the boy holding a fruit basket (Fig. 2) must have been a very natural one. In works, now lost, that surely preceded the Fruit-Vendor, Caravaggio intuitively settled on poses, chose accessories, and emphasized physical qualities that appealed to his own erotic fancy. The Fruit-Vendor is a picture in which homosexual content has become overt, but with what seems an almost innocent spontaneity. The paintings that follow it are, in contrast, characterized by a calculated, even sly, air of sophistication.

According to Baglione, the art dealer Valentino took some of Caravaggio’s paintings and showed them to Cardinal del Monte. 34 We don’t know what paintings these were or whether they were religious or genre subjects; it is tempting to imagine that works like the Fruit-Vendor were among them. But whatever kind of painting by Caravaggio first impressed the cardinal, it was certainly not long before he and his circle recognized the special qualities of the master’s half-length portrayals of youths. Del Monte commissioned for himself the Concert and the Lute Player (Figs. 3, 4). These works reflect the new world of experience that the painter now enjoyed through his association with del Monte. It is a refined world, scented and musical, knowing and deliberate about its pleasures. The boys in these pictures, in contrast to the fruit-vendor, are no mere street-urchins. They are pampered mignons accustomed to the luxuries and delights provided by a cultivated society.

It is probable that Caravaggio drew now on some pictorial prototypes that were especially relevant to his aims. An erotic genre of real or ideal portraits of courtesans was established in Italy and elsewhere in the sixteenth century. One thinks of Giulio Romano’s so-called Lady at her Toilet in the Pushkin Museum, and of representations of Flora Meretrix, 35 such as Titian’s Flora in the Uffizi—who, in a camiceia worn off one shoulder, 36 offers flowers much as Caravaggio’s Bacchus offers wine—or the Floras of Palma Vecchio (National Gallery, London) and Francesco Melzi (Hermitage). A striking parallel to Caravaggio’s half-length representations of youths is made by a School of Fontainebleau
painting of a courtesan in the guise of Flora, who has beside her a vase filled with flowers, including a large red lily (Fig. 3). The placement of the hands, as in Raphael’s Fornarina in the National Gallery in Rome, from which the pose and costume derive,\textsuperscript{37} conveys her meaning quite clearly. Presented as a half-length figure, seductively costumed, set against a neutral background, and complemented by a lovely still-life, she is different only in gender from Caravaggio’s boys. Caravaggio certainly knew, and may even have made, pictures of this general type,\textsuperscript{38} and they must have influenced the shape of his portrayals of boys.

Probably Caravaggio’s patron helped the artist to formulate the inventions of the paintings made for him. He may have made suggestions about costume and action, and it seems likely that del Monte would have been responsible for the initial decision about whether or not to give the now overpainted wings to the boy at the extreme left in the Concert.\textsuperscript{39} Caravaggio’s next pictures of this kind, the Bacchus and the Boy Bitten by a Lizard (Figs. 7, 8), reach a high level of sophistication. Carefully contrived to be aggressively provocative, they involve conceits and display a degree of wit that were obviously “programmed.” We do not know for whom these works were painted, but it is possible that the Bacchus was commissioned by del Monte and sent by him, as was Caravaggio’s Medusa, to Duke Ferdinando de’ Medici in Florence. Ferdinando, del Monte’s long-time friend, had himself, when he was a cardinal residing in Rome, earned a reputation for lascivious and dissolute living, and he was probably able to appreciate the special qualities of Caravaggio’s picture.\textsuperscript{40}

It seems to me obvious that the Bacchus is not a portrait of a real person, and that the physiognomy represents an ideal type based on special standards of beauty. This is not to say that Caravaggio did not paint from a model in this or in other cases; only that the much discussed question of whether he used friends or professional models or posed himself in front of a mirror is academic and cannot lead to substantial conclusions. Probably he used all methods sometime in the course of his early career. Admittedly, the boys Caravaggio represented in this period have a strong family resemblance. But the constant element in them is the formal ideal. The actual model was most likely variable and, even if in many instances Caravaggio worked from his mirror image, the pictures can only in the most general way be considered “automorphic.” Certainly we must dismiss as fanciful the notion that they are physiognomically accurate self-portraits.\textsuperscript{41}
Fig. 1. After CARAVAGGIO, Boy Peeling Fruit
Royal Collection, Hampton Court

Fig. 2. CARAVAGGIO, Fruit-Vendor
Borghese Gallery, Rome

Fig. 3. CARAVAGGIO, Concert. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Fig. 4. Caravaggio, *Lute Player*. Hermitage, Leningrad

Fig. 5. School of Fontainebleau

*Lady of the Red Lily*. High Museum of Art, Atlanta
Fig. 6. Antinous. Villa Albani, Rome

Fig. 7. Caravaggio. Bacchus. Uffizi, Florence

Fig. 8. Caravaggio. Boy Bitten by a Lizard. Longhi Collection, Florence

Fig. 9. Imitator of Caravaggio. Boy with Flowers. High Museum of Art, Atlanta
Fig. 10. Follower of Caravaggio  
Boy Bitten by a Crayfish  
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Strasbourg

Fig. 11. Imitator of Caravaggio, Boy with Grapes  
Borghese Gallery, Rome

Fig. 12. After Sophonisba Anguisciola  
Child Bitten by a Crayfish. Musée Magnin, Dijon

