

THE INFLUENCE OF CARAVAGGIO ON JACQUES-LOUIS DAVID'S  
DEVELOPMENT OF FRENCH NEOCLASSICAL PAINTING

by

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(Under the Direction of Alisa Luxenberg)

ABSTRACT

This study examines the purported influence of the art of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio on Jacques-Louis David's role in the development of French Neoclassical painting. Scholars of eighteenth-century French art have suggested a correlation between each artist's heightened naturalism, simplified compositions and careful modeling of forms. David's artistic training, during a period of reform in the French Academy, included an extended period of study in Italy with an emphasis on antiquity as well as Renaissance and Baroque Masters. Although Caravaggio held a precarious place among the artistic models advocated by the French Academy, there is evidence that many French students, including David, observed and copied his works in Rome. This study establishes a context for understanding the impact of Caravaggio in eighteenth-century French theory, academic practice, and public art consumption through a survey of correspondence from within the French Academy, theoretical texts relevant to academic practice, and Grand Tour literature. By examining the changing nature of the caravaggesque from David's work as a *pensionnaire* through his history paintings of the 1780s, this paper demonstrates the extent to which David may have incorporated qualities of Caravaggio's art into his development of Neoclassicism in French painting.

INDEX WORDS: Jacques-Louis David, Caravaggio, Painting, France, Italy, Neoclassicism, Baroque, Rome, Grand Tour literature, reform style, French Academy, caravaggesque, Valentin de Boulogne, Jean-François-Pierre Peyron, Jusepe de Ribera, chiaroscuro, tenebrism, *pensionnaire*

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Henry and Susan Martin. They have been more generous and supportive than I have deserved, and I cannot imagine possessing riches enough to repay them. I only hope to convey my gratitude and love in dedicating this work to them.

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## INTRODUCTION

The artistic achievements of Jacques-Louis David represent a pivotal juncture in the development of European art. In attempting to explain the artist's significance, a number of scholars have intimated, or claimed outright, that David's singularity within French reform painting is due, at least in part, to formal affinities with the art of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio. Modern art historians discussing David's major history paintings of the 1780s qualify the newly dramatic tenebrism of the French artist's painted environments, as well as the dynamic and volumetric qualities of his figures as either "caravaggesque" or as directly influenced by the Italian artist. Such claims have a long history, beginning with David's pupil and early biographer, Étienne Jean Delécluze (1781-1863). Admittedly, Delécluze's 1855 text, insofar as it treats David's early artistic career, represents an admiring pupil's interpretation of David's accounts.<sup>1</sup> A passage from the manuscript relates how David, recounting the circumstances of his 1779 *envoi*<sup>2</sup> after Valentin de Boulogne's *Last Supper* (1625-26), professed unequivocal admiration for Caravaggio,

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<sup>1</sup> M. E. J. Delécluze, *Louis David, son école & son temps* (Paris: Didier, Libraire-Editeur, 1855). In his discussion of the mitigating factors in the evolution of the genre of art criticism in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France, Richard Wrigley suggests that because Delécluze was himself an artist, privy to "inside knowledge" of the practice, he may have been inclined to provide honest, rather than blustery or formulaic, responses to works of art. Richard Wrigley, *The Origins of French Art Criticism: From the Ancien Régime to the Restoration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 230. However, Wrigley chiefly addresses the writer's Salon criticism, and does not examine or critique Delécluze's memoirs on David in any detail.

<sup>2</sup> The French term refers to a work of art produced by a *pensionnaire*, or student of the French Academy in Rome, which was sent to Paris to be evaluated by the professors and administrators of the institution.

...my eyes were so unrefined that, far from being able to train them profitably by directing them toward delicate paintings like those of Andrea del Sarto, Titian or the most skillful colorists, they did not really seize or comprehend anything but the brutally executed, but nevertheless entirely worthy, works of Caravaggio, Ribera and of Valentin who was their student...<sup>3</sup>

According to Delécluze, the Italian Baroque aesthetic was jarring to an artist formed within the late French Rococo era, and David, whose bewilderment in the face of new artistic forms was amplified by his relative inexperience, was thus most attracted to the bold qualities of caravaggism.

Supposedly validated by the artist himself, the aforementioned comparative device reappears in recent scholarship as a means of describing the new style that David developed after his first Italian sojourn (1775-1780), a style with which the fundamental characteristics of French Neoclassical painting are commonly identified. Despite, or perhaps because of, obvious visual correspondences between each artist's use of heightened naturalism, dramatic and distilled compositions and emphatically modeled figures, no scholar has pursued a historically informed investigation of the possible relationships between David and either Caravaggio or the vast body of Italian and French caravaggesque artists who followed in Caravaggio's wake. This study aims to demonstrate that David's unique perception and transformation of the formal and emotive qualities of Caravaggio's oeuvre contributed directly to the French artist's formative role in the development of Neoclassical painting in France after 1780.

David's transformation into the Neoclassical artist *par excellence* is exemplified by the triumphant presentation at the Salon of 1785 of the *Oath of the Horatii* (fig. 1), the work which virtually guaranteed his notoriety as a public artist. Fame generated by a

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<sup>3</sup> Delécluze, 113. My translation.

series of Salon coups in the 1780s cemented the artist's position as a leading choice for official and private commissions. Through moves that suggest intense ambition more than sincere political ideals, David pledged strategic allegiances to France's *Ancien Régime*, Republican, and Imperial governments as these administrations came to power. The malleability of his political loyalties, as well as his self-imposed exile in Brussels after 1815, account to various degrees for the distinct styles into which David's oeuvre is divided.<sup>4</sup> This paper examines works which, belonging as they do to the years surrounding the French Revolution and its political aftermath, have often been considered primarily for their proto-revolutionary and overtly political content.<sup>5</sup> David, an artist deliberate in his iconographical and stylistic choices, would not have ignored the potential social and political reverberations his paintings generated. Nevertheless, such interpretations have been emphasized to the detriment of a valuable formal study of stylistic developments that David achieved during that heady decade. Art-historical myth-making surrounding an artist whose impact is deemed so profoundly revolutionary frequently deflects attention from the elements and the process which precipitated, and contributed to, his stylistic achievements.

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<sup>4</sup> David's reasons for relinquishing the elements of caravaggism in his works after approximately 1793 are inextricably linked to, and perhaps indistinguishable from, the effects of the social and political transformations at work in France at the time. Yet, the impact of the caravaggesque qualities of David's pre-Revolutionary work is reinforced by their absence in the major canvases from David's *style greque* of c.1799-1804, especially the claustrophobic *Intervention of the Sabine Women* (1799). On a formal level, Robert Rosenblum relates the stylistic change in David's oeuvre in part to an international progression toward abstraction at the end of the eighteenth century. Rosenblum, *The International Style of 1800: A Study in Linear Abstraction* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1976), 135-42; *Transformations in Late Eighteenth Century Art* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967), 182-85.

<sup>5</sup> For a general treatment, see Warren Roberts, *Jacques-Louis David, Revolutionary Artist: Art, Politics, and the French Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), passim; on specific works, see Robert L. Herbert, *David, Voltaire, Brutus and the French Revolution: An Essay in Art and Politics* (London: Allen Lane; The Penguin Press, 1972), passim; Thomas Crow, "The Oath of the Horatii in 1785: Painting and Pre-Revolutionary Radicalism in France," *Art History* 1, no. 4 (December 1978): 424-471. On the philosophical component of republican virtue in David's studio, see Thomas E. Crow, *Emulation: Making Artists for Revolutionary France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 5-114.

In the case of David, one takes for granted that the ultimate product, namely, radically distilled compositions resonating with pithy moral significance, is evidence of the artist's genius within the history of eighteenth-century art. Yet, the undeniable Rococo qualities of David's early paintings, including his first *Prix de Rome* entry, the *Combat of Mars and Minerva* (1771) (fig. 2), and the work for which he eventually won the honor, *Antiochus and Stratonice* (1774) (fig. 3), belie any innate capacity for formal innovation. The fleshy, slightly amorphous nudes and the capaciously swathed deities in the *Combat* proclaim the young David's indebtedness to the staunch defender of the Rococo, François Boucher. David's 1774 entry owes its combination of increased compositional planarity and gently swaying forms to the influence of his master Joseph-Marie Vien, one of the most influential early proponents of the reform style.<sup>6</sup> The subtle, even timid, shift away from the formal devices of Boucher demonstrates the difficulty with which David attempted to synthesize the formal attributes of the Rococo with the venerable subject matter of Grand Manner painting.

Elucidating the impetus behind David's departure from the sinuous forms, delicate color and halcyon lighting of the Rococo style, which had dominated painting of the first half of the 1700s, is prerequisite for understanding the narrative clarity and compositional tension with which he invested such works as the rigorously ordered *Oath* or the bifurcated *Lictors Bringing to Brutus the Bodies of his Sons* (1789) (fig. 4). The seeds of the artist's stylistic transformation germinated during his first period of study in Italy. David went first as a *pensionnaire* of the French Academy in Rome (1775-1780) in the

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<sup>6</sup> David may also have taken a cue from the only artist who posed a challenge to his preeminence in the French school during the first half of his career, Jean-François Pierre Peyron, who won the *Prix de Rome* in 1773. For a discussion of caravaggism in Peyron's oeuvre, as well as his rivalry with David, see below, Chapter 2, 37-41.

company of Vien. As the newly appointed *directeur*, Vien was charged with the implementation of reform in the royal institution whose artistic purpose and moral edifices were declared to have deteriorated under its former head, Charles-Joseph Natoire. Several valuable studies have assimilated and analyzed the drawings, *envois* and personal correspondence from David's Italian sojourns, all of which evince his "discovery" of antiquity as well as the standard repertoire of Renaissance and Baroque models.<sup>7</sup> If modern scholars have not neglected the artist's formative experiences,<sup>8</sup> they have left two key questions largely unanswered: which of these "Italian" influences catalyzed David's radical redefinition of Grand Manner painting, and how did David manipulate his sources, which were by no means unknown to his predecessors and peers, to create the style of his post-1784 paintings, described as the epitome of Neoclassicism? This study seeks to demonstrate that David's interpretation of the caravaggesque evolved from emulation, seen in his work as a *pensionnaire*, to sophisticated reinterpretation of the most compelling characteristics of the Italian artist's oeuvre, yielding the thematic and formal power of his history paintings of the 1780s.

Perhaps no artist has undergone such a volatility of critical fortune as Caravaggio. For this reason alone, it is important to clarify what is meant by "caravaggism" and how it has been, and is recognized and valued in the work of other artists. Today, the term connotes a shallow, simplified composition shaped by clearly defined details, and forms sharply modeled by strong color, intense contrasts of light and dark, or a combination of

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<sup>7</sup> See especially *David e Roma/ David et Rome* (Rome: De Luca Editore with the Académie de France à Rome, 1981), 42-106; and Antoine Schnapper and Arlette Sérullaz, eds., *Jacques-Louis David, 1748-1825* (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1989), 59-111.

<sup>8</sup> For recent perspectives, see Dorothy Johnson, *Jacques-Louis David: Art in Metamorphosis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993): 11-69 and Thomas W. Gaehtgens, "David et son maître Vien," in *David contre David*, vol. 1, ed. Régis Michel (Paris: La documentation française, 1993), 17-34.

the two. Caravaggesque figures are often interpreted as having been drawn from life, immediate rather than historical, and palpable rather than ideal, whether in a genre scene or a religious tableau. These qualities characterize a number of Caravaggio's paintings, and support many modern scholars' claims for the caravaggesque in much of David's work. However, the generalized definition of the caravaggesque defies the stylistic diversity of Caravaggio's art, and erroneously suggests a consistency in David's interpretation of Caravaggio and integration of caravaggism in his own work. The present study does not rely on a broad interpretation of caravaggism, but rather acknowledges the permutations of style in David's early work as a growing understanding of the heterogeneity of Caravaggio and caravaggism.

Specific claims for the influence of the works of Caravaggio or the caravaggesque upon David are scattered among the monographic and thematic studies of the French artist, although explication rarely accompanies the observation, which seems evident enough to be taken for granted. Three categories emerge within the literature that treats David's relationship to the caravaggesque. The first includes works that makes nominal reference to the eponymous formal qualities in the Frenchman's major history paintings. Robert Rosenblum's evocative description of the *Oath*'s crystalline atmosphere is representative of the adjectival allusion to the strong chiaroscuro associated with Caravaggio and his followers. Rosenblum implies that the formal influence is pivotal to the way in which David defines the space in his innovative composition:

... [the] theatrical, Caravaggesque intensity of the light, which enters from above left, casts a diagonal shadow on the wall plane behind and long silhouettes on the floor below, and then begins to purge the atmosphere of Rococo haze not only by defining distinctly a wide range of local colors, but by elucidating sharply the difference between substance and void.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Rosenblum, "A Source for David's *Horatii*," *Burlington Magazine* 112 (May 1970): 273.



Rosenblum's use of the term may constitute no more than an ahistorical appropriation for descriptive purposes. However, the fact that several scholars have noted the "caravaggesque" traits of a distinct group of David's works which are otherwise seen as embodying the artist's perfection of the Neoclassical style,<sup>10</sup> begs the question: how do the qualities of the caravaggesque relate to the visual and thematic aspects of his Neoclassicism?

Typically, most sources merely cite, but do not analyze, the specific influence of Caravaggio, Valentin, or to a lesser extent, Jusepe de Ribera on Jacques-Louis David. Pierre Rosenberg noted in his attempt to demonstrate the abiding import of Caravaggio's oeuvre to David that Delécluze was probably the first writer to remark upon the importance of the Italian artist for David's stylistic development.<sup>11</sup> Not only did David's pupil purport to recount his master's ruminations on the impact Caravaggio made upon him as a *pensionnaire*, but he clearly identified the turning point in David's early career as his novel choice in copying the *Last Supper* by the seventeenth-century French caravaggesque Valentin de Boulogne (as opposed to Raphael or perhaps Domenichino).<sup>12</sup> Delécluze distinguished Valentin from painters whom he identified as the mediocre colorists who dominated the French school for most of the seventeenth century. He thus

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<sup>10</sup> Included in this group are: the *Oath of the Horatii* (1785) the *Death of Socrates* (1787), the *Lictors Bringing to Brutus the Bodies of his Sons* (1789) and the *Death of Marat* (1793). Citations are too numerous to include in this context.

<sup>11</sup> Pierre Rosenberg, "David et Caravage," in *L'Ultimo Caravaggio e la cultura artistica a Napoli in Sicilia e a Malta*, ed. Maurizio Calvesi and Lucia Trigilia (Siracusa: Centro Internazionale di Studi sul Barocco in Sicilia with Ediprint, 1987), 195-96. Rosenberg is, in fact, mistaken. Delécluze may have been the first French writer to discuss the importance of Caravaggio for David. However, as will be discussed below, at least one viewer of the *Oath of the Horatii* in Rome commented on both the influence of Caravaggio's style on the young David and his manipulation of the Italian artist's dramatic realism in his mature work. See Chapter 3, 64-66.

<sup>12</sup> Delécluze, 112-13.

suggested that while David chose to copy a fellow countryman rather than an Italian master, he nonetheless discerned one who emulated the finest traits of Italian painting.

The only other near-contemporary of David who suggests that the artist's awareness and employment of the caravaggesque played a significant role in his development during the early 1780s is P.A. Coupin. His 1827 *Essai sur J.-L. David, peintre d'histoire* attributes David's stylistic departure upon completing his copy after Valentin to an awareness of the "the Italians' strong coloring and their energetic modeling."<sup>13</sup> In the early nineteenth-century French imagination, Valentin seems not to have been considered an ambassador of the French school in Italy, but rather a French representative of the Italian master whose rich palette and expressive naturalism the Academy appreciated, even if it did not wholly endorse him as a model.

Much like Delécluze and Coupin, twentieth-century scholars assert that David's familiarity with the caravaggesque fomented the pronounced transformation of his style. The practice of tagging Caravaggio as a *prima facie* influence first appeared in two important biographies from the 1940s, by Louis Hautecoeur and Klaus Holma.<sup>14</sup> While Hautecoeur found that David ultimately repudiated the effects of the caravaggesque,<sup>15</sup> Holma, and most scholars who have since addressed the issue, contended that the lessons in tonality and the evocation of visceral forms that David learned from the study of Caravaggio were fundamental to his mature works. Indeed, Walter Friedlaender identified the simplified forms and vibrant tonalities in the works of Caravaggio as a corrective to the rococo from which David was consciously trying to disentangle

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<sup>13</sup> P.A. Coupin, *Essai sur J.-L. David, peintre d'histoire* (Paris: J. Renouard, 1827), 11-12. "...la couleur forte des italiens et de leur modelé énergétique."

<sup>14</sup> Louis Hautecoeur, *Louis David* (Paris: Éditions de la Table Ronde, 1954), 39; Klaus Holma, *David, son évolution et son style* (Paris: P. Lejay, 1940), 31.

himself,<sup>16</sup> although he famously refused to abandon the French manner on the threshold of his first trip to Italy when he insisted to his peers, “antiquity will not seduce me.” Among the consummate scholars who have shared Friedlaender’s ideas is his student Robert Rosenblum, who noted the importance of Caravaggio for David in the “reinvestigation of light, space, and solids.”<sup>17</sup> Beyond the conclusions of Friedlaender and Rosenblum, which indeed seem to be substantiated by the most immediate of visual evidence, lie the questions at the heart of the present study.

With the general acceptance of the premise that Caravaggio was one of the most important influences on David when the latter was a *pensionnaire*, recent scholarship has considered the extent to which the environment of the French art academy accepted the Italian artist. Philip Conisbee emphatically states that as Caravaggio became a popular and accepted model in the French Academy in Rome, his reductive style impelled the transition toward the austere realism associated with Neoclassicism.<sup>18</sup> However, Conisbee neither substantiates the claims for the alleged fervor for Caravaggio among *pensionnaires*, nor does he identify David as the causal factor in the synthesis of the caravaggesque and the trend toward reform in French painting.

Recent scholarship is peppered with elegant descriptions of David’s infusion of the caravaggesque into a variety of his works, particularly the early *académies*, or nudes, *Hector* (1778) (fig. 5) and *Patroclus* (1779-80) (fig. 6), with single figures which at once emerge from and seem enveloped by the unarticulated space of the pictures’ ground.

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<sup>15</sup> Hautecoeur, 297.

<sup>16</sup> Walter F. Friedlaender, *David to Delacroix*, trans. Robert Goldwater, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), 16.

<sup>17</sup> Rosenblum, *The International Style of 1800*, 78, n 1.

<sup>18</sup> Philip Conisbee, *Painting in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 65 and 91.

David's admiration for the caravaggesque is most immediate, Anita Brookner writes, in these academies, "'barbarous' works...[by] a painter with the gift of pathos."<sup>19</sup> For Walter Friedlaender, the *Saint Roch interceding with the Virgin for the Plague-stricken* (1780) (fig. 7), David's first commission and one of his few religious works, "is unthinkable without Caravaggio or his followers...the influence of Caravaggio or the Caravaggisti makes itself felt in the simplification and virility of the general tonality".<sup>20</sup> Jean Leymarie calls the *Death of Marat* (1793) (fig. 8) David's "most intense masterpiece of Caravaggism".<sup>21</sup> The fact that so many scholars support the notion that elements of the caravaggesque can be traced in David's oeuvre from his first years in Rome to the first few years of the 1790s justifies further analysis of the significance of the Italian artist to the concomitant emergence of the Neoclassical style.

Finally, select scholars have attempted to document Caravaggio's influence by identifying particular formal quotations in David's work, most notably the flaccid right arm of the figure of Marat as a derivation of Christ's corresponding limb in Caravaggio's 1602-03 *Entombment* (fig. 9).<sup>22</sup> The most enthusiastic contributor in this vein is Pierre Rosenberg, who has claimed that David *understood* Caravaggio better than seventeenth-century French caravaggesque painters themselves. Rosenberg argues that Caravaggio's lasting impact on David's oeuvre appears not only in the seminal shift in the French artist's style, but in formal correspondences through such works as *Cupid and Psyche*

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<sup>19</sup> Anita Brookner, *Jacques-Louis David* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1980), 58.

<sup>20</sup> Friedlaender, *David to Delacroix*, 14.

<sup>21</sup> Leymarie, *David et Rome*, 14.

<sup>22</sup> Harold Spencer, *The Image Maker: Man and his Art* (New York, 1975). See also Giulio Carlo Argan, *David et Rome*, 23.

