

MICHELANGELO MERISI DA CARAVAGGIO

The Creative Psychopath

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The story of the life of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, with its overtones of defiant behaviour, aggressiveness and turbulence, has a special appeal to the psychiatrist. This paper is intended to provide insight into his personality and identify those aspects of his psychological make-up that are peculiar to him as an individual. It will, therefore, avoid all attempts at an evaluation of his artistic works and of his place in the world of art; however, it will consider his paintings in so far as they may reveal some of his personality traits.

Outline of Caravaggio's Life.

Not much is known about his life so much so that not even his surname (Amerigi, Maresio, etc) and place of birth are known with certainty.¹ He was born on 28 September 1573 some say at Caravaggio, in the vicinity of Bergamo, and others say at Milan.² He was the son of an architect. Losing his parents in early childhood, he was apprenticed at eleven years of age (1584) by his brother Battista, a priest,³ to the painter Simone Peterzano, at Milan, for four years.⁴ He left this master when about fifteen years old (1588). Then we lose trace of him until he appears in Rome between the autumns of 1591 and 1592. Here, at twenty years of age, he catches malaria which was then prevalent in Rome and which appears to have dodged him all his short life.⁵ He was treated at the *Ospedale di Santa Maria della Consolazione* where he stayed – and painted – during a long convalescence.⁶ Some

1. E. Fabiani. "Il genio che divenne assassino" *Gente*, 12 ottobre 1973, No. 41, Vol. XVII, p. 161.
E. Sammut. "Caravaggio in Malta." *Scientia*, 1949, Vol. 15, p.78
2. E. Fabiani, *op. cit.*, p. 161.
R. Guttuso. *L'opera completa del Caravaggio*, Milano, 1967, p. 83.
3. E. Fabiani, *op. cit.*, p. 161
4. R. Guttuso, *op. cit.*, p.83
5. S.S. Ludovici. *Vita del Caravaggio*, Milano, 1953, p. 86
6. H. Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, New York, 1983, pp. 8-10

art critics discern in the yellowish, sickly complexion of his self-portrait as Bacchus (1593), painted at this period, the skin manifestations of liver involvement by malaria. In fact they have labelled it *Bacchino malato* or the sick Little Bacchus.⁷

After his recovery he found employment with various painters among whom Giuseppe d'Arpino whom the Pope had made a Knight of the Order of Christ and who was much in favour by the Roman aristocracy. By 1596, Caravaggio left d'Arpino and made the acquaintance of Cardinal del Monte who was so impressed by his artistic merits that he accepted him to live in his palace, provided him with a studio and with a servant. At this juncture Caravaggio begins to paint his masterpieces, to enter the high society circles of Rome and to sell his pictures to the richest families. He obtains the patronage, among that of others, of Cardinal Scipione Borghese, the nephew of Pope Paul V.

He introduced the innovative principle of depicting life with realistic accuracy and as it presented itself to our senses. He thus chose as models for his Madonnas and saints the humble people that thronged the streets of Rome. This outlook provoked the antagonism of established conventional artists and of those who favoured the pomposity of academic painting and the grand style of the Renaissance masters.

In 1599 he painted scenes from the life of St. Matthew for a chapel in the Church of San Luigi dei Francesi. St. Matthew is depicted as gambling in a tavern when Christ appears on the scene and calls Matthew to follow him. Caravaggio had departed from the scriptural text which states that at the calling by Christ, Matthew was at the custom house, he being a tax collector.⁸ Caravaggio painted another canvas with St. Matthew as a subject, this time the saint being presented as a stocky man in the act of writing. This oeuvre, too, was criticised on ethical grounds because the saint evoked the image of a peasant or old beggar with his legs bared and crossed – a pose which in conformity with the ideas of the time was regarded as being outside the accepted propriety of portraying sacred subjects.⁹ Similar criticism was levied against Caravaggio when, in 1606, he painted the death of the Madonna for the Church of Santa Maria della Scala. The canvas was refused as

7. H. Hibbard, *op. cit.*, pp.20-1, 193.

S.S. Ludovici, *op. cit.*, p.86

8. H. Hibbard, *op. cit.*, pp. 96, 138-140

9. *Ibid*, pp. 140, 202-205

being indecorous because the Madonna was shown with her bare feet projected towards the viewer and the apostles were depicted as if they were "brigands". Caravaggio was asked to repaint the subject but he refused and the painting was acquired by the Duke of Mantua who took it to France.

In August 1603 he was sued for libel by a rival painter (Giovanni Baglione 1566-1643) who felt offended by defamatory verses about him allegedly written by Caravaggio and his friends; however no conclusive evidence seems to have been produced against Caravaggio though he had to promise not to molest the plaintiff.¹⁰

Caravaggio's arrogance again got him into trouble in July/August 1605 when he was involved in an altercation with a notary over a woman (Lena) – an episode which caused him so much trouble that he had to leave Rome for Genoa.¹¹

In 1606 he was once more in Rome. On the 29 May he quarrelled with Cavaliere Ranuccio Tommasoni over a game of tennis. Caravaggio challenged Tommasoni to a duel; he was wounded in the neck but he succeeded in killing his opponent. He managed to escape from the police, abandon Rome and hide in the Palace of Prince Mario Colonna until he recovered his health and went to live in Naples for a year or so.¹²

In 1608 he came to Malta from Naples from where he had to flee as he was being followed by the avengers of Tommasoni. They, in fact, caught up with him in a tavern, beat him up and left him for dead. In the meanwhile he had petitioned the Pope, who was the temporal head of the Roman States, to pardon him for the murder of Tommasoni.¹³