Fig. 13. After Abraham Janssens  
Lascivia. Colored engraving
The fleshy but refined and regular features of Bacchus have reminded some authors of ancient sculpture, and representations of Antinous have been mentioned several times as a possible influence on Caravaggio. Little has come of the suggestion, though, because no known ancient portrayals of Antinous can positively be shown to have been used by Caravaggio. Yet, the possibility is worth considering, especially in the present context. For nothing would have been more natural than for Caravaggio's patrons to have directed his attention to representations of Hadrian's concubine, the beauteous boy from Bithynia who was very often shown in antiquity in the guise of Bacchus. The similarities in physique and physiognomy, in costume and hair-style, and even in "still-life" embellishments, between some of Caravaggio's youths and some portraits of Antinous are very close. Figure 6 illustrates the relief in the Villa Albani. Caravaggio could not have known this relief, which was only discovered in 1735, but some such image may well have helped him to clarify and refine his ideal of youthful beauty. The Bacchus contains the most polished and uncompromising statement of that ideal. But the shadow of Antinous also seems to have crossed the features of the lute player and the boy bitten by a lizard.

The chronological sequence that I have suggested for Caravaggio's early paintings of youths (Boy Peeling Fruit; Fruit-Vendor; Concert; Lute Player; Bacchus; Boy Bitten by a Lizard) can be defended on stylistic grounds. It is, in fact, very like the sequence proposed by Friedlaender. Arguments deduced from content and typology cannot, of course, prove that the Lute Player necessarily preceded the Bacchus and that it is not, as Friedlaender thought, a slightly later production. However, they do, to my mind, exclude the possibility of dating any of the last three works in my sequence before the Fruit-Vendor or the Concert, which clearly belong to the formative phase of Caravaggio's homo-erotic imagery. The question of absolute chronology cannot be dealt with properly except in the context of a discussion of all Caravaggio's early works, regardless of subject matter. But I might note here that recent discoveries by Röttgen and Zandri suggest that the last works of the group that concerns us are considerably later than is generally supposed, and that they probably date from as late as 1597/98. The pictures I have treated are in my opinion the only known works from what was probably a somewhat larger group of early paintings by Caravaggio with a primarily erotic and homosexual content. The problematic St. John
with a Ram, and the Amor Victorious are his only other known works with an obvious homosexual appeal. However, they belong to a later moment, between 1600 and 1602, and they are typologically and dramatically different from the works considered here. But two other pictures, which are closely related to the early works and which have been attributed to Caravaggio, remain to be discussed.

The painting in the Borghese Gallery of a boy crowned with ivy and holding a bunch of grapes (Fig. 11) was listed in the Borghese inventory of 1693 as a work by Caravaggio. It was later attributed successively to Lodovico Carracci, Tiarini, and Pietro Paolo Bonzi, but in 1927 Longhi reintroduced it as an early picture by Caravaggio. In doing so he remembered that the young artist had been hospitalized for a short time in Rome, and noting the rather sallow complexion of the boy in the painting he argued that the Borghese picture is a self-portrait made when Caravaggio was recuperating from malaria. Although the report about Caravaggio’s hospital stay that was written by the physician Mancini tells us that the artist had been kicked by a horse, Longhi’s ingenious theory has become popular and the picture is now generally called the “Sick Little Bacchus.” An alternate explanation of the painting has, however, been offered by Argan. He would relate it to a poem in Alciati’s Emblemata, where ivy is said to be an emblem of the poet and its color is treated as symbolic of the pallor poets acquire in their work. Argan believes, therefore, that poetical endeavor rather than malaria explains the boy’s flesh color, and he proposes in addition that the painting was programatically intended as an assertion of Venetian, Giorgionesque principles of art (“arte-elegia”) in opposition to a mannerist position (“istoria-elogio”). This seems farfetched, especially in view of the fact that the costume, fruits (the paired peaches symbolize the desired union of two “hearts”), and the provocative glance over the naked shoulder give the image a lascivious character that would hardly be in keeping with elegiac poetry or art-theory. It accords quite well, though, with the traditional identifications of the figure as a Bacchus or satyr. Indeed, the painting may be meant to symbolize “Lewdness” or “Lust,” which are represented in Cesare Ripa’s iconological handbook by a faun with a bunch of grapes and crown of rocket (erica). The plant prescribed by Ripa is an odd one for a wreath, and possibly it seemed so to the artist, too. Since ivy is mentioned by Ripa only a few pages earlier specifically as a symbol of lewdness, the artist could easily have felt justified in using the more familiar plant as a substitute for rocket.
My feeling is that rather too much attention has been given to the olive complexion of the figure in the Borghese picture, which seems not to have been thought noteworthy before Longhi’s publication. Insofar as it requires explanation, I believe it is the product, neither of malaria nor poetry, but of an unsuccessful attempt to give the boy a satyr-like coloration. This, of course, raises the question of the work’s quality and authenticity. The painting is awkward in construction, wooden in handling, and unpleasant in color. Its execution is more clumsy even than some of the copies of the Boy Peeling Fruit. Furthermore, the type and technique are very different from those in Caravaggio’s certain early pictures. Schudt and Voss doubted its attribution to Caravaggio, and Friedlaender expressed reservations about it. Theirs has remained a minority opinion, but it finds indirect support in the extreme proposals Arslan has found necessary in order to retain the picture in the corpus of Caravaggio’s works. Recognizing that the painting is stylistically incompatible with the master’s early Roman pictures, Arslan has argued, first, that it is an eighteenth-century copy (a view that is hardly tenable), and second (what seems a desperate and wholly unworkable remedy), that the original was painted around 1585, years before the artist settled in Rome and while he was still in Lombardy working under the tutelage of Peterzano.