(1817).<sup>23</sup> Rosenberg fails to explicate his claim by documentation or analysis, but rather proffers a string of visual examples.

The following chapters of this study will address the lacunae that exist amid the compelling observations of and assertions for the influence of Caravaggio on David. Of fundamental importance is a review of the state of French art during the second half of the eighteenth century, and the role of the reform movement in David's development of Neoclassicism. Requisite comparisons and detailed examinations of the elements of caravaggism in David's Roman works and major canvases of the 1780s will substantiate claims for the Italian artist's influence. To explain why David's response to the works of Caravaggio was unique, precipitating the French artist's development of Neoclassicism as it is characterized today, it is necessary first to investigate the heretofore peripheral question of the impact of Caravaggio in eighteenth-century French theory, academic practice and public art consumption.

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<sup>23</sup> Rosenberg, "David et Caravage," 203.

## CHAPTER I: CARAVAGGIO AND EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE

Determining whether a general French taste for the caravaggesque existed in eighteenth-century France is germane to understanding how David would come to see it as a meaningful vehicle for his own aesthetic expression that was discrete from and indeed, more complex than that of previous artists. Although Caravaggio's reputation had steadily diminished since the middle of the seventeenth century, his art was by no means unknown in eighteenth-century France to artists and collectors, due in part to the response his work elicited from the French artists who flocked to Rome in the years after Caravaggio's death.<sup>1</sup> This group of painters disseminated their tenebrist manner through various provinces of their native country, and produced a great number of works that emulated those of Caravaggio in both the choice of theme (particularly the card sharps and fortunetellers) and the employment of intense contrasts of light and dark.

Among the myriad international artists who comprised the Caravaggisti, or followers of Caravaggio, the French contingent represented one of the most cohesive groups of painters who combined fresh naturalism and radical immediacy of forms. Chief among

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<sup>1</sup> The wholesale taste for caravaggism dissolved in most of Europe by the mid-1630s. The seventeenth-century response to the caravaggesque and other Baroque artists has been subject to a variety of studies. All but those with which David was directly concerned are beyond the scope of the present paper. For the taste for Italian painting in seventeenth-century France, see Arnould Brejon de Lavergnée, *L'inventaire Le Brun de 1683 : la collection de Louis XIV* (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1987); *Seicento: le siècle de Caravage dans les collections françaises* (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1988), 10-63; and Stéphane Loire, "Le Guerchin et les peintres français aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles," in *Studi di Storia dell'Arte in onore di Dennis Mahon* (Milan: Electa, 2000), 237-251. On the caravaggesques, see Arnould Brejon de Lavergnée, *Valentin et les caravaggesques français* (Paris and Rome: Réunion des musées nationaux et l'Académie de France à Rome, 1975), passim; Pierre Rosenberg, ed., *La peinture française du XVIIe siècle dans les collections américaines* (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des

the *caravagesques*, as these French followers are known, were Simon Vouet, Claude Vignon and Valentin de Boulogne, the latter of whom scholars see as the most loyal subscriber to Caravaggio's aesthetic ideals. Valentin, who resided in Rome from 1611-12 until his premature death in August of 1632, did not simply create formulaic reconfigurations of caravaggesque types or motifs. Rather, he invested his works with the same gravitas that permeates Caravaggio's biblical narratives and portraits of saints and martyrs. Caravaggio's own biographer, Giovanni Baglione, included Valentin's biography in his treatise,<sup>2</sup> implying the French artist's kinship with the progenitors and paladins of Italy's artistic heritage.

Some significant eighteenth-century French aesthetic texts saw Valentin, like Caravaggio, as a formidable alternative to France's most esteemed Italianate artist, Nicolas Poussin. Antoine-Joseph Dézallier d'Argenville (1680-1765), *secrétaire du roi*, as well as an amateur theoretician and engraver who made several prints after Caravaggio,<sup>3</sup> produced in 1762 the copious *Abrégé de la vie des plus fameux peintres...*, which provides the most extensive commentary on Caravaggio by an eighteenth-century French figure. In his text, Dézallier placed the life of Caravaggio just before that of Poussin, thereby juxtaposing the exemplars of naturalism and classicism. Dézallier identified Caravaggio's indelible legacy of verisimilitude in French painting by contrasting Valentin to Poussin: "[i]t was said in Rome that Poussin grasped the soul's

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musées nationaux 1983), 16-24; 51-73; and Christopher Wright, *The French Painters of the Seventeenth Century* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1985).

<sup>2</sup> Brejon de Lavergnée, *Valentin et les caravagesques françaises*, 124. Giovanni Baglione, *Le vite de' pittori, scultori, architetti, dal pontificato di Gregorio XIII del 1572, fino a tempi di Papa Urbano VIII nel 1642* (Rome, 1642; repr., Bologna: Arnaldo Forni, Editori, 1975-76), 337-38.

<sup>3</sup> M. Pinault Sørensen, "Dézallier d'Argenville, Antoine-Joseph," *Allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon die Bildenden Künstler aller Zeiten und Völker*, v. 27 (Munich/ Leipzig: K. G. Saur, 2000), 35-36.

affections and that Valentin was more skilled at representing nature...”<sup>4</sup> Yet, even as French commentators recognized Valentin’s fidelity to his Italian master, they sought to distance him from the censurable aspects of Caravaggio’s art. Thus, in the 1786 volume of engravings of the collection of the Duc d’Orléans, the text accompanying two of Valentin’s genre scenes notes that while “the forceful style of Michelangelo da Caravaggio pleased him greatly...”, if Valentin had lived longer, “he would, following the example of Guido [Reni], have mollified his brush, and he would have rendered it more graceful.”<sup>5</sup>

In an earlier catalogue of the Orléans collection, Louis Francois Dubois de Saint-Gelais alluded to the aesthetic naïveté that Caravaggio imparted to his French follower and that could be seen in a supposed self-portrait of the Italian entitled *The Dream of Caravaggio (Le Songe de Caravage)*. He described the canvas, “this painter dressed in tatters, gazing at himself in a mirror, above which is a skull placed on a sheet of paper which is atop a closed book.”<sup>6</sup> The description alludes to the heightened naturalism of Caravaggio’s painting, often at the expense of decorum or idealization, which is insinuated by the presence of a mirror (which was not an unconventional tool for

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<sup>4</sup> Antoine-Joseph Dézailler d’Argenville, *Abrégé de la vie des plus fameux peintres avec leurs portraits gravés en Taille-Douce, les indications de leurs principaux ouvrages, Quelques Réflexions sur leurs caractères et la manière de connoître les desseins et les tableaux des grands maîtres*, vol. 4 (Paris: 1762), 46, reprinted in Brejon de Lavergnée, *Valentin et les caravagesques françaises*, 125-126: “[o]n disait à Rome que le Poussin saissait mieux les affections de l’âme et que le Valentin representoit mieux la nature...”

<sup>5</sup> L’Abbé de Fontenai, *Galerie du Palais Royal, gravée d’après les Tableaux des différentes Ecoles qui la composent: Avec un abrégé de la vie des Peintres & un description historique de chaque tableau* (Paris: J. Couché and J. Bouilliard, 1786), n.p.: “le manière forte de Michel-Ange de Caravage lui plût tellement...il auroit, à l’exemple du Guide, adouci son Pinceau, et qu’il l’auroit rendu plus gracieux.”

<sup>6</sup> Louis François Dubois de Saint-Gelais, *Description des tableaux du Palais Royal, avec la vie des peintres à la tête de leurs ouvrages* (Paris: chez d’Houry, 1727; repr., Geneva: Minkoff Reprint, 1972), 323-34. “...ce peintre vetu de haillons, se regarde dans un miroir au dessus duquel est une tête de morte posée sur une feuille de papier qui est sur un livre fermé.” The other paintings in the collection are identified as a *Sacrifice of Isaac*, *Transfiguration*, and a *Flutist*. Apart from the *Sacrifice*, there is no evidence of Caravaggio’s execution of works treating the other subjects.



seventeenth-century artists). Indeed, Dubois de Saint-Gelais refers to the painting's representation of Caravaggio's unrefined physical appearance and supposed reticence for learning. There is no extant evidence that *The Dream of Caravaggio* belongs to Caravaggio's oeuvre. Nevertheless, the elements of the painting demonstrate the ignoble qualities that were seen to characterize him and his art.

Notwithstanding the prejudices surrounding Caravaggio's disposition, his art was a real presence in France by the middle of the seventeenth century. In 1683, Charles Le Brun, official First Painter and unofficial arbiter of taste, inventoried the French royal collection, which grew in the age of Louis XIV to include representative works from the canon of Italian masters. The inventory records three autograph Caravaggios (as well as one *Saint John* now given to his Neapolitan follower Giovanni Battista Caracciolo), and nine works by Valentin.<sup>7</sup> Le Brun's annotations objectively record the paintings' dimensions and in some cases the dates of acquisition, but André Félibien's near-contemporary descriptions of the works in the collection reveal the early bias against Caravaggio's realism. Of the *Death of the Virgin* (1602) (fig. 10), acquired in 1672, he remarked, "...the body of the Virgin, arranged with so little decorum, and which seems to

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<sup>7</sup> Brejon de Lavergnée, *Valentin et les caravagesques françaises*, 10. Today, the Louvre holds three works by Caravaggio, all of which were a part of the French royal collection in David's day: the *Fortune Teller* (c. 1597), the *Death of the Virgin* (1602), and the *Portrait of Alof de Wignacourt and Page* (1608). The *Death of the Virgin* is the only one to figure prominently in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French critical reception of Caravaggio. Genre scenes and portraiture, even those by recognized masters, did not constitute sufficient models for artists aspiring to the highest order of history painter. Nonetheless, Caravaggio's *Fortune Teller* and portrait of Wignacourt present strong examples of his characteristic naturalism. That David was a prolific portrait artist, particularly adept at capturing the likeness and conveying the lifelikeness of each sitter, presents a possible avenue for examining the importance of Caravaggio which this study will not pursue.

be that of a drowned woman, does not appear sufficiently noble to represent that of the mother of God.”<sup>8</sup>

As for Valentin, Félibien found that he had succumbed in part to Caravaggio’s lack of decorum, “...he was not more judicious than his master [Caravaggio] in the choice of subjects, as you can observe in the paintings here, which can be considered nonetheless some of the most beautiful that he has made.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, Félibien begrudgingly approved of Valentin. However, this painter, who had a relatively large number of canvases in the royal collection, did not foster caravaggism in Paris, whereas several other *caravagesques* brought the style to the provinces after their Roman sojourns.

If Louis XIV had deemed Caravaggio and his followers worthy of a place in the royal collection, the Academy, as it evolved, did not subscribe whole-heartedly to the pedagogical value of the artist’s work. From an eighteenth-century academic perspective, Caravaggio’s approach represented, at best, an efficacious method of painting,<sup>10</sup> and at worst, a refutation of the principles of *dessin* and decorum—the technical and ideological requirements for treating noble, historical subjects.

Nevertheless, David must have become acquainted with the caravaggesque style in Paris through Valentin’s notoriety and works in the royal collection. When, as a *pensionnaire*,

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<sup>8</sup> André Félibien, *Description du chateau de Versailles, de ses peintures, et d’autres ouvrages fait pour le roy, par monsieur Félibien* (Paris: F. & P. Delaulne, 1696), n.p., cited in Brejon de Lavergnée, *Valentin et les caravagesques françaises*, 242: “le corps de la Vierge disposé avec si peu de bienséance, et qui paroît celui d’une femme noyée, ne semble pas assez noble pour représenter celui de la mère de Dieu.” Félibien’s description betrays his reliance on the anecdote popularized by Giovanni Bellori. See below, pages 21-2 and n 25 for the eighteenth-century response to Caravaggio’s *Death of the Virgin*.

<sup>9</sup> Brejon de Lavergnée, *Valentin et les caravagesques françaises*, 125. The Valentins in the collection included: *The Innocence of Susanna*, the *Judgement of Solomon*, *Judith*, *St. John the Evangelist*, *St. Luke*, *St. Mark*, *St. Matthew*, *The Fortune Teller*, *The Denial of Caesar*; *ibid*, 10: “...il ne fut pas plus judicieux que son maistre [Caravaggio] dans le choix des sujets, comme vous pouvez remarquer dans les tableaux qui sont icy, qu’on peut regarder néanmoins comme des plus beaux qu’il ait faits.”

<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Jacques Thuillier attributes the popularity among seventeenth-century *caravagesques* to the relative diminution of emphasis on perspective, anatomy and compositional complexity in his canvases. Thuillier, “Introduction,” in *Valentin et les caravagesques françaises*, ed. Brejon de Lavergnée, xvi.

David was permitted to copy Valentin's *Last Supper* for his requisite submission to the royal academy,<sup>11</sup> Vien (then *directeur* of the Academy in Rome) and the Comte d'Angiviller (*Surintendant des Bâtiments* in Paris) tacitly acknowledged the status that Caravaggio had attained.

Pierre Rosenberg and Philip Conisbee have noted that during the last three decades of the eighteenth century, *pensionnaires* drew and painted copies after Caravaggio with growing frequency. Both have insisted on the Italian artist's currency within the Academy, though their purposes differ. Conisbee posits a correspondence between a renewed appreciation for Caravaggio's realism and the transition within the French school to a stylistic austerity that reflected the institutional and philosophical reforms in painting.<sup>12</sup> Rosenberg attempts to establish a tradition of French admiration for the Seicento artist that would offer plausible verification for David's interest in Caravaggio.<sup>13</sup> There is little evidence for direct emulation of Caravaggio's style within the oeuvre of any *Ancien Régime* painter who preceded David. Yet, the few known copies after Caravaggio by eighteenth-century French students establish the possibility that Caravaggio's oeuvre existed as a source to be mined for inspiration. Nonetheless, a disparity in the Academy's official records between the infrequent references to

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<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of David's *envoi*, see below, Chapter 3, 58-9.

<sup>12</sup> Conisbee, 65. Conisbee cites Caravaggio's Matthew cycle in the Contarelli Chapel of San Luigi dei Francesi, the French national church in Rome since 1589, as an obvious work from among those by Caravaggio that were copied often after 1770. Louis Hauteceouer also named Caravaggio as one of several Italian Renaissance and Baroque masters who were considered acceptable models for students at the Rome Academy, although he does not provide documentary evidence of students who worked directly after the Lombard painter. Hauteceouer, 34. The following chapter of this paper will address the effects of the major institutional reforms undertaken near mid-century on David's early formation. The most comprehensive study of the impact of reform on French painting remains Jean Locquin, *La Peinture d'Histoire en France de 1747 à 1785* (Paris, 1912; repr., Paris: Arthéna, 1978).

<sup>13</sup> Rosenberg, "David et Caravage," in Calvesi and Trigilia eds., 186; 188.

Caravaggio and the many to other Renaissance and Baroque Masters, challenges the claim that the French royal art academy advocated him as a model.

It is in the official correspondence between the *Surintendant des Bâtiments* and the *directeurs* of the Royal Academy in Rome that one first finds mention of Caravaggio.<sup>14</sup>

In a 1757 letter by the then-*directeur*, Charles Natoire to the Marquis de Marigny, one reads:

Would you approve of my assigning the beautiful painting by Pietro da Cortona in the church of the Capuchins to the *pensionnaires* to copy for their studies... ? The other, which faces it, in the same church, which is the Saint Michael by Guido [Reni], could occupy another *pensionnaire*. There is also a beautiful painting by Caravaggio in the Chiesa Nuova of the entombment of Christ. This third work would justly occupy our three young painters. I would distribute them in a manner so that the three different styles would make each of them [the students] study what they need...”<sup>15</sup>

Shortly after, the *pensionnaire* Nicolas Guy Brenet (1728-1792) was assigned to copy Caravaggio's *Entombment* (1603) (fig. 9), then in the church of Santa Maria in Vallicella (known familiarly, as Natoire's letter indicates, as the Chiesa Nuova).<sup>16</sup> Natoire did not represent the reform contingent of the French school, and the possibility remains that the young Brenet lobbied for the choice of the *Entombment*. Natoire made clear that he did

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<sup>14</sup> Pierre Rosenberg, “Caravage et la France,” *Scritti di storia dell'arte in onore di Federico Zeri* (Milano: Electa, 1984), 824. Rosenberg emphasized the fact that Caravaggio was one of a very few notable Italian painters who had not already been mentioned in the previous one hundred years of correspondence.

<sup>15</sup> Natoire to Marigny, Rome, 2 November 1757, *Correspondance des directeurs de l'Académie de France à Rome avec les Surintendants des Bâtiments* (1666-1797), XI, ed. Anatole de Montaiglon and Jules Guiffrey (Paris: Charavay Frères, 1887-1908), 199, cited in Rosenberg, “Caravage et la France,” 824: “Approuveriez-vous que je donnasse à copier aux pensionnaires pour leurs études le beau tableau de Pierre de Cortone, qui est dans l'église des Capucins... ? L'autre, qui est en face, dans la même église, que est le saint Michel du Guide, pourrait occuper un autre pensionnaire. Il y a encore un beau tableau du Caravage dans l'église neuve d'un Christ que l'on met au tombeau. Ce troisième morceau occuperait justement nos trois jeunes peintres. Je les partagerais de façon que ces trois manières différentes feraient étudier chacun dans ce qu'il [a] besoin...”

<sup>16</sup> Brenet's copy was achieved 18 October 1758. *Correspondance*, XI, 239, in Rosenberg, “Caravage et la France,” 824. The canvas is listed in the 1824 inventory B of the Louvre (MR 1596, inv. 58). The *envoi* measures 300 by 224 cm (the original, now in the Vatican Museum, is 300 by 203 cm). The inventory

not give Brenet *carte blanche* with respect to the *pensionnaire*'s assignment. The *directeur* informed Marigny six months later that he advised Brenet to modify certain elements from the Italian artist's canvas: "This master is somewhat lacking in the elegance of drawing. I have endeavored to inspire the young painter not to fall into the clumsiness toward which parts of this painting are too much inclined."<sup>17</sup> When Natoire sent the *envoi* to Paris in 1759, he admitted to Marigny the unfortunate results of Brenet's endeavors:

I would have wanted Mr. Brenet's copy after Caravaggio, with regard to the contour, to have been a bit more elegant than the original; but despite my precautions, he allowed himself to be drawn into imitating too closely this master who, as far as line is concerned, is ponderous and hardly noble.<sup>18</sup>

For the proponents of reform, Natoire's eclectic choices of models represented the susceptibility of the French Academy in Rome to what was seen as degeneracy of the French school. Brenet's 1758 painting seems to have been the first copy after Caravaggio's works given to a *pensionnaire*. Perhaps because the initial venture yielded disappointing results, there is no evidence of another until twenty-five years later.

In 1784, Louis-Jean-François Lagrenée, *dit l'Aîné*, *directeur* in Rome, informed the *Surintendant*, the comte d'Angiviller, that Jean Charles-Nicaise Perrin (1754-1831) "just completed his copy for the King of one of the most beautiful paintings by Michelangelo

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notes that the back of the picture is signed and dated "Brenet 1758" and that it was sent to "Province". Its whereabouts are unknown today. Rosenberg, "Caravage et la France," 825.

<sup>17</sup> Natoire to Marigny, Rome, 3 May 1758, *Correspondance*, XI, 210; 213, cited in Rosenberg, "David et Caravage," 824: "Ce maître manque un peu dans l'élegance du dessin. J'ai tâché d'inspirer au jeune peintre de ne pas tomber dans des lourdeurs de partie ou ce tableau incline un peu trop."

<sup>18</sup> Natoire to Marigny, Rome, 24 October 1759, *Correspondance*, XI, 317, cited in Rosenberg, "Caravage et la France," 824: "J'aurais voulu que la copie du sr Brenet d'après le Caravage, dans la partie du contour eût été un peu plus élégante que n'est l'original; mais il s'est laissé emporter, malgré mes précautions, à trop imiter ce maître qui, dans la partie du dessin, est pesant et peu noble."