The strongest argument in favor of the picture, and the reason, I suspect, that it has been so little questioned, has to do with its history. The painting is mentioned, along with the Fruit-Vendor, in the list of pictures owned by Cavaliere d’Arpino that were confiscated in 1607 by Paul V, who gave them to his nephew, Cardinal Scipione Borghese. It is described in that list, but, like all the other paintings, without indication of author. However, since Caravaggio is known to have worked for a time, early in his Roman career, in Arpino’s shop, the attribution of this picture has the deceptive appearance of being “documented.” In fact, most writers assume that this work and the Fruit-Vendor were either painted in Arpino’s shop or bought by Arpino from the impoverished young Caravaggio. Now the sequestration of 1607 consisted of over a hundred paintings, largely unframed, hardly any identifiable as Arpino’s own productions, and counting many genre subjects and still-lifes. Included in the group, it seems, was a St. Francis by Annibale Carracci that is now in the Borghese Gallery and that must have been painted by Annibale in Bologna about 1585. The whole lot was clearly the stock-in-trade of a picture dealer, an occupation that was apparently a secondary source of income for Arpino. Considering this, the probability that any painting by
Caravaggio that Arpino owned in 1607 had been acquired by him around 1595 is not very great. Years before 1607 Caravaggio had become famous and his pictures commanded high prices. In his capacity as a dealer Arpino would hardly have allowed an original work by the master to gather dust in his shop for ten years or more. We must assume that he acquired the Fruit-Vendor on the market shortly before the sequestration. Such considerations do not, of course, disprove the attribution of the Boy with Grapes. But since by the time of the sequestration copies and imitations (and forgeries?) of Caravaggio’s works must have been fairly plentiful on the market, the list of 1607 cannot be supposed to document the paternity of any Caravaggesque picture it mentioned (and Arpino owned several that cannot now be positively identified).  

There is, then, no compelling reason to include the Borghese Boy with Grapes among Caravaggio’s authentic paintings; and one consideration, I believe, forces its exclusion, at least as a production of the master’s own hand. The picture shows a degree of incompetence that can only be explained, if it is to be accepted as Caravaggio’s, by a very early date. Most writers do in fact place it at the beginning of Caravaggio’s Roman career, no later than the Fruit-Vendor. However, the pictorial type is one that Caravaggio did not develop until farther along in his career. The costume—the sash tied around a shirt that is worn off one shoulder—and the bacchic conceit itself do not appear before the time of the Concert (Fig. 3), and the aggressively provocative eroticism of the image (however unsuccessful) would even indicate a moment after the Concert. Such a date is plainly out of the question and so, therefore, is the attribution to Caravaggio.

It remains possible, of course, that we are dealing with a poor copy of a lost original by Caravaggio. It seems to me, though, that the stylistic distance that separates this picture from the melodious formulations of comparable works by the master is too great even for a copy. Furthermore, there is a poverty about the invention, limited as it is to two small bunches of grapes, two peaches, and a wide expanse of empty table, that is not at all like Caravaggio. It is as if the inventor of this picture did not want to make his work any more difficult than he had to. In my opinion, the Boy with Grapes is by a Caravaggio imitator of very modest abilities who aimed to satisfy the same kind of market that enjoyed the Uffizi Bacchus.

A painting of a boy with a vase of flowers owned by the High Museum in Atlanta (Fig. 9) is also by a rather inept hand. But in this case, although the attribution to Caravaggio has received a small measure of critical support,
scherly opinion is massively against it. Its mechanical handling and hard, metallic surfaces readily distinguish it from Caravaggio’s own paintings, and the question of authenticity need not be discussed further. But since it is plainly the work of an imitator, it is worth noting, in connection with my remarks about the Boy with Grapes, that this painting was possibly also one of the pictures confiscated from Arpino in 1607 and dubbed “Caravaggio” in the Borghese inventory of 1693. In any event, it is little more than a compositionally and dramatically simplified version of the Boy Bitten by a Lizard (Fig. 8). Standing beside a vase filled with roses, the youth touches the point of a thorn, not with the surprise of discovery, but by way of admonishing the spectator. The “moral” of the picture is essentially the same as Caravaggio’s, though its presentation is without the visual and narrative complexity, and without the erotic intimations, of Caravaggio’s masterpiece. One has the feeling that the author of this painting, setting out to produce a “new” Caravaggio, was a little puzzled and perhaps somewhat embarrassed by his chosen prototype. The effeminate features and the elaborate coiffure of the original are retained in slightly variant forms, but the compromising rose behind the ear is gone. The pose is approximately the same, but the nakedness of the figure is covered up. Clearly, this was an artist without much interest in the homosexual character of Caravaggio’s work, and who was at something of a loss to know just what to do with it.

The homo-eroticism of Caravaggio’s paintings is a quality that had “private” appeal, and it could not, by its nature, have enjoyed wide diffusion. Artists inspired by Caravaggio generally suppressed it and transformed the pictorial prototypes the master had established into more acceptable public images. Concert scenes by Manfredi, Valentin, and others, for instance, however bawdy, and even if they show only men, do not hint at “unnatural” pleasures. An interesting picture by an unknown Caravaggio follower of a boy bitten by a crayfish (Fig. 10) is a reinterpretation of the Boy Bitten by a Lizard that marks a return to the earlier, unambiguous genre type (represented by Sophonisba Anguisciola’s well-known composition of a Child Bitten by a Crayfish [Fig. 12]) from which Caravaggio’s picture derived but diverged. A comparison of Figures 8 and 10, incidentally, serves as a nice corrective to the view that Caravaggio’s boy is just an ordinary Roman street-urchin.

The overtly libidinous character of Caravaggio’s work was not, however, without an after-life. Perhaps its most striking reincarnation is in a picture by the Flemish artist Abraham Janssens, who was in Rome in 1598 and possibly
again around 1604. The two known versions of the picture, one a painting in the Brussels museum, the other reproduced in an eighteenth-century print (Fig. 13), replace Caravaggio's seductive, semi-naked boys with a buxom female nude who boldly displays her charms. Beside her in the print is a still-life that might have been lifted out of a picture by Caravaggio. In the painting she has a shoulder-band inscribed "LASCIVIA."  

It has become increasingly clear in recent years that the subjects of sixteenth-century genre pictures cannot be viewed as having no significance in themselves and as being nothing more than arbitrarily chosen motifs from the world of everyday experience.  

Occasional suggestions have been made about the iconography of individual genre paintings by Caravaggio, but only two scholars have previously dealt with the question in a systematic way. Kurt Bauch, in reviewing some early works by Caravaggio, concluded that the Lute Player is a "Vanitas," and he suggested that the Fruit-Vendor might be a "Sense of Taste" and the Boy Bitten by a Lizard a "Sense of Touch." His interpretation of the Lute Player is to my mind unconvincing, and his other proposals are, as Bauch himself said, speculative. Nonetheless, I suspect that further investigation along the same lines will provide more certain evidence for at least very similar interpretations. But I wish to emphasize here that such interpretations are not in themselves sufficient to explain the pictures. The "Sense of Touch" is basically an "ideographic" scheme which limits and defines the artist's possible choices of subject-matter. A woman searching her body for fleas or, perhaps, a boy bitten by a lizard or a crayfish may both represent "touch," but the difference is significant. And so are the final differences in visual inflexion, in the allusions and intimations with which the subject is surrounded. "Touch" and "taste" would not be unsuitable allegorical significations for the Boy Bitten by a Lizard and the Fruit-Vendor, but they would have to be understood as belonging to a low level in the strata of meanings that comprise the essential content of these works.

Unlike Bauch, whose point of departure was the elements and actions visible in Caravaggio's paintings, Luigi Salerno has tried to deduce the meanings of the master's compositions from specimens of early Seicento poetry. Unfortunately, poems specifically written about pictures by Caravaggio do not substantiate Salerno's readings of the paintings, while poems which Salerno uses as explanatory texts because of their subject-matter are not demonstrably connected to Caravaggio's works. A poem by Giovan Battista
Lauri, De pueru et scorpio, for instance, is related to Caravaggio’s Boy Bitten by a Lizard only insofar as in both a boy is bitten by a small animal. Otherwise, as Salerno himself points out, the two describe the scene differently. In the poem the child reaches among damp rocks and cold stones and, when bitten by a scorpion, sucks his injured hand and so ingests the fatal poison. Still, Salerno believes that the hidden meaning of the picture is the same as that expressed by the poem. Now it is true that both are concerned with youth’s delusions and with the surprises or dangers of life. But these commonplace insights are hardly hidden in Caravaggio’s picture; and, incidentally, they inform as well Sophonisba Anguisciola’s Boy Bitten by a Crayfish (Fig. 12)—the crayfish being a symbol of inconstancy and ill-fortune. On the other hand, the poem takes a serious turn and speaks of death (“Heu miserande Puer, tepido qui ex ore medelam/Dum speras, certam combibis inde necem”), and this, too, Salerno believes can be found in Caravaggio’s painting: “the boy surrenders to the pleasures of the senses, touching the beautiful flowers, and finds death waiting in ambush there.” Surely this is to read too much into the picture, and to treat the difference in the animals in too cavalier a fashion. The sting of the scorpion really is dangerous; the “bite” of the lizard—which can only be symbolic (the lover’s rebuff)—may be imagined as painful, but hardly as death-dealing. Indeed, it is very difficult to imagine that the playful, rather ludicrous scene invented by Caravaggio was the product of meditations on mortality. Needless to say, I cannot subscribe to Salerno’s general conclusion that Caravaggio’s early works have the value of “moral lessons.”

In the case of great paintings, the results of iconographic analysis can almost never be accepted if they do not confirm and illuminate the content their creator has made visible by pictorial means. In pictures like the Uffizi Bacchus, where, in Wittkower’s words, “the pink of the flesh [is] so obscene,” I believe we can have no doubts about the essential nature of the artist’s meaning.

Institute of Fine Arts, New York University

I wish to thank Jane Costello, who kindly lent me a number of the photographs used to illustrate this article, and William Barcham, Thomas Martone, and Nanette Salomon, who have helped in various ways.