Caravaggio and it is quite good.”<sup>19</sup> Lagrenée, another first-generation reform painter,<sup>20</sup> does not specify in his letter the painting’s subject, but it may have once again been Caravaggio’s *Entombment*, as a copy of the altarpiece appears in the inventory of the Royal collection in 1785.<sup>21</sup>

With evidence that Perrin was certainly familiar with Caravaggio, Philip Conisbee suggests that the monumentality and highly modeled quality of the figures in Perrin’s 1788 *Death of the Virgin* (fig. 11) may have been influenced by Caravaggio’s 1602 work of the same subject, a part of the French Royal collection since 1672.<sup>22</sup> Perrin’s canvas, exhibited in the 1789 Salon, is exemplary of “reformed” French history painting as it was understood in the eighteenth century. If, as Sylvain Bellenger argues, the painting

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<sup>19</sup> Lagrenée l’Aîné to d’Angiviller, Rome, 24 June 1784, *Correspondance*, XIV, 439, cited in Rosenberg, “Caravage et la France,” 827: “...vient d’achever sa copie pour le Roi d’un des plus beaux tableaux de Michel-Ange Caravage et elle est fort bien.” The painting was sent to Paris in September of 1784. *Correspondance*, XIV, 450; 455, *ibid.* Perrin was accorded the Prix de Rome in 1780 after it was determined that the first winner, Jean Pierre Saint-Ours, a Protestant, was ineligible, “ne pouvant...être admis à l’Académie de France à Rome à cause de sa religion...”. D’Angiviller to Pierre, Paris, 9 September 1780, *Correspondance*, XIV, 48, cited in *Un peintre sous la Révolution: Jean Charles-Nicolas Perrin (1754-1831)*, ed. Sylvain Bellenger (Montargis: Éditions du Musée Girodet, 1989), 83.

<sup>20</sup> Lagrenée was a former student of the *École des Élèves Protégés*, a prestigious school that prepared the most promising *Prix de Rome* winners for their Italian sojourns. Its establishment in 1749 was considered one of the most enterprising reforms implemented by the *Surintendant des Bâtiments*, Lenormant de Tournehem (1745-1751). See below, Chapter 2, pages 38-9 and *n* 16 for further discussion of David’s connection to the *École des Élèves Protégés*.

<sup>21</sup> Rosenberg, 827. Sylvain Bellenger confirms that Perrin copied the *Entombment* while in Rome. *Un peintre sous la Révolution*, 45. Pierre Rosenberg notes a sequence of copies done by French students in Rome that purport to demonstrate the secure position of Caravaggio in the context of the Academy’s teaching practice. There is Guillaume Guillon, *dit* Lethière (1760-1832) for whom Menageot proposed a copy after Caravaggio’s Flemish contemporary, Francois Stellaert, of his *Deposition* from San Pietro in Montorio de Baburen. The Flemish artist is described as “contemporain de Michel-Ange de Caravage, qui avait beaucoup de sa manière avec un plus beau coloris” *Correspondance* (1788), XV, 288-89; Rosenberg, “Caravage et la France,” 827. In his correspondence with d’Angiviller, Menageot also praised Ribera’s *Descent from the Cross* in the Carthusian sacristy in Naples as “un des plus beaux tableaux de l’Italie...” (XV, 415), and the two decided on the latter model for Lethière. Rosenberg further extended the circle of caravaggesque painters recognized or praised by the French academy to include Guerchino and Guido Reni. Francois-Xavier Fabre (1766-1837) executed a copy of Guido Reni’s tenebristic *Martyrdom of Saint Peter*. Rosenberg, 827. For the painting, Reni was encouraged to emulate Caravaggio’s style by the Cavaliere d’Arpino. Janis Bell, “Some Seventeenth-Century Appraisals of Caravaggio’s Coloring,” *artibus et historiae* 14, no. 27 (1993): 117. As Stephen Pepper notes, Reni’s composition derives directly from Caravaggio’s work of the same subject in Santa Maria del Popolo. D. Stephen Pepper, “Caravaggio and Guido Reni: Contrasts in Attitudes,” *Art Quarterly* (Autumn, 1971): 325-344. There is no evidence of Caravaggio’s famous version having been assigned to a *pensionnaire*.

exhibits a dramatic, severe composition “purified of gallant or sensual complacency,”<sup>23</sup> it nonetheless betrays a preference for Poussinist formality in the less condensed processional arrangement of figures and theatrical elucidation of emotions. Divine intercession breaks, rather than augments, the solemnity of the moment, as does the too-large still life of copper ewers and basins in the left foreground. Overall, Perrin’s *Death* lacks the cohesive composition and emotional thrust of the weighty, almost oppressive anguish conveyed in Caravaggio’s painting.

Still, Perrin did attain moments of touching realism. His study for the head of the Virgin (fig.12), to which the passage in the final version adheres closely, conveys a caravaggesque sobriety that counterbalances the histrionics of the composition.<sup>24</sup> Perrin himself said that he “executed this head in Italy after a Roman woman who had just died.”<sup>25</sup> Perrin’s claim resonates with the conceit, adopted from the 1672 biography by Giovanni Bellori, that Caravaggio’s painting indecorously depicted a corpse-like, and therefore utterly human, Virgin, “[Caravaggio’s] *Death of the Virgin* in the Chiesa della Scala...was removed because he had shown the swollen body of a dead woman too realistically.”<sup>26</sup> Notwithstanding the questionable veracity of Perrin’s explanation, the study surpasses the emotive capacity of an academic *tête d’expression*, and bears no small resemblance to the head of the Virgin in Caravaggio’s altarpiece. Perrin’s choice to depict the mouth of the Virgin slightly agape represents a rather vulgar detail by

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<sup>22</sup> Conisbee, 68.

<sup>23</sup> *Un peintre sous la Révolution*, 95.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* Perrin clearly mediated what was seen as the morbid naturalism of Caravaggio’s scene with the appearance of the heavenly host suspended over the recumbent figure. Bellori’s biography of Caravaggio was likely to have been readily available to Perrin. See below, pages 22-3 and *n* 29.

<sup>26</sup> Giovanni Pietro Bellori, “Michelangelo da Caravaggio,” *Le vite de’ pittori, scultori e architetti moderni* (Rome, 1672), 213. Reprinted in translation in Howard Hibbard, *Caravaggio* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983), 372.

eighteenth-century standards. Such visual devices, as well as Perrin's anecdote, imply a desire to be associated with Caravaggio's unmitigated faithfulness to nature, and purported practice of always painting directly from the model.

Despite the appearance of visual and verbal references to Caravaggio and the case made by scholars about Perrin for an understanding of the compositional and emotional devices of the caravaggesque, the evidence for institutional incorporation of Caravaggio's oeuvre into French art education is thin. Scholars like Conisbee and Rosenberg have not established that one generation of *pensionnaires* transmitted the qualities of the caravaggesque to their pupils, yet, they have intimated that a growing tradition of caravaggism paved the way for the emergence of Neoclassicism. Conisbee argues that David's most promising protégé, Jean-Germain Drouais, was one of the first artists in eighteenth-century France to evince Caravaggio's influence.<sup>27</sup> Conisbee identifies Drouais as a former pupil of Brenet, in order to establish a direct link between Drouais' extreme tenebrism and Caravaggio's work through Brenet's copy of the *Entombment*. Conisbee proceeds to claim that David, not Brenet, served as the source for Drouais' understanding of Caravaggio, but he fails to elaborate on the nature of the caravaggesque in David's work. Such muddled arguments take for granted David's caravaggism while glossing over the intricacies of stylistic inheritance from one generation to the next.

Caravaggio's infamous biography, which was linked to his artistic realism, likely inhibited the French academy from embracing his art as a model. Giovanni Pietro Bellori (1613-1696), whose biography was neither the most conciliatory nor the most rancorous of the seventeenth-century texts, was made an honorary member of the French royal art

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<sup>27</sup> Conisbee, 68.



academy in 1689.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, his *Vite de' pittori, scultori et architetti moderni* would probably have been part of the Academy's eighteenth-century library.<sup>29</sup> The theoretical dialogues of the constituent bodies of French art literature and criticism, to which the Academy itself increasingly lent the vocabulary and syntax, often emphasized Caravaggio's distinct manner of representing nature, and his apparent lack of discernment in the depiction of earthly and divine figures, two of Bellori's main contentions.<sup>30</sup> Later, Louis de Jaucourt's discussion of Caravaggio for an article on "écoles" in the *Encyclopédie* informed the reader that, "In a word, he made deals with everyone, was miserable his entire life...he ate alone in the tavern, where, one day, having no means to pay, he painted the cabaret's shop sign, which was sold for a considerable sum."<sup>31</sup> The *Encyclopédie* entry conveys a French understanding of the dubious nature of Caravaggio's fame: the visual impact of his art may have been undeniable, but it could not conceal the perceived lack of idealization. De Jaucourt explained that the artist

made himself very famous by means of an extremely strong, true manner, which had a great effect...[but] he painted entirely after nature...Because he copied his models exactly, he imitated their faults and the beautiful

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<sup>28</sup> Charles Harrison, Paul Wood and Jason Gaiger, eds., *Art in Theory, 1648-1815: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 96-97.

<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth Holt claims that the Academy relied on the principles of the aesthetic doctrines of "Boileau, de Piles, and Bellori, 'speaking for Poussin.'" Elizabeth Gilmore, Holt, ed., *The Triumph of Art for the Public, 1785-1848: The Emerging Role of Exhibitions and Critics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983, c1979), 4.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Wrigley provides a copious analysis of the various venues for critical writing, as well as the significance of art criticism in the context of the Salons, the Academy and the public sphere of eighteenth-century France. Wrigley, *The Origins of French Art Criticism from the Ancien Régime to the Restoration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), passim. The availability of texts varied according to methods of circulation, and therefore the applicability of discrete selections to the opinions of a broad French audience cannot be ascertained. Nevertheless, this paper recognizes that the phenomenon of criticism became an "instrument of collective values" for which a variety of sources can be mined to understand in general terms the reception of Caravaggio and the response to David's oeuvre during the second half of the eighteenth century.

<sup>31</sup> Louis de Jaucourt, "École", *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Mérits*, vol. 5, ed. Diderot and D'Alembert (Paris, 1751, repr., Stuttgart: Frommann, 1966), 326.

elements: for he had no other idea at all than the effect of the nature before him.<sup>32</sup>

De Jaucourt's acknowledgement of Caravaggio's fame among his contemporaries did not necessarily reflect the status of the Seicento painter in eighteenth-century France. In fact, starting with the first critical discussions of Caravaggio's art in the late 1600s, French theorists tempered their praise for his color and brushwork with criticism of his indecorous forms.

In the dialogue that André Félibien constructed between an art student, Pymandre, and his teacher in his *Entretiens sur les vies et les ouvrages des plus excellents Peintres anciens et modernes* (1688), the merits of Caravaggio's art are at once tentatively acknowledged and challenged. When Pymandre observes that the *Death of the Virgin* has "neither beauty, nor grace", the teacher offers an equivocal response: "you can observe a truthfulness in the figures and the other things that accompany them, and it can be said that nature can not be copied better than in all that he has painted..."<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, the artist's greatest weakness, despite his ability to reproduce nature so faithfully, was seen as his lack of discretion in the treatment of noble or elevated subject matter. Félibien remarked that "in all the...stories that he has treated,...he has thought neither of nobility, nor of the grandeur which should accompany them."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid: "...s'est rendu très-illustré par une manière extrêmement forte, vraie, & d'un grand effet...Il peignoit tout d'après nature...Comme il a exactement suivi ses modeles, il en a imité les défauts & les beautés: car il n'avoit point d'autre idée que l'effet du naturel présent."

<sup>33</sup> André Félibien des Avaux, *Entretiens sur les vies et les ouvrages des plus excellents Peintres anciens et modernes*, (Paris, 1688; repr., Paris, 1725), cited in Margrit Franziska Brehm, *Der Fall Caravaggio : Eine Rezeptionsgeschichte*, (Frankfurt am Main : Peter Lang, 1992), 78 : "...vous pouvez remarquer une vérité dans les figures et les autres choses qui les accompagnent , et l'on peut dire que la nature ne peux mieux être copiée que dans tout ce qu'il a peint. "

<sup>34</sup> Ibid: "dans toutes les...histoires qu'il a traitées, qu'il n'a pensé ni à la noblesse, ni à la grandeur dont il devoit les accompagner."

In truth, the Academy primarily advocated classicizing models for its artists. Whereas by the mid-eighteenth century, “naturalism” was valued insofar as it guarded against artifice, idealization and the use of certain rhetorical tropes were still crucial to the higher genres. Fundamental to the institutional valuation of ideal forms was Johann Joachim Winckelmann’s seminal text, *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst* (*Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works of Painting and Sculpture*, 1755), in which the German historian reflected,

Nothing would demonstrate more clearly the advantages of the imitation of antiquity over the imitation of nature than to take two young people of equal talent and to have one of them study antiquity and the other nature alone. The latter would depict nature as he finds her, if he were an Italian he would perhaps paint figures like those of Caravaggio. The former, however, would depict nature as it should be, and would paint figures like those of Raphael.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, although Caravaggio represented a particular embodiment of Italian art (albeit the undesirable practice of unmitigated naturalism), the art of Raphael was posited as a universal example of ideal forms. Indeed, the two works by Caravaggio most often cited in the context of eighteenth-century French academic art, the *Entombment* and the *Death of the Virgin*, may have been singled out for what would have been recognized as their relatively classicizing or traditional compositions.<sup>36</sup>

For the French academy, the great descendent of Raphael was Poussin, whose methods and effects it considered the extreme opposites of Caravaggio’s. The supposed enmity between the two Baroque artists (who never met) was constructed in large part by

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<sup>35</sup> Harrison, et al., *Art in Theory*, 450.

<sup>36</sup> The *Entombment* in particular is the only altarpiece by Caravaggio which did not provoke initial consternation or scandal, perhaps because it was held to the highest expectations of decorum by the patrons. On the *Entombment* in the context of the program of Santa Maria in Vallicella, see Lothar Sickel, “Remarks on the Patronage of Caravaggio’s *Entombment of Christ*,” *Burlington Magazine* 143, no. 1180

Félibien, who famously attributed to Poussin the remark that Caravaggio “had come into the world to destroy painting.”<sup>37</sup> A. J. Dézallier d’Argenville lambasted Caravaggio’s purported claim, reported by Baglione and Bellori, that nature was his only model when he wittily observed in 1762, “the title of taxidermist which is suitable only for a physicist, was given in his time to painters like [Caravaggio] who endeavored only to copy slavishly that which nature reveals to us.”<sup>38</sup> Behind the jest is the insistence upon decorum in the choice of subject matter and the appropriate means of representing it.

Dézallier’s text may have been born of his own journey to Italy.<sup>39</sup> Among the vast numbers of French travelers who took part in the phenomenon of the Grand Tour,<sup>40</sup> those who recorded their impressions in the form of guidebooks, travelogues or personal documents (diaries and letters) betray their familiarity with the traditional theories and opinions of the Academy. These humanists, intellectuals and *gens de lettres* provide, to varying degrees, the locations and accessibility of Caravaggio’s works, although the attributions of some have been re-evaluated or are now untraceable. Travelers’ reactions seem to have been mediated not by the visual impact of Caravaggio’s painting but rather

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(July 2001): 426-29. On the conventional aspects of the *Death of the Virgin*, see Pamela Askew, *Caravaggio’s Death of the Virgin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 19-35.

<sup>37</sup> Félibien, *Entretiens sur les vies et sur les ouvrages des plus excellents peintres anciens et modernes*, v. 2 (Paris, 1688, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), 12-13: “était venu au monde pour détruire la peinture.” René Jullian astutely observed that if Poussin actually uttered the famous remark, it was at an advanced stage of his career, and that, in fact, the French artist was receptive early on to certain aspects of the caravaggesque tradition. Jullian, “Poussin et le Caravagisme,” in André Chastel, ed., *Nicolas Poussin*, vol. 1 (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1960), 225. For a recent semiotic exploration of the diametrical opposition of Caravaggio and Poussin in picture-making, see Louis Marin, *To Destroy Painting*, trans. Mette Hjort (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

<sup>38</sup> A. J. Dézallier d’Argenville, *Abrégé de la vie des plus fameux peintres*, vol. 2, 85: “le nom de naturaliste qui ne convient qu’à un physicien, fut donné de son temps aux peintres qui ne s’attachaient comme lui, qu’à suivre servilement ce que nous montre le naturel.”

<sup>39</sup> Dézallier traveled to Germany and Italy between 1712 and 1716. “Dézallier d’Argenville, Antoine-Joseph,” *Allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon die Bildenden Künstler aller Zeiten und Völker*, v. 27, 35.

<sup>40</sup> Yves Hersant estimates that some 3000-4000 left written accounts of journeys to Italy between 1700 and 1900. Yves Hersant, ed. *Italie: Anthologies des voyageurs français aux XVIII<sup>e</sup> et XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles*, (Paris: R. Laffont, 1988), vii.

by their predisposition to respond more favorably to those artists whose work could be accommodated to French art and taste. The frequency of mention and the extent of the praise that Grand Tourists gave to works by Caravaggio pale in comparison with laudatory references to Veronese, Guido Reni (le Guide), the Carracci, Correggio, and of course, Raphael. Undisputed models for young artists, the works of this latter group shared an underlying classical ideal that, by comparison, seems absent in the notoriously quotidian quality of Caravaggio's scenes. Even as these writers admire Caravaggio's mastery of coloring and verisimilitude, as a body of criticism, the Grand Tour literature fails to provide conclusive evidence for a broad French appreciation of Caravaggio's singularity. Two written accounts, Dézallier's and that of Charles-Nicolas Cochin offer distinct receptions of Caravaggio's art in eighteenth-century France. Neither is definitive of the artist's status at that time. Rather, each represents a critical examination of Caravaggio's art that is notable in the breadth of the attention it gives to the artist.

A. J. Dézallier d'Argenville's *Abrégé de la vie des plus fameux peintres...* provides the most extensive discussion of Caravaggio to be found in French Grand Tour literature, modeling its format after Vasari's seminal *Vite de' piu' eccellenti pittori, scultori e architetti*, and in turn, after Caravaggio's own biographers who used the same Renaissance template.<sup>41</sup> Dézallier's sketch of Caravaggio's character reiterates the bias of seventeenth-century biographies at the same time that the rest of his text provides valuable information from direct observation. However, despite his ostensible attention to detail, Dézallier erred when he purported to offer a critique of Caravaggio's drawings

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<sup>41</sup> Apart from its breadth, Dézallier's entry on Caravaggio distinguishes itself from other eighteenth-century French compendia of artists that recount the most violent anecdotes of Caravaggio's biography, correlating them with the instability of his professional career. See, for example, L. A. Bonafons, *Dictionnaire; and*

which, the author admits, “sont rares...”<sup>42</sup> In fact, no extant drawings by Caravaggio are known today.<sup>43</sup>

Despite its reliance on seventeenth-century precedents, Dézallier’s entry on Caravaggio provides valuable insight into the difficulty with which the eighteenth-century viewer reconciled the Seicento artist with French academic theories of painting. When, for example, Dézallier remarked that the first version of *The Inspiration of Saint Matthew* for the Contarelli Chapel of San Luigi dei Francesi (then in the Giustiniani collection) (fig. 13) was rejected because “it represented [the saint] as a peasant,”<sup>44</sup> he assumed that a contemporary viewer, expecting a certain degree of decorum in the depiction of divine figures, would pass the same judgment as the monks of San Luigi.<sup>45</sup> In a similar case, the Carmelites of Santa Maria della Scala in Trastevere refused Caravaggio’s *Death of the Virgin*, which was sold on the private market only a few years after its completion. Dézallier repeated the trope of comparing the figure of Christ’s mother to a prostitute’s bloated corpse, and observed that many other works by Caravaggio were similarly undignified.<sup>46</sup>

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Jacques Lacombe, *Dictionnaire portatif des Beaux-Arts, ou Abrégé de ce qui concerne l’architecture, la sculpture, la peinture, la gravure, la poésie & la musique*, (Paris: La veuve Estienne & fils, 1752): 407-09.

<sup>42</sup> A. –J. Dézallier D’Argenville, *Abrégé de la vie des plus fameux peintres*, vol. 2, 88.

<sup>43</sup> Dézallier’s description of the artist’s use of bistre, China ink and sanguine on tinted paper suggests that the writer may have attributed works by the sixteenth-century student of Raphael, Polidoro da Caravaggio, with Michelangelo Merisi. Scholars debate whether Caravaggio executed preliminary drawings as a component of his painting practice. See Alfred Moir, “Did Caravaggio Draw?” *Art Quarterly* 32 (1969): 354-37; Nevanka Kroschewski, “Caravaggio-Bild und Caravaggios Bilder: zur Frage der künstlerischen Methode,” *artibus et historiae* 20, no. 39 (1999): 191-215, 219; and Giulio Bora, “Da Peterzano a Caravaggio: un’ ipotesi sulla pratica disegnativa,” *Paragone arte* 53, no. 41-42 (623-625) (January-May 2002), 3-20.