1 Laizi (Storia pittorica della Italia, 4th ed., Pisa, 1815, II, p. 161) called the Borghese picture “la Fruttaiola” and, for a time, so did Marangoni (Dedalo, II, 1922, pp. 788f.). I believe the present discussion resolves the question of the sex of the flute player. If Bauch is right in arguing that the figure wears a woman’s dress (“Zur Ikonographie von Caravaggios Frühwerken,” Kunstgeschichtliche Studien für Hans Kaufmann, Berlin, n.d. [1956], p. 254), then the figure is a transvestite, as was suggested by Wagner (Michelangelo da Caravaggio, Bern, 1958, p. 20).
Zahn wrote [Caravaggio, Berlin, n.d. [1928], p. 11]: "Dieses volle, runde Gesicht mit dem plastischen vorquellenenden Mund . . . das so wenig individuell gemeint ist, dass es uns sogar über den Sexus im Unklaren lässt, verdankt seine Bevorgung wahrscheinlich seinem plastischen Wert." See also Marangoni, cited in n. 1, above.

Longhi dated the Bacchus 1589, when Caravaggio was sixteen. Few, if any, scholars would follow him in this today or would place the picture earlier than Caravaggio's twentieth year.


Caravaggio Studies, Princeton, 1935, p. 117.

Hinks (Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, London, n.d. [1953], pp. 45, 50) was the first, to my knowledge, to treat the question seriously (although very briefly), but he gave most of his attention to the Amor Vitoriosus and St. John with a Ram. Waterhouse pertinently remarked (Italian Baroque Painting, London, 1962, p. 23) that the Concert "seems to have been understood as a statement about the romantic possibilities of the flash underworld." (I believe he is wrong, however, in suggesting that it is a "tavern" scene.)


F. Susinno, Le Vie de' pittori messinesi [1724], ed. V. Martinelli, Florence, 1960, pp. 114 ff. E. Natoli ("Michelangelo da Caravaggio nell' interpretazione di Francesco Susinno," Archivio storico messinese, XVII-XIX, 1966-68, p. 200) doubts the accuracy of this report; but there seems no good reason to question it. It is hardly the kind of story one invents, and Susinno himself made an effort to excite the artist, explaining that he "andava osservando . . . que' ragazzi scherzanti per formarne le sue fantasie," and that later events were the result of a misunderstanding.


This is a distinction that C. L. Frommel, in an article that is otherwise rich in insights, failed to make. Unfortunately, his "Caravaggio und seine Modelle," in Castrum Peregrini, No. 96, 1971, p. 21 ff., appeared only when this article was already in proof. I am pleased to note that he has made some of the same observations as I.

Metamorphoses, III, 553-556 (Loeb Classical Library ed., London, 1936, I, pp. 161 f); V. Cartari, Le Imagine de i det de gli antichi, Lyon, 1581, p. 348. Similar references to Bacchus' effeminate nature are abundant in Renaissance as well as ancient literature (for the latter see W. F. Otto, Dionysos, Mythos und Kultus, Frankfurt a.M., 1950, pp. 159 ff.). Wagner (Caravaggio, pp. 15 ff.) has proposed that Caravaggio was inspired by Michelangelo's statue of Bacchus, which is also "androgynous" in form. The connection seems to me possible, but not wholly convincing.


Caravaggio Studies, p. 148.


The motif of a figure in the background picking a bunch of grapes reappears in a more outspokenly bacchic Concert by Pietro Paolini (illustrated in A. Moir, The Italian Followers of Caravaggio, Cambridge, 1967, II, fig. 289), which looks back to Caravaggio's composition. For the once winged figure see n. 39, below.


In the earliest known reference to it, in 1607, it is described as "Un quadro di un Giovane che tiene un Canestro di frutti in mano." (See below, n. 58.) It was already called "Fruit-Vendor" in Lanzi's Storia (see n. 1, above).

The association of fruits and sensuality is not an unfamiliar one. Fig. 13 provides an obvious example. The
same association is made in the so-called “Bambocciate” by Dosso Dossi in the Uffizi, where a woman, obviously a courtesan, holds a bowl of fruit in front of her exposed breasts: cf. F. Gibbons, Dosso and Battista Dossi, Princeton, 1968, pp. 98, 101, fig. 101. De Mirimonde has called attention to the bowls of fruit that appear in some pictures of “Lot and his Daughters,” and also in a painting by Jan Massys of “Ill-Assorted Lovers,” where a monkey, a symbol of lubricity, reaches for a fruit (“Jan Massys dans les musées de province français,” Gazette des Beaux-Arts, LX, 1962, pp. 548–549, 559, 563, no. 10, figs. 1, 2, 14). In a print by Saenredam after Goltzius of the sense of taste, an amorous couple is shown, with the woman feeding the man a fruit (illustrated in S. Slive, Frans Hals, London, 1970, I, p. 78, fig. 55). The reader will no doubt recall the famous eating scene in Tony Richardson’s “Tom Jones.”


27 Compare the painting in Atlanta, Fig. 9, and see my comments on it in the text. Incidentally, the Korda version of the Boy Bitten by a Lizard seems to me, but on the basis of photographs only, to be a copy.


30 Cf. Terwarent, Attributs, cols. 234–235. Another interpretation of the picture, based on a different, but also erotic, meaning of the lizard, has been made by K. Goetz in an unpublished study that I have not had the opportunity to consult: see Realklexikon zur Deutschen Kunstgeschichte, IV, Stuttgart, 1956, col. 938.

31 Coletti, who first published the picture, disregarded the lizard but speculated that the other objects on the table might be “i testimoni dolorosi di una passione finita”: L’arte, I, 1930, p. 468. I am grateful to Kathleen Weil-Garris Posner for calling my attention to Lotto’s painting.