<sup>44</sup> Dézallier, v.2, 88. “...il representa [the saint] comme un paysan...”

<sup>45</sup> On the Contarelli Chapel, its French patrons and the role of the priests in the chapel’s decorative scheme, see Helen Langdon, *Caravaggio: A Life*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000).

<sup>46</sup> Dézallier, v.2, 85. On the controversy surrounding the reasons for the painting’s rejection, see Askew, *passim*.

In spite of the intermittent references to admirable qualities in select works by Caravaggio, Dézallier's text appealed to young painters to consider carefully the consequences of choosing this artist as a model. The author warned his readers that the members of Caravaggio's school were the sort to be satisfied by achieving their works through "facility" and painting "without study." Moreover, "all painters," according to Dézallier, had remarked that Caravaggio possessed neither "genius," nor "propriety," nor "intelligence," and that he showed no discrimination in his depictions of noble figures and his method of composition. Dézallier's ultimate judgment of Caravaggio's canonical significance is unequivocal :

When one is unable to attribute an artist's distinction to the true worth that accompanies great qualities in his art: when his worth is due only to novelty, this reputation does not enter into immortality; such an artist must therefore be regarded as a fashionable painter.<sup>47</sup>

Lacking the timelessness of ancient models or the universal ideal presented by Raphael, Caravaggio's oeuvre, while well known and even praiseworthy in certain respects, was characterized for Dézallier by its unconventionality and transitory appeal.

Charles-Nicolas Cochin's 1756 *Voyage d'Italie*,<sup>48</sup> an account of his travels abroad between 1749 and 1751 with Abel-François Poisson de Vandières (later the Marquis de Marigny and future *Directeur des Bâtiments du Roi*), the architect Jacques-Germain Soufflot, and the Abbé Le Blanc, presents a compelling contrast to Dézallier's approach to and unfavorable assessment of Caravaggio's art. A printmaker and secretary to the royal art academy, Cochin offered more careful observations and descriptions of the

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<sup>47</sup> Dézallier, v.2, 83. "Quand on ne peut attribuer la distinction d'un peintre, au vrai mérite accompagné des grandes qualités de l'art : que ce mérite est seulement dû à la nouveauté, cette réputation ne perce pas jusqu'à l'immortalité ; on doit alors regarder un artiste comme un peintre à la mode. "

paintings themselves, and refrained from using Caravaggio's turbulent biography as the foundation for an evaluation of the artist. Intimating that he approved of Caravaggio as a model, Cochin cited his influence on other artists, describing in their works the adaptation of the positive qualities of the Lombard painter's style. Most notable among these were the effects of "the style (as far as the character of *dessin*) of M. A. da Caravaggio, of a base nature, but with much truthfulness, of the extremely varied and well rendered characters of heads, well painted with fire and expression..."<sup>49</sup> Cochin often put Caravaggio in the category "of the greatest masters" for his skillful creation of forceful shadows, and praised artists who dared to emulate him. However, as an academic artist, he was equally likely to criticize Caravaggio (and his followers) for a lack of freshness in color, an overly dark or brown effect, lowly subject matter, and poor *dessin*.

In his 1758 "Lettres à un jeune artiste peintre, pensionnaire à l'Académie Royale de France à Rome," Cochin privileged Raphael, Guido Reni, Guercino and Domenichino.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, in his second letter, Cochin remarked that

There are also other masters from whom one can derive useful lessons. You will see beautiful things in [the work of] Michelangelo da Caravaggio, but with harsh and black shadows. There is nevertheless a picturesque and singular taste for composition, a striking truth to nature, a large and facile handling, details rendered with certitude, a great manner, but which is sometimes too forceful... You will admire in [the work of] Valentin vigorous color, a three-dimensionality and a roundness in the forms, created by highly colored half-tones, strongly rendered truth to

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<sup>48</sup> *Voyage pittoresque d'Italie, ou Recueil de notes sur les ouvrages de peinture et de sculpture qu'on voit dans les principales villes d'Italie, Suivi des Lettres à un jeune artiste peintre pensionnaire à l'Académie Royale de France à Rome* (Paris: C.A. Jombert, 1756; repr., Geneva: Minkoff Reprint, 1972), 65.

<sup>49</sup> Cochin, 179, repr., 55. "...le goût (quant au caractère de dessein) de M. A. de Caravaggio, d'une nature basse, mais avec beaucoup de vérité, des caractères de têtes fort variés & bien rendus, bien peints, avec feu & expression..." This represents one of the more explicit examples. Cochin also praised "la couleur...vigoureuse..." in the works of Caravaggio and his followers. Ibid, 134, repr., 44.

<sup>50</sup> Especially the latter's *Saint Cecilia* in San Luigi dei Francesi, the location of Caravaggio's impressive *Saint Matthew* cycle, which is not mentioned. Cochin, 21, repr., 197.



detail ; but you will see almost everywhere in his work the most ignoble nature, and often in subjects that demanded the utmost nobility.<sup>51</sup>

Cochin carefully distinguished in the oeuvres of both Caravaggio and his most prestigious French follower the qualities that young artists could admire from those that should be avoided. In a public capacity, Cochin followed Natoire in deeming a work by Caravaggio a worthy model, with the stipulation that the student should modify the unacceptable elements of the composition or handling.

What the present author perceives as a broader, tacit appreciation for certain visual elements in Caravaggio's art seems curiously absent with respect to several artistic trends that emerged toward the end of the eighteenth century. These trends, which recall aspects of Caravaggio's and caravaggesque painting, include a taste for spectacular subject matter, night scenes, and candlelight pictures (especially in English painting after mid-century). Chloe Chard observes that the concept of "horror" (and the corresponding responses elicited, such as disgust, shock or terror) gained prominence in eighteenth-century travel writing after 1720, particularly as commentary on works of art began to reflect the personal responses of viewers.<sup>52</sup> In scenes of violence or martyrdom, for

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<sup>51</sup> Cochin, *lettre 2*, 26-27, repr., 198. "Il est encore d'autres maîtres chez qui l'on peut prendre des leçons utiles. Vous verrez de belles choses de Michel-Ange, de Caravage, mais avec des ombres dures et noires. Il y a cependant un goût de composition pittoresque et singulier, un vrai de nature piquant, un faire large et facile, des détails rendus avec sûreté, d'une manière grande mais seulement trop dure... Vous aimerez dans le Valentin une vigueur de couleur, une saillie et un arrondissement dans les objets, causés par des demi-teintes très colorées, des vérités de détails fièrement rendues ; mais vous y verrez presque partout la nature la plus ignoble, et souvent dans les sujets qui demandaient le plus de noblesse."

<sup>52</sup> Chloe Chard, "Horror on the Grand Tour," *The Oxford Art Journal* 6, no. 2 (1983): 7-8. An analogous development is the growing narrative appeal of the *roman noir* and the emergence of new disaster subjects in painting in the later decades of the eighteenth century. J. J. L. Whiteley, "Light and Shade in French Neo-Classicism," *Burlington Magazine* 117, no. 873 (December 1975): 771. Whiteley posits this trend as one of several factors that contributed to the development of dramatic chiaroscuro as a significant formal quality in the emerging Neoclassical style of painting. Neither David nor Caravaggio is examined in relation to this development. Intrinsic to Chard's argument is the development of the aesthetic theory of the sublime, codified in the eighteenth century by Sir Edmund Burke's *Philosophical enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and beautiful*, (1757, repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). The

example, the viewer may have perceived the content as “horrible,” but nonetheless could have praised the painting for its quality of execution.

In the case of Caravaggio, tourists often evaluated the artist’s most gruesome scenes according to these criteria. Josephe Jérôme Lefrançais de Lalande wrote in the 1760s of the *Judith and Holofernes* (fig. 14), then, as now, in the Palazzo Barberini, that it was “very beautiful, well composed,” but that “it is treated in a manner that is so terrible that one cannot look at it without a sort of rush of emotion.”<sup>53</sup> De Lalande was an astronomer, not a connoisseur, but his appraisal is valuable precisely for the frank response to Caravaggio’s unapologetic view of the climax of the decapitation. Other eighteenth-century viewers attributed the taste for the work of certain artists, such as Michelangelo Buonarroti, as particularly suited to those of hardy constitution who could tolerate the strong emotional responses such work evoked.<sup>54</sup> The sixteenth-century Michelangelo, whose notorious *terribilità* not only coexisted with, but also contributed to, the concept of his divine genius, was a canonical master on the order of Raphael. Yet, there is little to suggest that eighteenth-century viewers attributed to the equally mercurial Caravaggio the capacity for expressing powerful emotional profundity in conjunction with his startlingly realistic depictions of violence. An exception is seen in the comments of Jean-Baptiste de Boyer, Marquis d’Argens (1704-1771) who wrote that “it is not surprising that [Caravaggio’s oeuvre] has had and that it has yet today great power over

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concept of the sublime seems not to have been identified directly with Caravaggio’s oeuvre by eighteenth-century theoreticians.

<sup>53</sup> Josephe Jérôme de Lalande, *Voyage d’un François et Italie fait dans les Années 1765 et 1766*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1769), 87, cited in Brehm, 93. “...très-beau, bien composé...[mais]...il est traité d’une manière si terrible qu’on ne peu le regarder sans une espèce de saisissement.”

<sup>54</sup> Richard Wrigley, “Infectious Enthusiasms: Influence, Contagion, and the Experience of Rome,” *Transports: Travel, Pleasure, and Imaginative Geography, 1600-1830*, eds. Chloe Chard and Helen Langdon (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 87. For Michelangelo’s reputation and presence as a model within the French art Academy, see Locquin, 100-01.

the most refined eyes.”<sup>55</sup> De Boyer’s insightful observation offers rare praise for the singularity of Caravaggio’s art and its esteem in the eyes of the discerning viewer.

Caravaggio was not ignored by the collectors, artists, academicians, or *gens de lettres* of eighteenth-century France. However, it becomes clear that the artist did not inhabit the upper echelons of the aesthetic canon of Italian Masters. He was considered a peculiarity in many ways, and some powerful qualities of his work were overlooked in the face of his perceived lack of discernment and brutal realism. Although *pensionnaires* before and after David executed official copies after Caravaggio, something David would not do, they did not seek to implement the caravaggesque in the pursuit of reformed French history painting. Between the dates of Brenet’s and Perrin’s *envois*, Jacques-Louis David and Joseph-Marie Vien came to the French Academy in Rome. After his initial training with the leading artist in the reform of French painting, David would find in Caravaggio’s oeuvre the means to impel reform to aesthetic revolution.

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<sup>55</sup> Jean-Baptiste de Boyer, Marquis d’Argens, *Reflexions critiques sur les differents écoles de peinture*, (Paris, 1768), cited in Brehm, 93. “...il n’est pas étonnant que [l’oeuvre de Caravage] ait eu et qu’elle ait encore aujourd’hui beaucoup de pouvoir sur les yeux les plus éclairés.” Virginia Spate argues that expressions of violent and horrific subject matter in French reform painting were not only a presentiment of Romanticism, but also one result of the influence of an artist like Caravaggio. Virginia Spate, ed., *French Painting: The Revolutionary Decades, 1760-1830*, (Sydney: Australian Gallery Directors Council, 1980), 8.

## CHAPTER 2: DAVID'S EARLY FORMATION

Many of the lessons David would learn from studying Caravaggio were built upon his adherence to principles of the reformed French art education that had evolved after 1750, however ambiguously Caravaggio's art seems to have fit into eighteenth-century academic practice. During the decades of reform, Rococo visions of aristocratic pleasure and amorous mythological subjects were rejected for depictions of noble heroes from ancient and modern history or virtuous paupers in humble domestic interiors.

Concomitant with the demand on the part of academicians and theoreticians for paintings with morally elevated themes came the taste for formal clarity and simplicity, inspired in part by the rediscovery of ancient frescoes at Pompeii and Herculaneum. The French Academy had privileged ancient and Renaissance models since its founding in 1648, and certain traditional themes and subjects, imbued with morality, became signs of the virtuous progress in French art. In painting, the call for didactic or inspiring subjects found its successful vehicle to be a lucid and dramatic presentation of the narrative, in which figures of a more emphatic, sculptural presence, achieved through intense light effects and greater surface detail and textures, replaced the flaccid, generic forms of the Rococo.

David's early formation was traditional if felicitously marked by privileged associations and relations. His uncle, François Boucher (the same Rococo master),

arranged the young David's apprenticeship with Joseph-Marie Vien.<sup>1</sup> Because Vien is generally seen as a significant and early contributor to the reform in French painting, his ideas and methods constituted an important foundation for the achievements of his most prestigious pupil.<sup>2</sup>

The changes in academic methods which Vien instituted during his directorship (1775-1781) emphasized the aim for greater truth in painting at the fundamental level of studio practice. Drawing after the model became a regular, rather than exceptional component of daily lessons. Vien also encouraged painting (in addition to drawing) after nature to achieve the qualities of realism he admired in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italian painting.<sup>3</sup> His directorship was colored by his own response to seventeenth-century tradition as a *pensionnaire* from 1744-1750. Vien's memoirs recount how he perceived within early Seicento sources an affinity for nature that would shape his own innovative teaching methods,<sup>4</sup>

I was the first artist, of the French school, who, having perceived the necessity of acquainting youths with the observation of nature, introduced into his studio the living model, three days per week, from morning until night. It is thus that I made my students sensitive to the beauties of nature that one must reproduce...<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> David enjoyed a small network of support early on, and scholars have explored the significance of certain men as father figures for the young artist whose own father was killed when David was a child. See especially Gaehtgens, "David et son maître Vien," in *David contre David*, vol. 1, 17-34. For the avuncular role played by the dramatist and academician Michel Jean Sedaine, see Crow, *Emulation*, 5-13.

<sup>2</sup> Vien's role in the reform of art was recognized by his contemporaries. Seen as consistent, above all, in the pursuit of the "bon style", his steadfast adherence to the highest principles of decorum made the artist "immune to caprices in painting." *Discours sur l'origine, le progres et l'état actuel de la peinture en France, contenant des notices sur des principaux artistes de l'Académie; pour servir d'introduction au Sallon* (Paris 1785), 10, cited in Wrigley, *The Origins of French Art Criticism*, 319, n 218.

<sup>3</sup> Gaehtgens, "David et son maître Vien," *David contre David*, vol. 1, 25-26.

<sup>4</sup> Conisbee, 61.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph-Marie Vien, *Mémoires*, cited in Thomas Gaehtgens and J. Lugard, *Joseph-Marie Vien, Peintre du Roi (1716-1809)*. Paris: Arthena, 1988), 113. "Je fus le premier artiste, de l'école française, qui, ayant sent la nécessité d'habituer la jeunesse à voir le nature, introduisit, dans son atelier, le modèle vivant trois jours de la semaine, depuis le matin jusqu'au soir. C'est là que je faisais sentir à mes élèves les beautés de la nature qu'il fallait reproduire..."

While it is true that, during the eighteenth century, the concept of “nature” was subject to various interpretations, in practice, the fact that Vien encouraged drawing and painting in oil after the live model opened a key path for David: the marriage of a fresh, visceral quality of form based on observation of the world, with historical subjects, considered the most difficult and noble, and therefore, the most ambitious.

Several administrative reforms, including a regimented program of drawing, such as Vien advocated and d’Angiviller officially instituted, coincided with David’s first years in Rome.<sup>6</sup> Increased emphasis was placed on drawing after the model, scheduled in the early morning and, in the winter, at night,<sup>7</sup> the latter of which would necessitate the implementation of artificial light and thereby intensify the contours of the model.<sup>8</sup> Charles-Nicolas Cochin’s 1763 engraving for the *Encyclopédie* entry on drawing (fig. 15) depicts an ideal view of a life class in an academy, in which students draw after casts and models illuminated by lamplight. The French academic practice of drawing instruction was cognizant of the importance of *clair-obscur* as an essential tool in the artist’s ability to translate three-dimensional models onto two-dimensional planes through the depiction of light and shadow on forms. In Neoclassical painting, a greater intentionality in the distribution of light and dark often coincides with the enhanced linearity in objects and planarity in compositions that regularly define the style.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Despite Vien’s claims for his early and assiduous advocacy of drawing from the live model in studio practice, d’Angiviller and Pierre reproached him for having facilitated, by his “laxness...the flagging of the [practice of] study after the model...” Pierre to D’Angiviller, Passy, 19 May 1780; D’Angiviller to Vien, Paris, 28 May 1780, *Correspondance*, XIV, 23, 25. “mollesse...le relâchement...de l’école du modèle.”

<sup>7</sup> Hauteceur, 33.

<sup>8</sup> Whiteley, 768, 771.

<sup>9</sup> Whiteley sees the heightened use of chiaroscuro in Neoclassical painting as the pendant development to the linear qualities associated with the appeal of ancient frescos and vase painting that is often cited as an important inspiration for the purity of Neoclassicism. Whiteley, 768.

In addition to the practice of copying works by approved Renaissance and Baroque Masters, d'Angiviller instituted a mandatory trip to Naples as a component of the *pensionnaires'* Italian studies.<sup>10</sup> While most scholars have focused on the students' exposure to examples of ancient painting preserved there, the *pensionnaires* could also see various and important works from the seventeenth-century Neapolitan school, of which Caravaggio is considered the definitive inspiration.<sup>11</sup> The following chapter will examine how David, who had yet to prove himself in Rome capable of challenging his fellow *pensionnaires* for preeminence in the French school, would return from Naples displaying the first signs of confidence in and control of his artistic experimentation.

If David's progenitors and peers seem, in retrospect, to present pale reflections of the full-blown Neoclassicism that David delivered in 1785 with startling newness, it must be observed that a number of artists responded concurrently to changing aesthetics brought about by two generations of institutional reforms. Most notable among them is Jean-François-Pierre Peyron, who bested David for the *Prix de Rome* in 1773. His version of the assigned theme, the *Death of Seneca*, is now lost, but known through a 1774 engraving (fig. 16). The painting was highly lauded, and the composition and figures communicate a restrained yet powerful heroism. Peyron synthesized the classical purity of form of Poussin, who was championed with renewed vigor in the era of reform, with a reduction and clarification of compositional elements. David's composition (fig. 17), *retardataire* by comparison, forces the fanciful architectural elements into steep recession, implying an interior that is as difficult to imagine as Peyron's ground plan is

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<sup>10</sup> Hautecoeur, 33.

<sup>11</sup> See Mina Gregori, "Caravaggio and Naples," in *Painting in Naples 1606-1705: From Caravaggio to Giordano*, eds. Clovis Whitfield and Jane Martineau (London: Royal Academy of Arts with Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982), 36-40.

clear and accessible. Peyron's prize-winning *Seneca* put him at the fore of the myriad reform painters who were abandoning superfluity for simplicity and seemed an obvious inheritor of Vien's aesthetic principles.

In Rome, where both artists enjoyed the special affection of Vien, Peyron continued to produce striking canvases of saturated colors and well-modeled figures ordered within tenebristic settings, while David struggled both personally and professionally. Although he had little to say about what David had achieved in his first years as a *pensionnaire*, the poet Gabriel Bouquier remarked that Peyron excelled in his choice of subjects, composition, expression, and distribution of light, creating emotionally powerful works that nearly induced him to tears.<sup>12</sup>

Peyron arrived in the Eternal City in 1775, several months before David and Vien, and after two years of study at the *École des Élèves Protégés*. Prix de Rome winners and other promising art students attended this special preparatory school where they received up to three years of advanced tutelage in classical history, literature, anatomy, and perspective to prepare for their study in Rome.<sup>13</sup> As one of the most ambitious reforms in the formation of French artists, the *École des Élèves Protégés* was nonetheless considered a failure (d'Angiviller called it a "foyer d'anarchie"<sup>14</sup>) and dissolved in 1775.<sup>15</sup> Scholars do not agree as to whether David attended the *École des Élèves Protégés* between his 1774 Prix de Rome win and his departure for Rome in 1775.<sup>16</sup> Peyron may have

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<sup>12</sup> Gabriel Bouquier, "10<sup>ème</sup> observation sur quelques artistes étrangers qui en 1778 et 79 étoient à Rome pour s'y perfectionner dans leur art," (Paris, 1779), n.p.

<sup>13</sup> This *École*'s first class was held in 1749. See Locquin, 10-11.

<sup>14</sup> Jacques Sylvestre de Sacy, *Le Comte d'Angiviller, dernier directeur général des bâtiments du roi* (Paris: Plon, 1953), 116.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas E. Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-century Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 178.

<sup>16</sup> Louis Hauteceur cited a document dated 30 September 1775 which notes the award to David of a gratification of 300 *livres* "en consideration de ce que, non obstant un grand prix gagné, il n'est pas entré à



additionally benefited from attending this school in the status it granted him in the eyes of his superiors, who saw that he received a string of impressive commissions as a *pensionnaire*.<sup>17</sup>

One of these commissions came from the French ambassador to Rome, the Cardinal de Bernis, Peyron's 1779 *Belisarius receiving Alms from a peasant who had served under him* (fig. 18). Peyron's frieze-like arrangement of the figures and depiction of raking light achieve what Frederick Cummings calls an effect of severe staging, which he sees as the influence of Caravaggio's *Calling of Saint Matthew* from San Luigi dei Francesi (fig. 19).<sup>18</sup> Although by this time David had produced the *académie* known as *Hector* (fig. 5) and his copy after Valentin's *Last Supper* (lost), he had yet to create an original, large-scale painting that demonstrated a complex recapitulation of the lessons gleaned from his study of nature and Italian models.

Other scholars have suggested that David learned from Peyron to emulate some aspects of Caravaggio's painting. Norman Bryson attributes Peyron's dramatic use of lighting, isolated figures, and rupture of narrative unity as a "secretive and dangerous appeal...to Caravaggio" which the French artist moderated with Poussinist elements of

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l'École des Élèves protégés..." Archives nationales O<sup>1</sup> 1916, cited in Hauteceur, *Louis David*, 31, n 44. See also "David et le Prix de Rome (1770-1775)," in *David e Roma/ David et Rome*, 35; and Antoine Schnapper, *David*, trans. Helga Harrison, (New York: Alpine Fine Arts Collection, 1982), 14. J. J. Whiteley claims that David did attend the *École*, and argues that the training would have been influential in the artist's knowledge of composing through *clair-obscur*. Whiteley, 768.

<sup>17</sup> Udolpho Van de Sandt suggests that as a *pensionnaire*, David intentionally refused commissions as a part of his strategy for success. In an undated letter to Vien, he wrote, "People here have proposed many works that I have no desire to do...I do not wish for my Roman sojourn to become unfruitful. Consequently, I am opting for only that which can contribute to my advancement." Cited in Udolpho Van de Sandt, "David pour David: 'Jamais on ne me fera rien faire au détriment de ma gloire,'" *David contre David*, vol. 1, 119-120. "On me propose ici beaucoup d'ouvrages que je ne veux pas faire...Je ne veux pas que mon voyage de Rome ne devienne infructueux. Par conséquent, je ne choisis que ce qui peut contribuer à mon avancement."

<sup>18</sup> Frederick J. Cummings, "Painting under Louis XVI, 1774-1789," in *French Painting, 1774-1830: The Age of Revolution*, (Detroit: Detroit Institute of Arts, 1975), 37. Less convincing is Cummings' suggestion

classicism.<sup>19</sup> Bryson considers the novelty of Peyron's compositions as an important precursor to David's achievements. Peyron's strict adherence to his academic tasks and his several commissions in Rome may have propelled him to greater heights more rapidly than the young David, despite his timid, even introverted character.<sup>20</sup> However, by the time David completed his first commission in 1780, *Saint Roch interceding for the Plague-Stricken* (fig. 7), he delivered a picture whose scale was worthy of the walls of the Salon,<sup>21</sup> whereas Peyron's *Funeral of Miltiades* of the same year was half the size (fig. 20). The dramatic staging and intense tenebrism of Peyron's picture may bear greater witness to the influence of Caravaggio than David's unconventional composition. Yet David's *Saint Roch*, treated in the following chapter, represents an important link from David's early academies to the synthesis of the caravaggesque in his history paintings of the 1780s.<sup>22</sup>

Peyron's endeavors to communicate in the language of reform would be overshadowed by David's ambitious pictures of the late 1780s. It became clear to eighteenth-century Salon viewers that the "new" was to be found in the art of David. Thomas Crow has extensively examined how David trumped Peyron decisively, often by treating the same subject as Peyron had the same or preceding year, in their two major Salon confrontations of 1785 and 1787.<sup>23</sup> Cochin's verdict in 1785 was that "M. David is superior...David was

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that the still-life elements in Peyron's picture reflect a study of Caravaggio's *Supper at Emmaus* (London), then in the Mattei collection.

<sup>19</sup> Norman Bryson, *Tradition and Desire: From David to Delacroix*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 39; cf. Conisbee, 64.

<sup>20</sup> Pierre Rosenberg suggests that Peyron's reserved personality jeopardized his professional development, especially when competing with the self-confidence that David exhibited in his debut in Paris. Pierre Rosenberg and Udolpho van de Sandt, *Pierre Peyron, 1744-1814*, (Neuilly: Arthena, 1983), 29.

<sup>21</sup> See below, Chapter 3, 52-6 for a discussion of the caravaggesque in the *Saint Roch*.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Robert Rosenblum, *Transformations in Late Eighteenth Century Art*, 63; 83, n 112.

<sup>23</sup> Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-century Paris*, 203-209; and Chapter 7, especially 241-45.

the real victor of the Salon.”<sup>24</sup> When David later reflected upon Peyron’s death that his peer and rival “opened my eyes,”<sup>25</sup> he paid tribute to the new avenue of expression in French painting that Peyron signaled with his work of the 1770s. The following chapter will demonstrate that the channels of reform found an innovative promoter in David, and that the artist’s incorporation of the caravaggesque, in all its manifestations, played an important part in shaping the surface, as well as the core, of French Neoclassicism.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Charles Nicolas Cochin, *Le Peintre*, (Paris, 1785), 33.

<sup>25</sup> Attributed to David at Peyron’s 1814 funeral, cited in T. B. Emeric-David, “Peyron,” in *Biographie universelle ancienne et moderne ou, Histoire, par ordre alphabétique, de la vie publique et privée de tous les hommes qui se fait remarquer par leurs écrits, leurs actions, leurs talents, leurs vertus ou leurs crimes*, vol. 33 (Paris: Michaud frères, 1823), 553. “[il] m’a ouvert les yeux...”

<sup>26</sup> William Vaughan claims that Peyron, despite his contributions to the trend in reform, did not achieve the “arresting sense of actuality that David achieved through his espousal of the caravaggesque.” Vaughan, 95. However, he fails to explicate the qualities that are present in David’s works, or absent in Peyron’s, which distinguish the impact and innovation of the two artists.

## CHAPTER 3: DAVID AND CARAVAGGIO

### I. David's first Roman sojourn, 1775-1780

The origins of David's ultimate revolution of forms cannot be found conveniently in one artist's oeuvre or formal style. Sketches in David's Italian notebooks of ancient architecture, costumes and furnishings, as well as works of art, attest to the wealth of sources that he consulted and assimilated in order to achieve verisimilitude in all aspects of his compositions.<sup>1</sup> According to his own recollections, the monuments of each city on the road to Rome impressed upon David the preeminence of artists like Correggio, Domenichino and, upon reaching the Eternal City, Raphael.<sup>2</sup> While the "brutally executed" works of Caravaggio and his followers, Valentin and Ribera seem to have jarred the young artist accustomed to the dulcet palette of the French Rococo, an older David attested to his youthful devotion to Raphael as the modern painter who came closest to the "inimitable models" of antiquity.<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that David's memoirs, compiled by his grandson, were the meditations of an older artist whose style had undergone significant transformations and was divorced from many of the fundamental

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<sup>1</sup> For David's drawings, see "À Propos des dessins du premier séjour de David à Rome (1775-1780)," *David e Roma/ David et Rome*, 64-70; Arlette Serullaz, *Inventaire général des dessins: École française: dessins de Jacques-Louis David, 1748-1825*, (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1991); and Pierre Rosenberg and Louis-Antoine Prat, *Jacques-Louis David, 1748-1825 : catalogue raisonné des dessins*, (Milan: Leonardo arte, 2002). Apart from public monuments, David had access to the Palazzos Giustiniani, Mattei, Spada, Farnese, and Rospigliosi, as well as the Villas Albani and Medici and the Vatican Library. Brookner, *Jacques-Louis David*, 55.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques-Louis David, *Mémoire*, published in J.-L. J. David, *Le peintre Louis David, 1748-1825, Souvenirs et documents inédits*. (Paris, 1880), n.p.

<sup>3</sup> The description is attributed to David, cited in Delécluze, 113. On Raphael's prestige within the French art academy, see Locquin, 98-9.

qualities of his Roman canvases and history paintings of the 1780s. Moreover, David's study of antiquity as it is evinced by his drawings represents something of an exercise, what Giulio Carlo Argan calls a "devoir", rather than a passion for classical art.<sup>4</sup>

Although both Raphael and the classical past were ubiquitous models within the French art academy, David quickly became aware as a *pensionnaire* of compelling qualities of painting that he would find, not in these revered sources, but in the art of Caravaggio.

In a well-known passage from his memoirs, David implicitly acknowledged the shortcomings of his French training and the contrasting models he chose to study:

When I arrived in Italy with M. Vien I was at once struck, in the Italian paintings I saw there, by the vigor of their tones and shadows. This was a quality absolutely opposed to the weakness of this aspect of French painting, and this new relationship of light to dark, this imposing vivacity of which I had until then no idea, so struck me that during the first period of my stay in Italy, I believed that the whole secret of the art of painting lay in reproducing, as the Italian colorists of the late sixteenth century had done, the undisguised and decisive modeling which nature almost always presents.<sup>5</sup>

As a reform-minded painter and teacher, Vien sought to emulate what he believed to have been the methods by which seventeenth-century Italian artists achieved the admirable qualities of "truth" and realism.<sup>6</sup> Eighteenth-century viewers, like Caravaggio's contemporaries, saw the Italian's naturalism of detail and "truth to nature" as the hallmarks of his art, whether these qualities were admirably or indecorously employed.

David must have recognized the chasm between his master's naturalism and that of Caravaggio's in the presence of the latter's distinctively articulated figures. The most cursory comparison between the art of master and pupil denies any vestiges of Vien's brand of naturalism in David's Roman works. Vien's depictions of amorous themes, set

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<sup>4</sup> *David et Rome*, 23.

<sup>5</sup> Delécluze, 113-114.

in the classical past, defined to a large part his oeuvre after 1760. Yet even when treating subjects of Roman history, Vien utilized fruity tones for drapery and softly modulated hues for the non-specific architectural and landscape elements that frame the subject matter. The figures in *Hector convincing Paris to take up arms in Defense of the Fatherland* (1779) (fig. 21) exemplify Vien's figure type, an equivocal modeling that yields only a hint of musculature beneath doughy limbs.

Early in his career as a public artist, critics remarked upon David's autonomy from his renowned master. An anonymous respondent to the Salon of 1783 (where David showed his Academy reception piece, *Andromache Bewailing the Death of Hector*) acknowledged Vien's impact but praised David's courage and originality in the pursuit of nature, and the abandonment of the mannerisms of Vien's school. David would adopt a more neutral palette punctuated with passages of saturated color and dramatic chiaroscuro, and a keener attention to the anatomical complexities of the body. Even in David's scenes of antiquity, the artist's interest in the psychological and physical realities of living beings translated onto canvas surpasses the "reformed" naturalism of Vien's compositions.<sup>7</sup>

Regardless of Vien's purported enthusiasm for the use of the model in his atelier, a practice which recalls Caravaggio's well-known technique, the immediacy of form and expression, as well as the anatomical precision of David's figures, cannot be attributed to

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<sup>6</sup> Gaehtgens, 26.

<sup>7</sup> Anonymous, [Antoine Renou], *L'Impartialité au Sallon dédiée à messieurs les critiques présents et à venir* (Paris, 1783), 16-17. Two of David's early large-scale works, *Andromache* and *Belisarius Receiving Alms* (1781) are conspicuously absent from the present discussion of the influence of Caravaggio in his oeuvre, despite their temporal proximity to his Roman caravaggesque works. Both display more clearly David's debt to Poussin, the implications of which are beyond the scope of this paper. Poussin's legacy would have been instilled in David from his earliest days as a *pensionnaire*, and reiterated by the Baroque artist's apotheosis at the Roman Pantheon in 1782-83. Udolpho Van de Sandt, "David pour David: 'Jamais on ne me fera rien faire au détriment de ma gloire,'" in *David contre David*, vol. 1, 125.

a method related to that used by Caravaggio. The Italian's biographers noted with particular disapproval the artist's practice of composing directly from the model, without preliminary drawings.<sup>8</sup> In fact, David produced exquisite preparatory drawings when planning his compositions, including the figure of the mourning nurse (fig. 22) for the *Lictors bringing to Brutus the Bodies of his Sons* (1789) (fig. 4). From the studies for the painting, to the *esquisse*, or painted sketch, David reworked the composition, not arriving at the final arrangement for the nurse, whose veiled face rhymes with that of Brutus, which is cloaked in shadow, until the execution of a presentation drawing.

Scholars have argued that David came to understand that art that represented traditional, codified gestures and expressions could not communicate convincing emotional responses. David abandoned the platitudinous expressions of his early work in Paris, like the *Death of Seneca* (fig. 17), and although he did not consistently rely on the model, as Caravaggio was purported to have done, to render his figures' emotive responses, David otherwise emulated the Italian artist's ability to invest figures with humanity and emotional brio. Dorothy Johnson, for example, finds that David developed a new means of figural expression, which she calls a "corporal aesthetic" or "phenomenology of the body," and identifies it as the fundamental stylistic component of his Neoclassicism.<sup>9</sup> For Johnson, David's artistic innovation stems from this formal development that rejected the academic principle that favored the expressive capacity of the face above the descriptive role of the body.

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<sup>8</sup> See Baglione, 138, repr. Hibbard, 355; and Bellori, 201, 205, 212, repr. Hibbard, 361, 364, 371. Recent scholarship has relied on radiographic and visual analysis to determine whether incisions in Caravaggio's under-painting were used to keep consistent the arrangement of live models in *tableaux vivant* for the artist's compositions of one or several figures. See Keith Christiansen, "Caravaggio and 'l'esempio davanti del naturale,'" *Art Bulletin* 68, no. 3 (September 1986): 421-45. See also above, Chapter 1, 24, n37.

<sup>9</sup> Johnson, *Jacques-Louis David: Art in Metamorphosis*, 11.

In the Academy, the contest known as the *tête d'expression*, or “expressive head” exemplified what was considered the important communicative element of the figure within a narrative work. Proposed in 1759 by the antiquarian and honorary Academy member Anne Claude de Tubières, le Comte de Caylus, the competition required students to draw, from the live model, facial expressions purporting to convey specific human emotional states. Despite the institution’s desire to endow their students with the skills necessary to create believable expressions, successful drawings relied chiefly upon conventions established by Charles Le Brun. His 1698 handbook, *Conférences sur l’expression générale et particulière*, was an important tool for the professors at the royal academy.<sup>10</sup> David won the contest in 1773 with his representation *La Douleur* (fig. 23) and went on to earn the *Prix de Rome* the following year, exemplifying the remarkable consistency with which the winner of the *tête d’expression* became the favorite for the highest prize of a French artist’s studies.<sup>11</sup> Although Le Brun’s template of *La Douleur d’esprit* (fig. 24) represents a male figure, David’s indebtedness to his schematic composition of facial features, the expressive tenderness of a gently furrowed brow and imploring upward gaze, transcends the discrepancy of gender. David’s pastel drawing is essentially generic in its depiction of the bust of a woman in classicizing attire, but the exercise compromised emotional expression by the lack of context for the assigned “passion,” an omission in Le Brun’s handbook, as well.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>11</sup> Emmanuel Schwartz, “L’Expression des passions: Duchenne de Boulogne, Héritier de la doctrine académique,” in *Duchenne de Boulogne: 1806-1875*, exh. cat. (Paris: École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts, 1999), 96.

<sup>12</sup> On Le Brun’s treatise, see Jennifer Montagu, *The Expression of the Passions: The Origins and Influence of Charles le Brun’s Conférence sur l’expression générale et particulière*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), *passim*.



In spite of the perceived lack of original inspiration in such contests as the *tête d'expression*, the coinciding evolution of the expression of the passions, and the changing perception of what constituted proper models for artists to follow in the reform of French painting, contributed in no small way to the ultimate appearance of David's works.<sup>13</sup>

Although he does not specify Caravaggio as a model for David, Thomas Kirchner elucidates an essential feature shared by both artists' works: the singular nature of their portrayals of emotive expression, through the gesture of the body, the complex reactions of the face, or a combination of the two. Unlike Le Brun's systematic condensation of emotions into particular orientations of lips, eyes, and brows, the expressivity of David's and Caravaggio's figures derives from the artists' ability to invest them with believable human perception of and response to their painted circumstances.

The language of gesture, around which important theories were developed in the Renaissance, received renewed attention in the eighteenth century. Louis de Cahusac's entry on "Geste" in the 1760 *Encyclopédie* states that "gesture is and always will be the language of all nations; it is understood in all climates; nature, with the exception of a few modifications, was and always will be the same."<sup>14</sup> Contemporary eighteenth-century artists probably shared this belief in the timelessness of gesture, and David might have thought that he could achieve the communicative efficacy of Caravaggio's figures by adopting their precise and highly expressive gestures.

The most emphatic examples of David's early suppression of facial expression in favor of figural gesture can be seen in the two nude *académies* known as the *Hector*

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<sup>13</sup> Thomas Kirchner, *'L'expression des passions': Ausdruck als Darstellungsproblem in der französischen Kunst und Kunsttheorie des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts*, (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1991), 345; 351; 361.

(1778) (fig. 5) and *Patroclus* (1780) (fig. 6).<sup>15</sup> Both of these compositions hide the figure's face from the viewer. The first of these, *Hector*, also represents the artist's earliest caravaggesque work.<sup>16</sup> The single figure's crossed legs, hips and shoulders bear the weight of a body that trails down the roughly hewn steps of a stone base. David illuminated the jutting torso and casts the figure's extremities in ruddy shadow, echoing the voluminous red drapery underneath the nude. Although the picture's format is not wholly divergent from that of a typical *académie*, David's careful modeling, the intense naturalism of features like the figure's gently closed right fist, and the murky, lugubrious background, were not requirements for the exercise. David's portrayal of the awkwardly prostrate figure, and the dramatic foreshortening that creates unusual proportions and angles, and reduces the head to a crop of black curls, furrowed brow, and pointed chin belie the concept of the idealized nude, despite the polished, almost effulgent rendering of the skin.

The heightened naturalism and emphatic modeling of David's *Hector*, set off by a non-descript, shadowy space, recall some of the most distinctive aspects of Caravaggio's oeuvre, as seen in the *Sleeping Cupid* (1608) (fig. 25), and the 1604 *Saint John the Baptist* (fig. 26) (which David would not have known).<sup>17</sup> Caravaggio's tenebrous backgrounds enhance the emotional impact of the moribund child and pensive saint, and the compositional device may have appealed to David for an *académie*, an exercise that did not insist on a narrative context for the figure. Perhaps the most compelling

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<sup>14</sup> [Louis de Cahusac], "la Geste," in *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire, Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers*, vol. 7, ed. Diderot and D'Alembert, (Paris, 1760, repr., Stuttgart: Frommann, 1966), 571-72.

<sup>15</sup> Johnson, *Jacques-Louis David: Art in Metamorphosis*, 48-50.

<sup>16</sup> This *académie* may be derived from a vignette of David's large 1777 *esquisse*, or painted sketch, *The Funeral of Patroclus*, the narrative context of which may explain the attribution of the Homeric identity. For a discussion of the *esquisse*, see below, pages 55-6.

comparison to be made is with the figure of the executioner in the *Martyrdom of Saint Matthew* from the Contarelli Chapel in San Luigi dei Francesi (1599-1600) (fig. 27). The figure of *Hector* shows similar precise modeling and spotlighted illumination as the executioner in Caravaggio's painting. David's male nude is more graceful than that of Caravaggio; the somewhat effete Trojan prince has slightly attenuated limbs, unlike the stockier proportions of the pagan soldier. The awkwardness in Caravaggio's rendering may be due to the artist's attempt to convey the torque of the executioner's pose. Indeed, Howard Hibbard maintained that Caravaggio developed his exaggerated tenebrism in part as a means of disguising awkward portions of his composition that resulted from inadequate mastery of perspective and anatomy.<sup>18</sup> Admittedly, David had only to compose a single, albeit dramatically foreshortened figure, while Caravaggio was faced with his first large-scale, multi-figure work.