33 In other respects the Concert follows a standard pattern. Egan (“Concert Scenes,” p. 189) describes the typical Cinquecento musical group scene as consisting of three or four half-length figures, with emphasis given to the central figure, who invariably has a stringed instrument, and as frequently showing singing and including part books or sheets of music. Salerno has aptly contrasted the costume in Caravaggio’s picture and in an otherwise quite similar earlier Concert by Calisto Piazza (“Poesia e simboli nel Caravaggio: I dipinti emblematici,” Palatino, X, 1966, p. 109 and fig. 3). In a Concert by Pietro Paolini, deriving from Caravaggio’s painting, women are substituted for the boys and they are “decently” attired in what can be interpreted as “everyday” dress. See n. 39, below.

34 This is according to a report of January 1605, to which Haskell called attention (see n. 7, above). The avviso itself is quoted in Samek Ludovici, Vita del Caravaggio, p. 96.


36 I have not been able to investigate private lives. As Haskell suggested (see n. 7, above), what we know of del Monte seems sufficient to indicate his sexual proclivities, and we may assume that some of the cardinal’s friends shared them. I understand that material providing additional confirmation of del Monte’s homosexuality is scheduled for publication in Storia dell’arte, No. 9, 1971. Homosexuality among clerics, of course, has always been reputed to be especially common. Associated with Sixtus V (1585–90) is the supposedly popular cry, “Laudate Pueri Dominuni:” E. Fuchs, Illustrierte Sittengeschichte, Renaissance, Munich, n.d. [1909], p. 369. But in fairness it must be said that this report comes from a Protestant source and Sixtus is known to have punished immorality severely. In 1586 he had a priest and a boy burned for sodomy: L. von Pastor, Storia dei Papel, Rome, 1928, X, p. 71. Interestingly, during the concerns that us—particularly of Clement VIII Aldobrandini (1592–1605), whose nephew attended the party referred to above—denouncements of “crimes against nature” were very numerous, but it is also reported that immorality was very difficult to punish during Clement’s reign: Pastor, Storia, 1929, XI, p. 631, n. 1.

37 This is the composition mentioned by Mancini as one of Caravaggio’s earliest Roman works: “un putto che mondeva una pera con il corello:” Considerazioni sulla pittura, Rome, 1956–57, I, p. 224, II, pp. 111–112, n. 883.


321
Most writers seem to assume that for the most part Rome was unfamiliar with genre painting before Caravaggio's arrival there (e.g., Hinks, Caravaggio, p. 43; R. Jullian, Caravage, Lyon-Paris, 1961, pp. 45, 69ff.). However, Friedlaender argued (Caravaggio Studies, pp. 79ff.) that Caravaggio found an existing popular market for genre pictures in the city. Belloni's report (in a marginal note in Baglione's Le Vite de' pittori . . . , Rome, 1642; ed. V. Mariani, Rome, 1935, p. 136 and appendix, p. 7) that at an early stage Caravaggio worked in the studio of Antiveduto Grammatica making "mezze figure manco strappazzate" could be taken, along with other information about the artist's early activity, to support this contention. To my mind, the very existence of Caravaggio's early genre pictures is evidence of a market for the type. Caravaggio had trouble selling his early works, letting some go for ridiculously low prices (see n. 65, below), and he was desperately poor during his first years in Rome. Surely, if there had not been a strong market for genre paintings he would not have persisted in making them but would have turned to a more saleable type of product. One can only conclude that it was the painter, not the genre, that could not be easily marketed.

Inexpensive works produced for a popular market naturally have a short life expectancy, and we need not wonder that no certain works by Caravaggio's "competitors" from the mid-1590s are known. I suspect that, style aside, the kind of picture in demand on the popular market in Rome was pretty much the same as elsewhere in Europe. Caravaggio was probably trying to supply wants similar to those of a modest collector whose inventory, compiled in 1596 in Besançon, listed pictures of: "a man putting his hands in a woman's petticoat;" "heads of courtesans;" "a woman holding a lobster which she gives to a child to bite." J. Adhémar "French Sixteenth Century Genre Painting." Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, VIII, 1945, p. 194. (Incidentally, Adhémar comments [p. 193] on the loss of paintings made at the time for the popular market in France.) In the north, pictures of courtesans were apparently much in demand. Adhémar (ibid.) cites Brantôme's reference to "ces femmes en peinture que l'on porte de Flandres, et que l'on met au-devant des cheminées d'hôtellerie et cabarets avec des fleustes d'Allemante au bec" (Vies des Dames Galantes, ed. Paris, 1857, p. 188), and Slive discusses the market for paintings of courtesans in Holland (Frans Hals, I, pp. 91ff.). There is some evidence to suggest that Caravaggio may have produced such works for the Roman trade (see n. 38, below).

Baglione, Le Vite, p. 136.

See Held, "Flora" (cited above, n. 17).

E. Mellencamp ("A Note on the Costume of Titian's Flora," Art Bulletin, LI, 1969, pp. 176ff.) has demonstrated that the figure is not, as has sometimes been thought, wearing an engagement or bridal gown. She is dressed in the costume of a nymph, which is of course compatible with her identification as Flora.

This was noted by Held ("Flora," p. 217).