David's shift from a reliance on the *expression des passions* to a greater emphasis bodily gesture suggests that he may have turned to three-dimensional sources to better understand the expressive capacity of the figure. One must also consider the sculptural qualities of David's and Caravaggio's figures in terms of each artist's interest in and awareness of ancient sculpture, which was esteemed as a universal model in artistic practice of the Baroque and the French reform periods. David's academic training meant that he employed casts of sculpture as models for anatomical study as well as thematic types. Dorothy Johnson argues that in his progression toward a "corporeal aesthetic," David conceived of figures based on antique sculpture, and relied on the practice of

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<sup>17</sup> Painted for a Roman patron, Ottavia Costa, the painting was in Malta by 1710 and thereafter in England. It is presently in the collection of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Missouri.

contour drawing (*dessin au trait*).<sup>19</sup> According to Winckelmann's *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst*, contour was not found in nature, but remained the privileged domain of artists as based on ancient techniques.<sup>20</sup> The impact of contour line in David's painting can be seen in the articulation of forms, focus on anatomy and emphatic gesture, often enhanced by a blank backdrop. Moreover, David's later "frieze-like" compositions (beginning with the *Horatii*) bespeak an affinity with classical relief sculpture.

Caravaggio bore the reputation of an anti-classicist, based on the unconventional nature of his compositions and his indecorous models for sacred or noble figures.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the artist's circle of prestigious patrons and associates afforded him access to several collections of ancient treasures, especially the Galleria Giustiniani, in the family palace located directly across from San Luigi dei Francesi, and tracing classical sources in Caravaggio's works shows that he did not completely eschew this aesthetic inheritance. Avigdor Posèq argues that Caravaggio wedded classical gestures and postures with naturalistic representations of figures, imbuing canonical forms with

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<sup>18</sup> Hibbard, 95-6. Hibbard seems to adopt this criticism from Caravaggio's earliest biographers. For a modern scholar's refutation, see Walter Friedlaender, *Caravaggio Studies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), x.

<sup>19</sup> Johnson, *Jacques-Louis David: Art in Metamorphosis*, 35. Both Johnson and Seymour Howard see David's grisaille frieze drawing as the pinnacle of achievement in the synthesis of naturalism of expressive gesture and idealism of antiquity. Johnson, 50-6; Seymour Howard, *Sacrifice of the Hero: The Roman Years: A Classical Frieze by Jacques-Louis David*, (Sacramento: E. B. Crocker Art Gallery Monograph Series, 1975), 65. For Howard, David's achievement is prefigured in the "antico-realist" Homeric *académies*, but he argues that David's Roman works like the *Saint Roch* represent a "regression" to the style of Valentin and Caravaggio. Howard, 81.

<sup>20</sup> Howard, 81.

<sup>21</sup> Caravaggio's biographer Bellori was most explicit in his condemnation, noting that Caravaggio painted "according to his own inclinations; not only ignoring but even despising the superb statuary of antiquity...when he was shown the most famous statues of Phidias and Glykon in order that he might use them as models, his only answer was to point toward a crowd of people, saying that nature had given him an abundance of masters." Bellori, 202; repr. Hibbard, 362.

animated gestures of the living model.<sup>22</sup> Caravaggio did not reject the concept of the ideal, but melded it convincingly with the reality of human emotion. David, too, “animated” subjects from ancient history through highly naturalistic and dramatic representations, often through the family romance.<sup>23</sup>

David, like Caravaggio, was granted access to many of Rome’s most famous galleries. His annotated drawings indicate that he studied in the Vatican, Capitoline, Borghese, Mattei, Barberini and Farnesi collections in Rome, as well as the Uffizi in Florence.<sup>24</sup> In addition to their holdings of renowned examples of ancient art, most of these collections included works by Caravaggio. However, we do not know of any copies by David after any of these works by Caravaggio. Adhering to tradition, David executed most of his studies of antiquity in traditional outline drawing, but he made occasional use of wash to render the effects of light and shade in Renaissance and Baroque Master works. It would have been difficult, however, to replicate adequately the effects of Caravaggio’s paintings using either drawing method. Yet, David may have copied two caravaggesque pictures from the Giustiniani collection,<sup>25</sup> including a seventeenth-century *Death of Socrates*, now given to a Northern follower of Caravaggio.<sup>26</sup>

Caravaggio’s highly modeled figures often wear exaggerated expressions of horror and pleasure, an aspect that elicited some of the most vehement responses to his

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<sup>22</sup> Avigdor W. G. Posèq, *Caravaggio and the Antique* (London: Avon Books), 4; 13. Pierre Rosenberg suggests that Caravaggio’s appeal for the seventeenth-century French *caravagesques* was his apparent resolution of the inherent dilemma between the model of antiquity and the observation of nature. Rosenberg, ed., *La peinture française du XVIIe siècle dans les collections américaines*, 20.

<sup>23</sup> Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), xiii-xiv; 38-40.

<sup>24</sup> Hauteceur, 51; 58.

<sup>25</sup> Rosenberg, “David et Caravage,” 192. See also Steven A. Nash, “David, Socrates and Caravaggism: A Source for David’s *Death of Socrates*,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 91, no. 1312-13 (1978), 202-206.

<sup>26</sup> There is some question as to whether the drawing is by David or one of his pupils. This study will examine later how David used the composition as a template for his 1787 version of the subject.

canvases. Isaac's anguished gape in the 1603 *Sacrifice of Isaac* (fig. 28) and the biblical heroine's determined grimace, as well as Holofernes' open-mouthed cry in the *Judith and Holofernes* (1598) (fig. 14) may evince Caravaggio's dependence on observations from life. In 1739, Charles de Brosses commented on the "unique expression" of the *Judith* in the Casa Zanbeccari in Bologna, instructing the viewer, "Note the horror and the fright of Judith, the hideous struggle of Holofernes, the cold-bloodedness and the wickedness of the servant".<sup>27</sup> In David's oeuvre, two Roman works that make some of his most direct references to works by Caravaggio, the Québec *St Jérôme* (1779) (fig. 29) and the 1780 *Saint-Roch interceding with the Virgin to obtain the healing of the victims of the plague* (fig. 7) have equally violent facial expressions.

The *Saint Roch* was David's first major commission, awarded to him through Vien's recommendation after the department of health of the city of Marseille solicited the master's help in 1779 to find a painter to memorialize the plague that struck the city in 1720.<sup>28</sup> The canvas elicited great praise, and much of this response was directed to the realism and psychological poignancy of the prone plague victim in the immediate foreground, the horrified youth,<sup>29</sup> and the humble saint, rather than the idealized, Poussinesque Virgin.

David's simple, yet powerful composition hinges on the diagonal axis created by the Madonna and Child in the upper left quadrant and the eponymous saint who, kneeling at the feet of the Virgin, reaches toward her with hands in prayer. Underfoot are three

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<sup>27</sup> Ch. De Brosses, "Lettre xxii, à M. de Blancey," Bologne, 18 septembre, 1739, *Lettres familières écrites d'Italie en 1739 et 1740*, (repr. Paris: Mercure de France, 1986), 278. "expression unique"; "Regardez l'horreur et la frayeur de Judith, les affreux débattements d'Holopherne, le sang-froid et la méchanceté de la servante..." John Spike notes that this version is untraced, and therefore of uncertain authorship. John T. Spike, with Michèle K. Spike, *Caravaggio: Catalogue of Paintings*, CD-ROM, (New York: Abbeville Press, Inc., 2001).

<sup>28</sup> Spate, ed., *French Painting: The Revolutionary Decades, 1760-1830*, 50.

afflicted figures, a wailing mother whose son clings to her arms and legs, and the startling figure that stretches across the picture plane, with a slightly gaping mouth and sideways glance suggesting quiet suffering and apprehension. The use of frontal and profile views for the large-scale figures, as well as their proximity to the viewer and their compression into a relatively shallow space, effectively force the viewer to confront the dire human tragedy that called for divine intercession.

The naturalism of the figures that confront the viewer most directly struck contemporary Salon observers, some of whom specifically noted the “affecting” and “naturalistic” components. Diderot described the prone figure as “that huge and horrifying plague victim,” and instructed his readers,

Try to look extendedly, if you can, at this afflicted youth who has lost his mind and who seems to have gone furiously mad, you will flee this painting in horror, but you will be brought back to it by the taste of the art and by your admiration for the artist.<sup>30</sup>

However, the admirable qualities did not compensate some critics for what they saw as the ignoble nature of David’s figures, particularly the genuflecting saint, echoing certain eighteenth-century reactions to Caravaggio’s art. One Salon viewer observed that David

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<sup>29</sup> See below, page 53 and *n* 30.

<sup>30</sup> Denis Diderot, *Salons* (Paris, 1781), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 4, ed. J. Seznec and J. Adhémar, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 377. “Tâchez de regarder longtemps, si vous pouvez, ce jeune malade qui a perdue la tête et qui semble être devenu fou furieux, vous fuirez ce tableau d’horreur, mais vous y serez ramené par le goût de l’art et par votre admiration pour l’artiste.” An anonymous writer noted that “on souffre de la douleur des pestiférés...” [Anon.], *Pique-nique convenable à ceux qui fréquentent le Salon, prépare par un aveugle*, (1781), 24, published in Georges Duplessis, ed., *Collection de pièces sur les beaux-arts imprimées et manuscrites recueillies par Pierre-Jean Mariette, Charles-Nicolas Cochin et M. Deloynes, conservée au Cabinet des estampes de la Bibliothèque nationale*, vol. 12, (Paris: A. Picard, 1881), n<sup>o</sup> 267. Another anonymous viewer noted that the picture caused “a violent feeling of terror in all who looked at it...” [Anon.], “Année 1781, Lettre I. Sur les peintres, sculptures et graveurs exposées au Salon du Louvre, le 25 août, 1781,” *Mémoires Secrets*, vol. 19 (1783), reprinted in Bernadette Fort, ed., *Les Salons des “Mémoires Secrets” 1767-1789*, (Paris: École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, 1999), 224. “...un violent sentiment de terreur à tous ceux qui le regardent...”

depicted “an impoverished man who begs alms, and not a saint and a Christian hero.”<sup>31</sup>

Another critic noted that the heads of the Saints Roch and Jérôme (David exhibited the latter, as well as the *Hector* and *Patroclus*, at his Salon debut) “are unfortunately taken from [those in] vile conditions, I do not dare praise an artist who does not know how to create beautiful physiognomies.”<sup>32</sup> The physiognomies of the saint and sufferers, in contrast to the tranquil profiles of the Madonna and Child, emphatically convey passion, anguish, and fear that corresponded to the tragic and heroic.

The devotion and humility expressed in the figure of Saint Roch owe much to his gently imploring gaze as to his unassuming appearance in a drab brown cloak and conspicuously bare feet. His relationship to the Madonna and exposed feet echo strongly that of the pilgrims at the door of the Virgin’s home in Caravaggio’s *Madonna of Loreto* (1603-05) (fig. 30), in the church of Sant’ Agostino.<sup>33</sup> Caravaggio set his Madonna and Child in a seventeenth-century Roman doorway and gave the pilgrims a sense of vulnerability by their humble garb and soiled feet. In 1642, Baglione saw instead vulgarity, and compared the pilgrims to beggars, attributing the mass appeal of the altarpiece to the taste of common people.<sup>34</sup> In spite of Baglione’s criticisms, Caravaggio’s picture evokes a touching intimacy between the Virgin and the kneeling figures.

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<sup>31</sup> [Anon.], *Le Pourquoi, ou l’Ami des Artists*, (Geneva, 1781), 27. Cited in *Diderot et l’art de Boucher à David*, 169.

<sup>32</sup> *La Patte de velours, pour servir de suite à la deuxième édition du coup de Patte, ouvrage concernant le Sallon de peinture. Année 1781*, (London and Paris, n.d), 25. Cited in Régis Michel, ed., *Diderot et l’art de Boucher à David: les Salons 1759-1781*, (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, with the Ministère de la culture, 1984), 169. “sont malheureusement prises dans des conditions viles, Je n’ose louer un peintre qui ne sait pas créer de belles physiognomies.”

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, *Diderot et l’art de Boucher à David*, 168.

<sup>34</sup> Baglione, 137, repr. Hibbard, 354-54.



David, however, created an odd juxtaposition between his pilgrim and the ethereal vision of the Madonna and Child. Although the Saint and the Virgin appear to gesture toward each other, the gaze of the Madonna is locked on her Child, and the saint does not appear to occupy the same plane as either the holy figures or the plague victims on whose behalf he is acting. Werner Hofmann proposed that this disjunction was intentional, and that the “conflictual cohesion” that subtly interrupts the interaction of the figures in David’s canvases facilitates the viewer’s participation in the scene.<sup>35</sup>

David emphasized the suffering and tangibility of the earth-bound figures by creating an ambiguous relationship between the earthly and divine realms of the painting. The plague victims, somewhat obfuscated by the dark tone of the lower half of the canvas, provoke the viewer to engagement, especially the youth whose face, frozen in terror, meets the viewer’s gaze. Pierre Rosenberg has cited Caravaggio’s *Medusa* shield (1598) (fig. 31) as a possible source for the figure.<sup>36</sup> The Seicento artist’s *trompe l’oeil* painting, in which the decapitated head of the Gorgon appears to be mounted upon the wooden shield that is the painting’s ground, evokes a connection between the penetrating grimace of the face and the mythological power of Medusa to petrify those who met her eyes.

In the *Saint Roch*, David created an ambiguously heavenly frame for the Virgin, further adumbrating the boundaries of the earthly and divine. The Madonna appears to

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<sup>35</sup> Werner Hofmann, “Triplicity et Iconization chez David,” in *David contre David*, vol. 2, 729-30. Virginia Spate, *French Painting: The Revolutionary Decades*, 9, suggests it exhibits the influence of “Carracci, Caravaggio and Poussin,” arguably divergent in many ways, but fails to explain the way David melds the three sources. Klaus Holma cited Poussin’s *Apparition of the Virgin to Saint Jacques le Majeure* as a model. Holma, 36-37. In addition to Poussin, Régis Michel also notes the influence of Guerchino, although he does not explicate the comparison. Michel, *Diderot et l’art de Boucher à David*, 168.

<sup>36</sup> Rosenberg, “David et Caravage,” 208. In 1762, A. J. Dézallier d’Argenville recorded the presence of the 1598 *Medusa* shield, as well as Caravaggio’s *Sleeping Cupid* (1608) in the Gallery of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Florence. Dézallier d’Argenville, vol. 4, 89-90. It remains in what is now known as the Palazzo

sit on a dark cloud. No longer the fluffy confections of Boucher or Fragonard, it rises up from the stony ground upon which the saint kneels, and melds with the gray, mottled clouds that, save the soft orange halo of light framing the faces of the Madonna and Child, fill the sky. David's canvas does not convey intimacy through the figures' spatial and implied emotional relationship as effectively as does Caravaggio's *Madonna of Loreto*. Nevertheless, David's picture has an immediacy in the connection with the viewer that rivals that of the *Entombment* (fig. 9), one of the few works by Caravaggio favored by the French Academy. Although the grief-stricken figures do not seem to meet the viewer's gaze as David's plague victims do, the forceful expressions in Caravaggio's painting are enhanced by the viewer's perceived proximity to the tomb itself, as the stone slab seems to jut out of the picture plane.

The *Entombment* is one of the most dramatic examples of Caravaggio's distinctive use of tenebrism, the likes of which are not seen in even the most somber of David's paintings. Yet, the *Entombment* presents only one of several types of light effects which Caravaggio employed and which can be described as "caravaggesque." Within David's oeuvre, modern scholars have characterized the "brutal lighting" of the Saint Roch as a vestigial element of the caravaggesque tradition.<sup>37</sup> While there exists a great disparity between the luminous coloration of the holy figures and the obscurity into which the ailing earthly figures are cast (except for the strong highlight on the head of the reclining plague victim), David's light effects do not approach the deliberate juxtaposition of well-

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Pitti. David's reminiscences indicate that he did visit Florence, although scholarship differs as to whether he stopped on the way to Rome or on his return to Paris.

<sup>37</sup> Schnapper, *David*, 62. Schnapper relates the relative scale of David's figures that "emerge from the shade in a caravaggesque manner" to the influence of Peyron's *Belisarius* of the same year. Ibid, 62.

lit figures against a dark ground, or tenebrism, that are the distinctive elements of many of Caravaggio's works.

Concerning David's paintings in the 1781 Salon, the writer of the *Mémoires secrets* observed that "in general, it seemed that the harmony of *clair-obscur* is not the dominant specialty of the painter..."<sup>38</sup> Eighteenth-century discussions of *clair-obscur* raise questions about how the formal concept was interpreted and therefore, how David would have perceived one of the most distinctive qualities of Caravaggio's canvases.

René Verbraeken explains that to consider the effects of *l'éclairage* in David's painting, one must be aware of the semantic shift in the term *clair-obscur* during the second half of the eighteenth century, and ultimately, how it might have differed from the way the term is applied to artists today.<sup>39</sup> Only by the turn of the nineteenth century did *clair-obscur* evoke connotations of what Verbraeken calls the "couleur caravagiste," that is, extreme, sharply defined contrasts in light and shade.<sup>40</sup> For David and his contemporaries, *clair-obscur* was defined as,

The art of favorably distributing light and shadow, as much for the eyes' repose and satisfaction as for the overall effect. It is by the means of *clair-obscur*, that the painter suggests three-dimensionality in objects, and that he makes them appear more truthful and more palpable.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> [Anon.], "Année 1781, Lettre I. Sur les peintres, sculptures et graveurs exposées au Salon du Louvre, le 25 août, 1781," in Fort, 224.

"...but," the writer notes, "he has grand ideas, he is original, and you do not see at all in his work reminiscences as in so many others." It would seem that the eighteenth-century viewer did not identify David's Virgin with Poussin's, or, more significantly, his saint with Caravaggio's pilgrim of Loreto. "...en general, il paraît que l'entente du clair-obscur n'est pas la partie dominante du peintre, mais il a de grande idées, il est original, et l'on ne sent point chez lui de reminiscences comme tant d'autres."

<sup>39</sup> René Verbraeken, *Jacques-Louis David jugé par ses contemporains et par la postérité*, (Paris: Léonce Laget, 1973), 79.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Lacombe, 163. "[clair-obscur est] l'art de distribuer avantageusement les lumières & les ombres, tant pour le repos & la satisfaction des yeux, que pour l'effet du tout ensemble. C'est par le moyen du clair-obscur, que le peintre donne du relief aux objets, & qu'il les rend plus vrais & plus sensibles." Verbraeken argues that Antoine-Joseph Pernetys' entry on *clair-obscur*, which follows Lacombe's, adds a clause that renders the artistic concept inapplicable to the caravaggesque characterization of chiaroscuro: "this device [*clair-obscur*] which has been understood perfectly by only a small number of painters, is the most

As the French art academy emphasized the principles of harmony and balance, rather than extremes, in all aesthetic elements of painting, the employment of dramatic chiaroscuro would have been favored only so far as it contributed to the visual cohesiveness of a picture.

David's ultimate skill in rendering "truthful and...palpable forms" can be seen in such divergent works as the *Oath of the Horatii* and the *Death of Marat*. Yet, his early experimentation with light and shadow produced uneven results. The 1778 sketch for *The Funeral of Patroclus* (fig. 32) met with criticism of these very elements. In Paris in April 1779,<sup>42</sup> the Academy *commissaires* judged that David's representation of shadows obscured the scene, giving inadvertent night-time effects, and that "the poorly distributed light passages cause the light to appear to flicker, not allowing sufficient rest and neatness to absorb the entire composition from the first glance,"<sup>43</sup> in effect, denying the "eyes' repose and satisfaction" that skillful rendering of *clair-obscur* guaranteed, according to Lacombe. How David received the evaluations of this painting is unknown, and the major work that he completed that summer, the copy of Valentin's *Last Supper*, is now lost.

We may assume that David's version of the *Last Supper* was faithful to the original, as it received high marks from one of his most severe critics. In a letter to d'Angiviller, J.

B. M. Pierre, *Premier Peintre du Roi* and *directeur* of the academy wrote, "Mr. David has

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powerful way to emphasize local colors and the entire composition of the painting [...]" Antoine Joseph Pernety, *Dictionnaire portative de peinture, sculpture et gravure: avec un traité pratique des différentes manières de peindre, dont la Théorie est développée dans les articles qui en sont susceptibles: ouvrage utile aux artistes, aux élèves & aux amateurs...*, (Paris: Chez Bauche, 1757), 16.

<sup>42</sup> Schnapper and Sérullaz, eds., *Jacques-Louis David, 1748-1825*, 92. See also Antoine Schnapper, "Les Académies peintes et le 'Christ en croix' de David," *Revue du Louvre et des Musées de France* 24, no. 6 (1974): 381-392.

made a copy for the king, of the *Cène* painted by Valentin, which is in the Palazzo Mattei, that I find to be quite good.”<sup>44</sup> Valentin’s original (fig. 33) mostly employs the half-length format that Caravaggio favored in many intimate compositions, such as the *Supper at Emmaus* (fig. 34). Valentin arranged the twelve disciples in a generally symmetrical fashion, at once surrounding and isolating Christ in a stage-like space framed by the apostles’ garments that suggest a parted curtain.<sup>45</sup> Valentin’s picture recalls the caravaggesque combination of naturalistic detail in the foodstuffs and crisp white linen, as well as the disciples’ classicized garb and expressions of pathos. Caravaggio rarely insisted on symmetry, often preferring diagonally oriented compositions and slightly off-center arrangements of principle figures. Nevertheless, the *Supper at Emmaus*, in the Borghese collection in Rome until the nineteenth century<sup>46</sup> and a likely point of reference for both Valentin and David, demonstrates the capacity for powerful expression in the bodily gestures of Christ’s companions at the table, which Valentin interpreted in the straining poses and individualized faces of the two foreground figures. David’s synthesis of the caravaggesque would depend on his ability to invest his own figures with an equal dose of strong emotion and palpable surfaces.

The same year that David completed his copy, his mercurial behavior began to interfere with his studies and impelled his benefactors to intercede. On 21 July 1779, Vien notified d’Angiviller that he had arranged for David to make the requisite journey to

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<sup>43</sup> Cited in Gaetgen, “David et son maître Vien,” 41. “les clairs peu étendus font papilloter la lumière, ne laissant pas assez de repos et de netteté pour embrasser toute la composition du premier coup d’oeil.”

<sup>44</sup> *Correspondance des directeurs de l’Académie de France à Rome avec les Surintendants des Bâtiments*, XIII, 444, cited in Rosenberg, “Caravage et la France,” 825. “...le sieur David a fait une copie pour le Roi, de la Cène peinte par le Valentin, qui est dans le palais Mathei, qui me paraît très bien.” Rosenberg notes that David’s copy was sent to Paris on 12 September 1781 with those of three other students, who copied after Poussin, Pietro da Cortona, and the same Valentin. *Correspondance*, XIV, 111, cited in Rosenberg, “Caravage et la France,” 825.

<sup>45</sup> Brejon de Lavergnée, *Valentin et les caravagesques français*, 148.

Naples. David struggled with the execution of his 1779 *académie* before leaving for Naples; when he returned and finished it at the end of the summer, Vien wrote that it was done with “more fervor than I could have imagined.”<sup>47</sup>

In a much later account to his pupil Delafontaine, David recalled that “[i]t seemed to me upon my return [from Naples] that the cataracts had been removed from my eyes.”<sup>48</sup> The open-endedness of David’s avowal has enabled scholars to perpetuate the trope of casting the trip to Naples as the moment when David realized the deficiencies of the French school and embraced the sober lessons of antiquity.<sup>49</sup> Often posited as David’s vow of contrition after his stubborn refusal to change his style, (“antiquity will not seduce me,” he swore at the prelude of his first trip to Rome), his declaration nonetheless leaves the catalyst for his transformation unnamed.

Indeed, David’s verism is irreconcilable with ancient Roman wall painting. Jérôme Charles Bellicard and Charles-Nicolas Cochin intimated as much when they lamented that ancient paintings in Herculaneum

do not display anywhere the art of composing light and shadow...the composition of the figures is cold, and seems rather to have been treated in the taste of sculpture than with this warmth to which painting is susceptible.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Spike, *Caravaggio: Catalogue of Paintings*, CD-ROM.

<sup>47</sup> Vien to d’Angiviller, Rome, September, 1779. *Correspondance*, XIII, 451, cited in Schnapper and Sérullaz, eds., *Jacques-Louis David, 1748-1825*, 89. “...plus de chaleur que je n’aurois pu imaginer.”

<sup>48</sup> Bibl. Institut, Ms 3782, cited in Schnapper and Sérullaz, eds., *Jacques-Louis David, 1748-1825*, 102. “Il me semblait à mon retour que je venais d’être opéré de la cataracte...”

<sup>49</sup> The present study does not dispute the well-accepted conclusion that the period immediately following David’s return from Naples is demonstrative of the first substantial changes in the artist’s style. The major monographs included in the bibliography provide brief discussions of the issue. However, they neither adequately support the claim that David’s development of Neoclassicism derives from a sophisticated understanding of the antique as it is embodied in ancient wall painting, nor do they reconcile that source with the influence of the fundamentally different qualities of seventeenth-century Neapolitan painting.

<sup>50</sup> Charles-Nicolas Cochin and Jérôme Charles Bellicard, *Observations sur les antiquités de la ville d’Herculanum...* (Paris, 1754; repr. Geneva: Minkoff Reprint, 1972), 59-61. “...ils ne présentent nulle part l’art de composer les lumières et les ombres...la composition des figures est froide, et paraît plutôt traitée dans le goût de la sculpture, qu’avec cette chaleur dont la peinture est susceptible.”

Bellicard and Cochin juxtaposed here two related formal components of Caravaggio's oeuvre that David employed to great effect: *clair-obscur* and "sculptural" quality of forms. Bellicard and Cochin seem to compare the linear, pallid effects of ancient painting to the hard, monochromatic properties of sculpture (or perhaps the planarity of ancient reliefs). However, in the work of both Caravaggio and David, the modulation of light and dark contributes to the "sculptural" illusion of tangible, three-dimensional forms embedded within or emerging from the canvases.

In view of the argument for the sculptural dynamic in Caravaggio's pictures, it should be noted that Caravaggio's Neapolitan works represent a discrete phase within his oeuvre; they are more monochromatic, and their forms more abstracted. Caravaggio's Neapolitan brushwork, in a painting such as *The Seven Acts of Mercy* from the church of Pio Monte della Misericordia (1607) (fig.35), does not define forms with the specificity that is seen in a Roman painting like the *Inspiration of Saint Matthew* (fig. 36). Caravaggio's Neapolitan compositions often consist of masses shaped by general highlights, with a tendency toward planarity and figures that seem detached from or isolated within the background.<sup>51</sup> Whether David distinguished between the qualities in Caravaggio's Roman and Neapolitan works, or whether one made a greater impact on the artist, is unknown. William Vaughan is one of the few scholars who have postulated that David's trip to Naples precipitated an encounter with Caravaggio and his followers that presented the artist with an "antidote" to idealism, leading to David's employment of dramatic caravaggesque shadow to heighten the sense of the real in the major history

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<sup>51</sup> David M. Stone, "In Figura Daiboli: Self and Myth in Caravaggio's *David and Goliath*," in *From Rome to Eternity: Catholicism and the Arts in Italy, ca. 1550-1650*, ed. Pamela M. Jones and Thomas Worcester, (Leider, the Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2002), 29.

canvases of the 1780s.<sup>52</sup> What is clear is that the impact of the caravaggesque, first absorbed in Rome and reinforced in Naples, is already evident in several of David's works as a *pensionnaire* done immediately following the month-long excursion to southern Italy.

David seems to have telescoped the achievements of the last months of his *pension* when he recounted later to his pupil Delafontaine that, upon his return from Naples, he created, "under an entirely new stroke of inspiration, a large figure seen from the rear that earned for [him] great honor among [his] fellow *pensionnaires* in Rome."<sup>53</sup> His brief description calls to mind the 1780 *académie* known as *Patroclus* (fig. 6). However, the work that dates to the weeks following David's return from Naples is the Quebec *Saint Jérôme* (fig. 29).

The previous discussion of the *Saint Roch*, which dates after the *Saint Jérôme*, has demonstrated several ways in which David incorporated elements of the caravaggesque in this composition. Admittedly, the *Saint Jérôme* produces an entirely different effect from that of the *Saint Roch*, which suggests that the more somber qualities of Caravaggio's Neapolitan works, or that of Jusepe de Ribera, may have affected David. Ribera's painting, *Saint Jerome and the Angel* (1626) (fig. 37) has been posited as a likely source for the French artist.<sup>54</sup> David mentioned the art of Ribera, the most famous of Caravaggio's followers who worked in Naples, with that of Valentin as the work to which he responded most readily as a *pensionnaire*. Mina Gregori has noted that

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<sup>52</sup> William Vaughan, "Terror and the Tabula Rasa: David's *Marat* in its Pictorial Context," in *Jacques-Louis David's The Death of Marat*, ed. William Vaughan and Helen Weston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 95.

<sup>53</sup> Bibl. Institut, Ms 3782, cited in *Jacques-Louis David, 1748-1825*, 102. "Il me semblait à mon retour que je venais d'être opéré de la cataracte, et je fis sous le coup d'une inspiration toute nouvelle une grande figure de dos qui me fit un grand honneur parmi mes camarades de la pension de Rome."



Ribera's highly textural surfaces departed from the austerity of Caravaggio's, even in his Neapolitan works.<sup>55</sup> However, David's *Saint Jérôme* figure represents a full-bodied caravaggesque type, rather than Ribera's ascetic one, and the space that the French artist depicted is more like the tenebrous realms of Caravaggio in which narrative details are subsumed by murky shadows, a technique with which David first experimented in his *académie*, *Hector*. In the *Saint Jérôme*, David imbued the figure with both the enhanced narrative context and emotionally charged gesture that the *Hector* lacks. If David's first *académie* demonstrates a worthy emulation of the visual signifiers of the caravaggesque, his *Saint Jérôme* stands as an absorption and recapitulation of these formal devices in his own terms.

Several scholars have suggested that David ultimately rejected or seriously mitigated his absorption of the caravaggesque by the end of his first Roman period, and that this change is reflected in his final Roman *académie*, the *Patroclus* (1780) (fig. 6). This full-length nude represents a synthesis of anatomical precision, restrained naturalism, and purification of light and shadow.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, when the *Patroclus* is compared with the *Hector* from 1778, it is evident in the more planar depiction of the figure of *Patroclus* that David had tempered his tenebrism from the severity of his first *académie*, the *Saint Jérôme*, and, presumably, his copy of the *Last Supper* after Valentin. With the *Patroclus*, as in the *Saint Roch*, David approached the sharp, purified lighting of his imminent Roman history paintings. Moreover, David maintained a precision of detail in the

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<sup>54</sup> Sylvain Bédard, "David à Naples: une source pour le Saint Jérôme de Québec," *RACAR*, 17, no. 1 (1990): 40-45. (as above, 1, n 1).

<sup>55</sup> Mina Gregori, "Caravaggio in Naples," *Painting in Naples 1606-1705: From Caravaggio to Giordano*, ed. Clovis Whitfield and Jane Martineau (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson with the Royal Academy of Arts, 1982), 40.

<sup>56</sup> Bédard, 44.

figure's hands and calloused feet, both of which appear to bear traces of grime. If, for the *Hector*, David relied on the figure of the executioner in Caravaggio's *Martyrdom of Saint Matthew* (fig. 27), the *Patroclus* recalls the *repoussoir* figure in the left foreground of the *Seven Acts of Mercy* (fig.35), as well as the lower right figure in the *Martyrdom*. David's claim for greater acuity after his trip to Naples may be reflected in the equilibrium he found in investing his figures, indeed his compositions, with dramatic, yet precise lighting, powerful modeling, and physical and emotional naturalism.

## II. David's second Roman sojourn, 1784-1785: *The Oath of the Horatii* and after

In autumn of 1784, Jacques-Louis David returned to Rome along with his best-loved pupil Jean-Germain Drouais who was beginning his Prix de Rome sojourn. David, who had delayed fulfilling a royal commission that he was awarded in 1781, may have desired the surroundings of the Eternal City for what all expected to be an important work. David took a studio in the French Academy at the Piazza Trinità dei Monti.<sup>63</sup> Despite, or perhaps due to the fact that David worked in relative secrecy, closing the studio to all save Drouais,<sup>64</sup> David's picture, the *Oath of the Horatii* (fig. 1), generated a public interest. Once it was completed, the response of the Roman public was overwhelming, precipitating the flurry of anticipation that surrounded the painting upon its delivery to the Paris Salon in August of 1785. The *Oath* seemed predestined for greatness. If David

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<sup>63</sup> Holt, 13.

<sup>64</sup> Drouais' contribution to the picture is discussed in Crow, *Emulation*, 47-9.

needed to return to Rome to achieve the artistic preeminence that is only intimated in his aggregation and reception pieces to the French Academy,<sup>65</sup> he would return to Paris upon the completion of the *Oath* with an innovative work that demonstrated not simply a mature application of the lessons from his time as a *pensionnaire*, but an authoritative reinterpretation of the caravaggesque.

In Rome, the young German artist Wilhelm Tischbein kept a studio near David's. Tischbein saw the *Oath* upon its completion, and provided one of the first commentaries, not only on the picture, but on its immediate reception in Rome. The simplified composition, austere setting, and direct expression through which the painting heralds French Neoclassicism did not escape Tischbein's notice. He wrote of these precise qualities in his initial evaluation of the *Oath*,

nothing is in excess...all that is there belongs there and contributes to the effect of the whole. Therefore the expression, which without a doubt forms the most essential part of this picture, is naturally very much heightened.<sup>66</sup>

Given that Tischbein concluded that David intensified the expression by simplification of forms and composition, it is not surprising that the writer went on to cite Caravaggio as an important influence for David. Tischbein's commentary is quoted at length, as it provides the earliest interpretation of the caravaggesque in David's painting. Tischbein wrote that, with his coloring, David

imitate[s] the style of Caravaggio, Valentin, and Guercino. These artists painted for the effect; they noted that strong shadows employed directly next to light produce relief and cause objects to stand out. Such a style has

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<sup>65</sup> David became a provisional member of the Academy with his aggregation piece, *Belisarius Begging Alms* (1781) and a full member with the success of his reception piece, *Andromache Bewailing the Death of Hector* (1783).

<sup>66</sup> J. H. Wilhelm Tischbein, "Letters from Rome about new works of art by contemporary artists," [Jacques Louis David's *The Oath of the Horatii*], *Der teutsche Merkur*, (February 1786), 169-85; repr. and trans. in Holt, 18.

something striking and creates a sudden effect; although judged by nature it is entirely wrong, for this sudden contrast of light and shadow is never so evident on a body, except in a dark room where a slanting light comes from only one side and illuminates the body without the power of reflection...David, who took on this strong style, sought indeed in this picture to make the shadows translucent, but they nevertheless remain hard, unpleasant, and without soft reflection;...But even though the eye perceives so little that flatters in the play of colors, we cannot deny that the whole does make a penetrating effect; we do not know, in consequence, whether one should wish a different type of coloring for a painting which seems to have been made entirely for the soul's expression and the lofty effect of the whole.<sup>67</sup>

The caravaggesque is evinced in what Tischbein acknowledged as the compelling three-dimensionality of the figures to the painting's embodiment of the "soul's expression."

Even though the contrasts of dark and light are, in fact, more moderate in the *Oath* than in works from David's first Italian sojourn, their power seemed to increase as David reduced his figures and composition to a minimum. David did not reproduce the spotlighted effects that occur in Caravaggio's paintings such as the Matthew cycle in the Contarelli Chapel. While shadows fall on the upper third of the canvas, as well as the undefined space in the far background, the principle figures are bathed in a translucent light which at once crisply defines their forms and creates within them a dynamic play of *clair-obscur*.<sup>68</sup> Here, David achieved the purest distillation of formal clarity and moral imperative of his oeuvre.

David maintained the technique of the suppression of most facial expression in favor of emphatic gesture or corporeal pose in the *Oath*. It is the rigid poses and tensed muscles of the Horatii, not their stoic gazes, that convey their resolve, while the

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<sup>67</sup> Tischbein, cited in Holt, 21.

<sup>68</sup> In fact, at least on Parisian critic noted happily that "...the tone is also Roman, without having anything of this heavy blackness, a fault of which M. David has righted himself." M.L.B.D.B., "Minos au Sallon, ou

slackened postures, rather than the facial composure, of the women convey resignation to the dramatic turn of events.<sup>69</sup> He would employ a device similar to that of his early *académies* in which the facial expression is all but suppressed, in the *Death of Socrates* (1787) (fig. 38) and the *Lictors returning to Brutus the bodies of his Sons* (fig. 4). The pupil extending the kylix to Socrates in the first work and the seated nurse in the *Brutus* are both depicted concealing their presumably anguished faces so that the viewer is left to imagine how moved they are by the unfolding events.

A drawing from one of David's albums after an anonymous painting of the *Death of Socrates* in the Giustiniani collection provides compelling evidence that the caravaggesque endured as a useful tool in his oeuvre into the late 1780s. By this date, however, he had progressed from emulation to assimilation, in which the caravaggesque became a considerable means to his own goals. Unsigned but attributed to David,<sup>70</sup> the drawing (fig. 38) reproduces the composition of a now lost work by one of Caravaggio's Northern followers.<sup>71</sup> David's painting of the same subject from 1787 diverges from the seventeenth-century version, not only in the inversion of the principle figure, but in eliminating the conventional grieving of women and children.

The similarity between the pose, body type, and garb of Socrates, as well as the frieze-like arrangement of figures connect David's painting to the caravaggesque source.<sup>72</sup> However, David would more clearly distribute figures in the shallow foreground, resulting in a more cadent, clarified unfolding of the narrative. Socrates' gesture in

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la Gazette infernale", *Journal général de France*, (Paris, 1785), 22. David was seen to have renounced the somber, heavy tones of his Roman works.

<sup>69</sup> Kirchner, 353.

<sup>70</sup> The drawing, now in the Stockholm National Museum, is mounted in one of David's albums of studies, but its authorship is uncertain, as David's albums contain contributions by his pupils. On the question, see Nash, 204; 206, n 4-6.

<sup>71</sup> For the painting's provenance and fate, see Nash, 206, n 3.

reaching for the cup, in its centrality, isolation, and eloquence, recalls the hand of Christ in Caravaggio's *Calling of Saint Matthew* (fig. 19),<sup>73</sup> as does the raking light and crisp, naturalistic detail of the architectural space.

The *Brutus* offers a much more complex *expression des passions* than one sees in David's earlier history paintings. David gave the Brutus figure an unreadable expression, enhanced by its obscurity in shadow that suggests the conflicting emotions of a father who ordered the death of his own sons. Kirchner suggests that David displaced Brutus' mix of outrage, grief and despair to the party of women in the right half of the composition.<sup>74</sup>

The *Brutus* is often seen as the climax of David's elucidation of human tragedy, and the visage of Brutus recalls the rueful executioner of Caravaggio's image of *David and Goliath* (fig. 40) (1610). When David painted what is often considered his last caravaggesque work, the *Death of Marat* (1793) (fig. 8), he had for his subject a tragedy of his own age, evoking a connection to the everyday world that pervades so many of Caravaggio's works. Jean-Paul Marat, a journalist and voice of the French Revolution, known as "l'ami du peuple," was assassinated in July 1793 as he attended to his writing while soothing his diseased skin in a medicinal bath.

Here, David most clearly approached Caravaggio's technique of depicting highly modeled figures and narrative elements on a single plane at the near foreground of the picture plane, with an empty, darker background enhancing the effect of the raking light. Marat's slack right arm, because it still holds a quill, imbues the figure with a hint of life

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<sup>72</sup> Nash, 204.