The Giustiniani inventory of 1638 lists by Caravaggio "una mezza figura Ritratto di una Cortigiana famosa," and it describes the portrait of a woman formerly in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum as "un ritratto di una Cortigiana chiamata Filide." Burlington Magazine, CII, 1960, p. 156, nos. 11, 12.

The question of the wings, which were uncovered and recovered during a restoration in 1951, is difficult to resolve. Vasari's statement cited above (n. 14) indicates that a wingless Cupid is wholly appropriate, and it may have been by way of an iconographic "correction" that they were painted out. But it does not seem entirely certain that, as has been asserted, Caravaggio himself painted and then obliterated them: cf. D. Mahon, "Addenda to Caravaggio," Burlington Magazine, XCIV, 1952, p. 4, n. 15; Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin, XII, Oct. 1953, p. 45. A Concert by Paolini (illustrated in Moir, Italian Followers of Caravaggio, II, fig. 287) that depends on the Metropolitan painting has a winged figure, which suggests that the original had wings, too, and that it was not changed before the early seventeenth century.

The known history of the Bacchus goes back only to 1916, when Longhi discovered it in the Uffizi storerooms. The suggestion that it may have been sent by del Monte to Duke Ferdinando in Florence has already been made by Mahon: Burlington Magazine, XCIV, 1953, p. 215, n. 23. For Ferdinando, through whose efforts del Monte was made a cardinal, see H. E. Napier, Florentine History, London, 1847, V, pp, 386ff. For the history of the Medusa see D. Heikamp, "La Medusa del Caravaggio e l'armatura dello Scia 'Abbas di Persia," Paragone, No. 199, 1966, pp. 62ff.

A. Czobor's thesis ("Autoritratti del giovane Caravaggio," Acta historiae artium, II, 1955, pp. 201ff.) has found no support. The boys do not at all resemble Caravaggio as he portrayed himself in 1599-1600 in the background of the Martyrdom of St. Matthew (Czobor, fig. 2). Furthermore, to sustain her thesis, Czobor was forced to contradict the testimony of Caravaggio's early biographers and to propose an unlikely chronology for the paintings—one of which she has herself since rejected: cf. Jullian, Caravage, p. 61, n. 105. Recently, Frommel has suggested that Caravaggio's friend Mario Miniti served as the model for some of his early
pictures. This seems quite likely, but, as Frommel points out, the individuality of the model tends to be masked by general traits: "Caravaggio und seine Modelle," pp. 30ff.


45 *Caravaggio Studies*, pp. 155ff.

46 Rötgen’s discoveries ("Die Stellung der Contarelli-Kappelle in Caravaggios Werk," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, XXVIII, 1963, pp. 47ff.) demonstrate that Caravaggio’s stylistic development could proceed much more swiftly than one had imagined. Consequently, there seems no reason to suppose a long lapse of time between the "early" genre paintings and the beginning of work on the Contarelli Chapel pictures, especially since the documents Rötgen published remove the first St Matthew altarpiece and works stylistically associated with it from consideration as productions of the nineties. Zandri’s publication ("Un probabile dipinto murale del Caravaggio per il Cardinale Del Monte," *Storia dell’arte*, No. 3, 1969, pp. 338ff.) of a new early work by the master brings with it an important date, a *post quem* of Nov. 26, 1596. It seems to me, granting the difficulties of comparing a ceiling painting with Caravaggio’s easel pictures, that the *Bacchus* and *Boy Bitten by a Lizard* are stylistically very close to the new work. I should date the *Boy Peeling Fruit* and the *Fruit-Vendor* in the period 1593–95. (On the likelihood that Caravaggio arrived in Rome only about 1593, see S. Borla, "1591: arrivo del Caravaggio a Roma," *Emporium*, CXXXV, 1962, pp. 13ff.; in "Opere milanesi del Caravaggio," *ibid.*, CXXXVIII, 1961, pp. 157ff., Borla argued, unconvincingly, that some of Caravaggio’s preserved early works were made in Lombardy before 1593.) The *Concert*, I believe, dates from about 1596.

47 It seems to me that the very absence of such content in a picture whose subject so readily invites it, the *Narrative* in the National Gallery, Rome, is a strong argument against the attribution to Caravaggio, which is anyway widely doubted on grounds of style.

48 See n. 80, below.

49 P. della Pergola, *Galleria Borghese. I Dipinti*, II, Rome, 1959, pp. 76ff.; "Nota per Caravaggio," *Bollettino d’arte*, XLIX, 1964, pp. 254ff. It is possible that the "Bacco bellissimo" owned by the Borghese that Mancini mentioned (Considerazioni, I, p. 226, II, p. 125) was this picture, but this is not certain and in any event not a decisive argument for the attribution.

50 *Vita artistica*, II, 1927, pp. 28ff.


52 Argan has not elaborated on his argument, which was put forth in a brief letter published in *Hefte des Kunsthistorischen Seminars der Universität München*, Nos. 7–8, 1962, p. 24.


55 P. 151.

56 Frommel, who believes the painting is a self-portrait by Caravaggio, insists that the composition is a normal one and not in itself significant: "Caravaggio und seine Modelle," p. 25.


59 The painting’s history is apparently unbroken since 1607; see the literature cited in n. 48, above.

60 A. de Rinaldii, "D’Arpino e Caravaggio," *Bollettino d’arte*, XXIX, 1936, p. 278.


62 De Rinaldii, "D’Arpino e Caravaggio," p. 580: no. 59, "un giovane et una banda che tiene diversi fiori;" no. 73, "una donna grassa con un pomo in mano;” no. 89, "un putto ... con un pomo in mano;” no. 99, "una donna con una caraffa di fiori in un tavolino."

63 The costume of the angels in the Doria Gallery’s *Rest on the Flight to Egypt* and the Wadsworth Athenaeum’s *St. Francis* confirms what is in my opinion their stylistic contemporaneity with the *Concert*.

64 It seems that few of the writers who have accepted it actually knew it except from photographs. For its critical history see Kitson, *Complete Paintings of Caravaggio*, p. 85, no. 5. See below, n. 80, Addendum.

65 Della Pergola ("Nota per Caravaggio," p. 253) proposes to identify it with no. 99 of the 1607 inventory (see n. 60, above), which may be the same work that appears in the 1693 Borghese inventory as "un giovane con un vaso di rose."

66 Exceptionally, Caracciolo, in a couple of instances at least, maintained or even intensified it; see the "Bacchino" in the Moretti Collection (Mostra del Caravaggio, Milan, 1951, no. 79, fig. 68) and the *St. John
in the Art Museum of the University of California, Berkeley (Art Journal, XXX, Fall, 1970, cover illustration).
46 Salerno (in Mancini, Considerazioni, II, p. 111) called attention to Manilli’s reference of 1650 to a painting
by Caravaggio of a boy bitten by “un granchio,” and proposed that a version of the present picture is a copy
of it. Jullian (Caravage, pp. 47, 56, n. 36) believes the original was authentic, but he seems to be alone in
this opinion. A similar picture was mentioned by Mancini (Considerazioni, I, pp. 140, 224) as made about
the same time as the Boy Peeling Fruit and sold by the master for a mere fifteen gilii: “un putto che piange per
esser stato morso da un racano che tiene in mano.” Though it has been suggested that this is the Boy Bitten
by a Lizard (Fig. 8), the description seems almost certainly to refer to a different, now lost, painting: cf. Kitson,
Complete Paintings of Caravaggio, p. 89, no. 21.
47 For the painting see J. Held in Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts Bulletin (Brussels), I, 1952, p. 11, fig. 1. The
print, reproduced here from Fuchs, Sittengeschichte. Die galante Zeit: Ergänzungsband, 1911, p. 177, fig. 138,
is apparently by Jean Noiset de Saint-Mange. In Fuch’s book it bears the title “Die verliebte Andalusierin.”
48 Mr. Barry Wind is presently completing, for submission as a Ph.D. dissertation to the Institute of Fine
Arts, New York University, a study of the iconography of selected sixteenth-century genre types. Mr. Wind
has come independently to conclusions similar to mine concerning Caravaggio’s Concert and Lute Player.
49 In the article cited in n. 1, above. (The idea that the picture might be a “Vanitas” was also put forward by
P. Egan in “‘Concert’ Scenes,” p. 194, n. 40.)
50 Ibid., p. 260.
51 For the same reasons as those given by Jullian: Caravage, p. 77, n. 26.
52 It is interesting in this connection that in Holland representations of courtesans were sometimes used for
pictures of the “sense of touch”: cf. Slive, Frans Hals, I, p. 93, fig. 82.
53 “Poesia e simboli” (cited in n. 27, above).
54 Notably the poems by Marino and Murtola, which were specifically inspired by Caravaggio’s Medusa.
Salerno (ibid., p. 110) therefore dismisses them and looks elsewhere for the meaning of the picture. However,
as Heikamp has shown (see n. 40, above), the poems convey the point of the painting quite accurately.
55 The poem was published in 1605. It was first cited in connection with Caravaggio’s Boy Bitten by a Lizard
by E. Battisti in his Rinascimento e Barocco, Turin, 1960, p. 214, where the text is given, as also in Salerno’s
article, p. 108.
56 Tervarent, Attributes, col. 152.
57 “Poesia e simboli,” p. 108.
58 I hasten to add that sometimes a lizard can symbolize death (but I know of no example where it is the
active agent of death). And then, sometimes it (and also a scorpion) can symbolize “dialectic”: cf. Tervarent,
Attributes, cols. 234-235. The modern iconographer does well to remember Lomazzo’s warning that one and
the same animal can, depending on action and context, represent “molte cose:” Trattato della pittura, II,
p. 433; cf. also p. 430.
59 “Poesia e simboli,” p. 110.
60 Art and Architecture in Italy 1600 to 1750, Harmondsworth and Baltimore, 1965, p. 23.
61 A striking example of a work by Caravaggio that has eluded satisfactory interpretation because insufficient
attention has been given to its visual character is the so-called St. John with a Ram. I plan to devote a separate
study to this composition, but I should like to emphasize here that the nakedness, pose, and expression of the
youth are plainly lascivious, and that the ram, so difficult to explain as an attribute of St. John, is a notoriously
lustful beast.

Addendum: Richard Spear recently published (Burlington Magazine, CXIII, 1971, pp. 470ff.) another version
of the Atlanta painting (Fig. 9). To my mind the existence of two versions of such an inventively impoverished
and highly derivative image is no proof of a Caravagggesque paternity; two versions also exist, for example, of
the Boy Bitten by a Cagesfish (see above, n. 65), an invention which most scholars would agree is by a follower.
Incidentally, it is just those artists who imitated Caravaggio most “slavishly” whose names we are least likely
to know.

324