<sup>73</sup> The hand of Christ in Caravaggio's painting represents an inversion of the hand of Adam from Michelangelo Buonarroti's *Creation of Adam*. David seems to have consciously chosen to emulate the composition of Caravaggio rather than the famous passage from the Sistine Ceiling.

even as the bloodied bath water evinces the fatal nature of the wound above his right breast. David's apposite quotation of Caravaggio's *Entombment* (fig. 9), which was highly esteemed by the French art academy, attests to the correlation of the Revolutionary martyr to Christ.<sup>75</sup> The composition also evokes Caravaggio's solitary portraits of saints and martyrs, such as the 1610 *Magdalen in Ecstasy* (fig. 41), in the pose of the figure. David depicted Marat's head inclined back as he takes his dying breath, while the Magdalen's head is thrown back as she gasps in spiritual ecstasy. Much as scholars have interpreted light in Caravaggio's pictures as having a divine source and transformative effect, others have seen the light in David's painting that illuminates Marat's body against the shadowy, scumbled background, as beautifying the form of Marat, despite his infamous physical repulsiveness. Yet, David mitigated the spiritual allusion to Marat's martyrdom with the inclusion of physical emblems of his mortality: the bloodstained knife, the assassin's deceptive letter, and the epitaph inscribed on the makeshift writing table. Whereas Caravaggio presumed to make himself a witness to dramatic biblical events by including his own portrait (most notably in the *Martyrdom of Saint Matthew* and the *Taking of Christ*), David connected himself to the event he depicted in the form of a simple, eloquent dedication, "À Marat, David." Both artists saw the efficacy of making a painting resonate with the viewer by forging a symbolic link to the viewer's world.

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<sup>74</sup> Kirchner, 353-54.

<sup>75</sup> Robert Rosenblum discusses the proliferation of images of classical, medieval and modern political martyrs with attributes of their martyrdom that appeared in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Rosenblum, *Transformations*, 80-81.

## CONCLUSION

In his major Neoclassical canvases of the later 1780s, which adhered to the academic doctrine of the virtuous example of antiquity, David sought to vivify the stories with an attention to naturalistic detail that surpassed that of his teachers and peers, and helped to convey the emotive expression of his figures. Although he was a product of his age, trained during an important period of artistic reform, David owed his singularity to his own choices in the implementation of the lessons of reform. History painting, by its very nature, demanded an adherence to certain formal and thematic conventions. Nevertheless, David forged an independent identity at nearly every step of his career once he left Paris for Italy.

David's *académies*, traditional exercises for every *pensionnaire*, highlight his progression from emulating the most simple formal devices of the caravaggesque in the *Hector* and *Patroclus*, to investing a work like the *Saint Jérôme* with dramatic gesture and emotion of equal authority to any of Caravaggio's works. By the time David produced the *Oath* and his subsequent major history paintings of the 1780s, he found a way to transform light and shade into elements of equal import to the gesture and expression of his figures. Darkness and light are a part of the story, as indispensable as the tenebrism of Caravaggio to the dramatic effect of the painting.

This pursuit of an understanding of the impact of the art of Caravaggio on David's artistic development raised several broader questions that may offer further useful



avenues for elucidating the Italian's importance for David's Neoclassicism. Both artists' works have been described according to their "theatrical effects," suggesting the need for a scholarly consideration of the concept of the theatrical as it relates to the Baroque aesthetic, as well as French reform painting. Examining David's portraiture may also yield a better understanding of his interest in naturalism, a broad concept whose eighteenth-century definitions still await study, as he understood it through the caravaggesque.

This study has provided a new synthesis of the various avenues through which eighteenth-century French artists, theorists, and collectors knew and understood the art and life of Caravaggio. Grand Tour accounts, as well as those of David's contemporaries, create a context for the claim that many scholars have made, and that has been blindly accepted: that Caravaggio and the caravaggesque provided indispensable inspiration for David's formal evolution.

David, like Caravaggio, transformed the expressive potential of the figure to connect the viewer to the work of art as their peers could not. Caravaggio's uneasy position in eighteenth-century French aesthetic theory and practice reflects the fact that his art often refuted certain doctrines of the Academy. Nevertheless, David availed himself of both, wedding innovation and tradition in a revolution of form.



Figure 1. Jacques-Louis David. *The Oath of the Horatii*. 1785. Oil on canvas. 330 x 425 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.



Figure 2. Jacques-Louis David. *The Combat of Mars and Minerva*. 1771. Oil on canvas. 146 x 181 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.



Figure 3. Jacques-Louis David. *Antiochus and Stratonice*. 1774. Oil on canvas. 120 x 155 cm. École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris.





Figure 4. Jacques-Louis David. *The Lictors bringing to Brutus the Bodies of his Sons*. 1789. Oil on canvas. 323 x 422 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.



Figure 5. Jacques-Louis David. *Hector*. 1778. Oil on canvas. 123 x 172 cm. Musée Fabre, Montpellier.



Figure 6. Jacques-Louis David. *Patroclus*. 1779-80. Oil on canvas. 122 x 170 cm. Musée Thomas Henry, Cherbourg.





Figure 7. Jacques-Louis David. *Saint Roch interceding with the Virgin for the Plague-stricken*. 1780. Oil on canvas. 260 x 195 cm. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Marseille.





Figure 8. Jacques-Louis David. *The Death of Marat*. 1793. Oil on canvas. 165 x 128 cm. Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels.



Figure 9. Caravaggio. *The Entombment*. 1602. Oil on canvas. 300 x 203 cm. Pinacoteca, Vatican.





Figure 10. Caravaggio. *The Death of the Virgin*. 1602. Oil on canvas. 369 x 245 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.



Figure 11. Jean Charles-Nicaise Perrin. *The Death of the Virgin*. 1788-89. Oil on canvas. 215 x 366 cm. Musée national du château et des Trianons, Versailles.





Figure 12. Jean Charles-Nicaise Perrin. Study, *The Death of the Virgin*, 1788. Oil on board. Musée des beaux-arts, Valenciennes.



Figure 13. Caravaggio. *The Inspiration of Saint Matthew*. 1602. Oil on canvas. 232 x 183 cm. Formerly Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum, Berlin.



Figure 14. Caravaggio. *Judith and Holofernes*. 1598. Oil on canvas. 145 x 195 cm. Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Rome.





Figure 15. Charles-Nicolas Cochin. *Ideal Academy*. 1763. Engraving for the entry, “Drawing” in Diderot’s *Encyclopédie*. Bibliothèque nationale, Cabinet des estampes, Paris.





Figure 16. after Jean-François Pierre Peyron. *The Death of Seneca*. 1774. Engraving. Bibliothèque nationale, Cabinet des estampes, Paris.



Figure 17. Jacques-Louis David. *The Death of Seneca*. 1773. Oil on canvas. 123 x 160 cm. Musée du Petit Palais, Paris.



Figure 18. Jean-François Pierre Peyron. *Belisarius receiving Alms from a peasant who had served under him*. 1779. Oil on canvas. 93 x 132 cm. Musée des Augustins, Toulouse.



Figure 19. Caravaggio. *The Calling of Saint Matthew*. 1599-1600. Oil on canvas. 322 x 340 cm. Contarelli Chapel, San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome.





Figure 20. Jean-François Pierre Peyron. *The Funeral of Miltiades*. 1780. Oil on canvas. 98 x 136 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.



Figure 21. Joseph-Marie Vien. *Hector convincing Paris to take up arms in Defense of the Fatherland*. 1779. Oil on canvas. 330 x 258 cm. Musée de Fontainebleau.



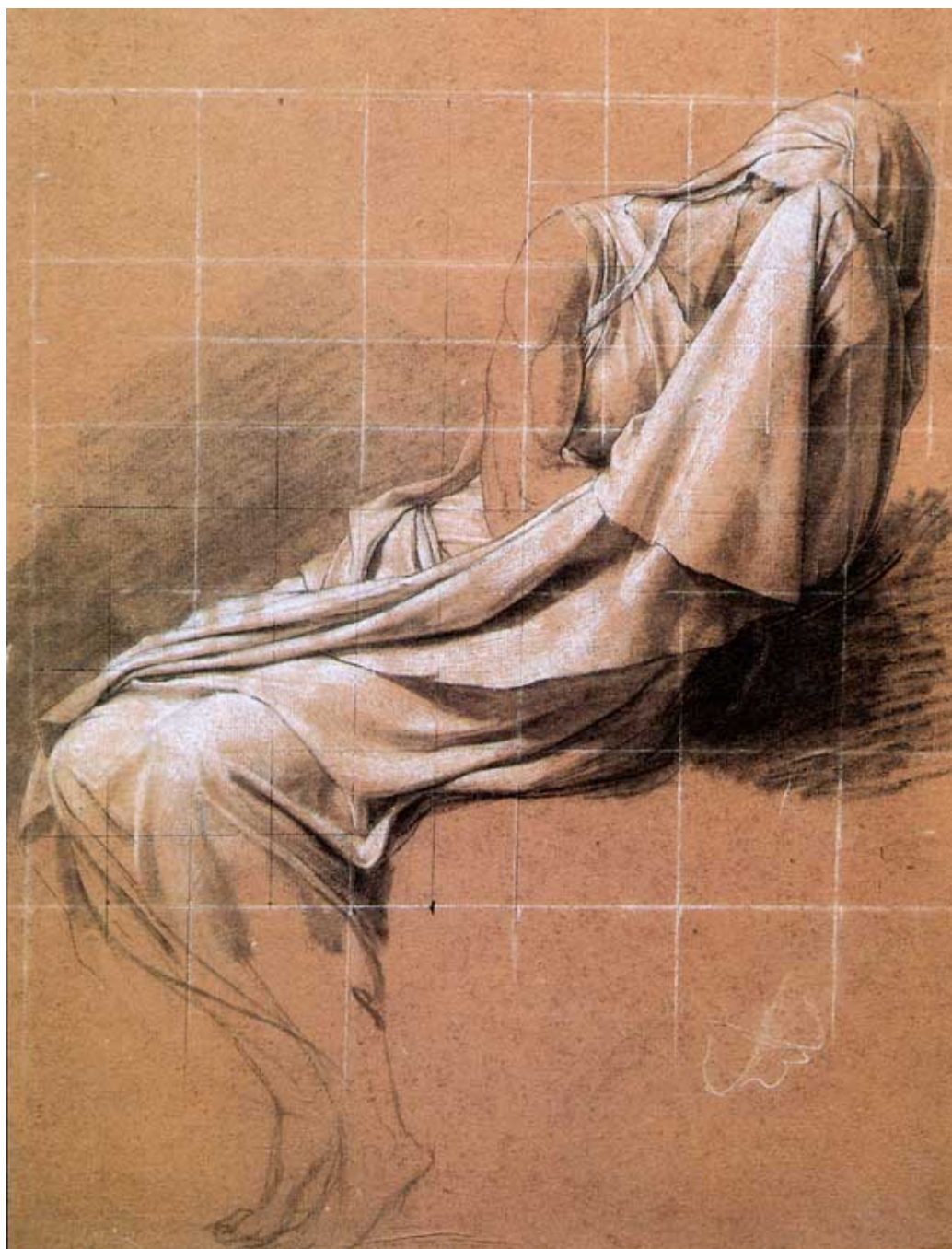


Figure 22. Jacques-Louis David. Drawing for the *Lictors bringing to Brutus the Bodies of his Sons*, figure of the nurse. 1789. Charcoal on paper. 56 x 43 cm. Musée des beaux-arts, Tours.



Figure 23. Jacques-Louis David. *La Douleur*. Pastel on paper. 54 x 41 cm. École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts, Paris.





Fig. 24. Charles Le Brun. *La Douleur d'esprit*. Charcoal on paper. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

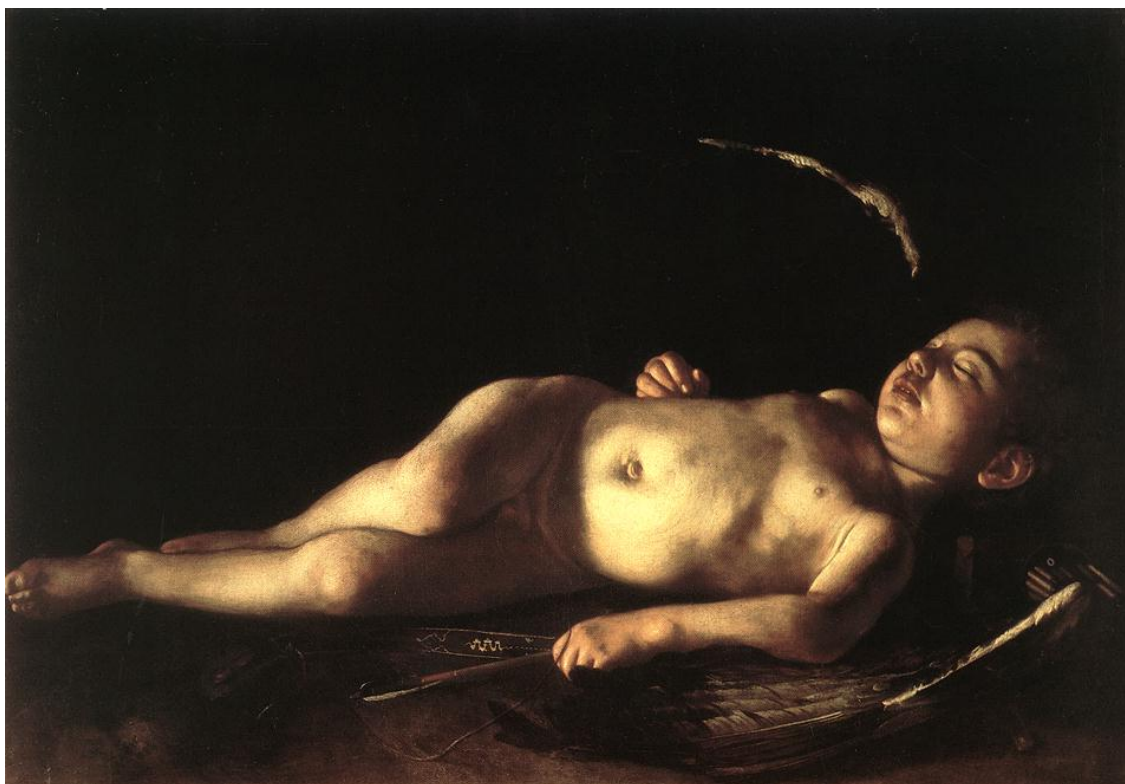


Fig. 25. Caravaggio. *Sleeping Cupid*. 1608. Oil on canvas. 71 x 105 cm. Galleria Palatina (Palazzo Pitti), Florence.





Figure 26. Caravaggio. *Saint John the Baptist*. 1604. Oil on canvas. 172 x 104 cm. Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City.



Figure 27. Caravaggio. *The Martyrdom of Saint Matthew*. 1599-1600. Oil on canvas. 323 x 343 cm. Contarelli Chapel, San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome.





Figure 28. Caravaggio. *The Sacrifice of Isaac*. 1603. Oil on canvas. 104 x 135 cm. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

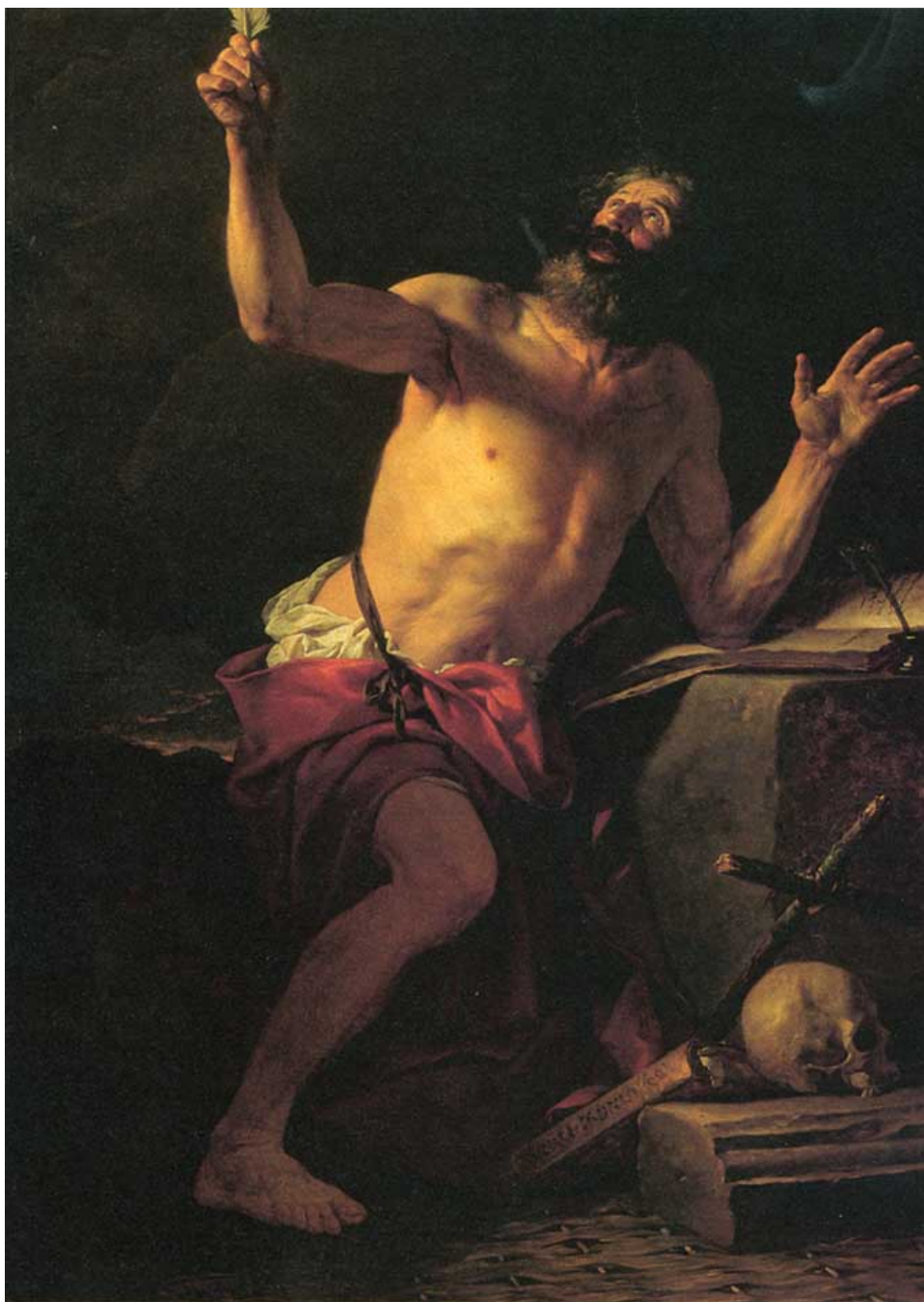


Figure 29. Jacques-Louis David. *Saint Jérôme*. 1779. Oil on canvas. 174 x 124 cm. Musée du Séminaire de Québec, Québec.





Figure 30. Caravaggio. *Madonna of Loreto*. 1603-05. Oil on canvas. 260 x 150 cm. Sant'Agostino, Rome.



Figure 31. Caravaggio. *Medusa*. 1598. Oil on canvas mounted on wood. 60 x 55 cm. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.





Figure 32. Jacques-Louis David. *The Funeral of Patroclus*. 1778. Oil on canvas. 94 x 218 cm. National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin.



Figure 33. Valentin de Boulogne. *The Last Supper*. 1625-26. Oil on canvas. 139 x 230 cm. Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Rome.



Figure 34. Caravaggio. *Supper at Emmaus*. 1601-02. Oil on canvas. 139 x 195 cm. National Gallery, London.





Figure 35. Caravaggio. *The Seven Acts of Mercy*. 1607. Oil on canvas. 390 x 260 cm. Church of Pio Monte della Misericordia, Naples.



Figure 36. Caravaggio. *The Inspiration of Saint Matthew*. 1602. Oil on canvas. 292 x 186 cm. Contarelli Chapel, San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome.





Figure 37. Jusepe de Ribera. *Saint Jerome and the Angel*. 1626. Oil on canvas. Museo e Galleria Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples.



Figure 38. Jacques-Louis David. *The Death of Socrates*. 1787. Oil on canvas. 129 x 196 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Fig. 39. attributed to Jacques-Louis David. Eighteenth-century drawing after anonymous seventeenth-century caravaggesque *Death of Socrates*. Pencil on paper. Stockholm, National Museum.





Figure 40. Caravaggio. *David and Goliath*. 1610. Oil on canvas. 125 x 101 cm. Galleria Borghese, Rome.



Figure 41. Caravaggio. *The Magdalen in Ecstasy*. 1610. Oil on canvas. 106 x 91 cm. Private collection Rome.

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