In Malta he was accorded the patronage of Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt and was commissioned to paint the *Beheading of St. John*. This canvas was judged to be a masterpiece. As a sign of appreciation of his talent, Caravaggio was invested with the title of Knight of Grace

10. *Ibid*, pp. 161-3, 168

R. Guttuso, *op. cit.*, 84

11. H. Hibbard, *op. cit.*, p. 191

12. E. Sammut, *op. cit.*, p. 79

13. E. Sammut, *op. cit.*, p.79

P. De Majo, *Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio*, Malta, 1959, p. 23.

(or Obedience) of the Order of St. John on the 14th July 1608.¹⁴ Besides this honour, the Grand Master is said to have bestowed on Caravaggio a necklace of gold and two slaves. While in Malta he also painted *San Girolamo* and a *Maddalena* for the Italian Chapel of St. Catherine in St. John's Conventual Church; a portrait of Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt wearing full armour (Louvre); another *San Girolamo* for the Palace (location now unknown) and the Sleeping Cupid or *Amorino addormentato* (Galleria Pitti, Florence).¹⁵

By mid-September 1608 he was involved in a clash with the police in Malta. He was arrested and imprisoned in Fort St. Angelo for attacking a Knight of Justice during a quarrel alleging that he did so to defend his honour against insults hurled at him. There are, however, conflicting views about this incident it being suggested that his arrest was occasioned by reports, that reached Malta, of the murder that he had committed in Rome. Whatever the reason for his imprisonment, he succeeded in escaping from Fort St. Angelo and in reaching Syracuse in Sicily by the 6 October 1608.¹⁶ On the first December of the same year he was formally expelled from the Order of St. John "as a foul and putrid member" of that brotherhood.¹⁷

In Syracuse he did not feel safe as he feared that the wounded knight of St. John had sent agents to avenge himself; so he left for Messina where he stayed for some months. Here he painted the *Resurrection of Lazarus*¹⁸ but when not busy with his brush he spent his time in pleasure-seeking adventures, squandering the money he had earned and engaging in squabbles. He showed disrespect to the religious sentiments and beliefs of his contemporaries by questioning in an irreverent manner the tenets of the Catholic faith and by boasting that

14. NLM, Archives 456, & 282, H.Hibbard, *op. cit.*, p. 228

15. *Ibid*, pp. 227, 234, 262, E. Sammut, *op. cit.*, pp. 81, & 86 S.S. Ludovici, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

16. G.P. Bellori. *Le vite de' pittori, scultori et architetti moderni* Rome, 1672, p. 210. H.Hibbard, *op. cit.*, pp. 226 & 235 E. Fabiani, *op.cit.*, p.161

17. H.Hibbard, *op. cit.*, p. 240 S.S. Ludovici, *op.cit.*, p.113 E. Sammut, *op. cit.*, p. 87

18. E. Fabiani, *loc. cit.*, p. 161 H.Hibbard, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

he never committed any venial sins as all the sins he had committed were all mortal ones. His offensive attitude towards religion, in fact, earned him the taint of being an atheist and even an "anti-Christ".¹⁹

From Messina he went to Palermo where he was a prey to fears of being pursued by enemies. It has been suggested that he might have become somewhat paranoid at this period but one cannot exclude the possibility that some persons were actually shadowing him to revenge themselves for some wrong received at his hands as subsequent events seem to show. In fact he left Sicily and on the 20 October 1609 reached Naples where he was cornered by his adversaries who wounded him so badly in the face that he was almost unrecognisable and spent a long period of convalescence until the early months of 1610.²⁰

He finally took ship from Naples to Rome in the expectation of receiving the pardon from Pope Pius V for the murder of Tommasoni. He landed at the nearby Porto Ercole, a Spanish praesidium on the border of the Papal States on 17 July 1610. Here he was mistaken for a man wanted by the police and arrested.²¹ On being set free the following day he hastened to the beach to board his ship for Rome but the vessel, on which he had left all his belongings, had sailed without him. In despair he ran along the wharf in the scorching heat of the July sun and in a distraught frame of mind in a vain attempt to catch sight of the boat. He fell acutely ill with a "malignant fever" – possibly another attack of malaria.²² He was given shelter in a house where he died on the 18 July 1610. The Pope's reprieve reached Porto Ercole less than a fortnight later on the 31 July 1610.²³ A contemporary fellow painter who was one of his adversaries thus records Caravaggio's death: "And so, without the aid of God and man, in a few days he died, as miserably as he had lived": while a modern biographer, in full sympathy with Caravaggio,

19. H. Hibbard, *op.cit.*, p.221, 247, & 386.

20. *Ibid*, p. 249

E. Fabiani, *loc. cit.*, p.161

S.S. Ludovici, *op. cit.*, pp. 46 & 115

R. Guttuso, *op. cit.*, p. 84

21. G.P. Bellori, *op. cit.*, p. 211

H. Hibbard, *op. cit.*, p.254.

22. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, April 3, 1972, Vol. 220, p. 15.

G.P. Bellori, *op. cit.*, p. 211

23. H. Hibbard, *op. cit.*, pp. 225 & 270.

S.S. Ludovici, *op. cit.*, p. 76

E. Fabiani, *loc. cit.*, p. 161

found it hard to convince himself that an artist of Caravaggio's calibre could "die like a dog".²⁴ From this delineation of Caravaggio's life we now turn to an investigation of his personality.

Delinquent and Police Record.

Caravaggio's known record of disruptive behaviour begins in the year 1600 with a progressive escalation of notoriety, belligerence, antisocial behaviour, brawls and murder in later years. He was in the habit of carrying a sword; and when he was too ill to carry it himself, he had a servant follow him with it. Life was then rough and tough and the carrying of a sword was the privilege of free men and of the nobility.²⁵ Caravaggio's tempestuous temperament however went beyond the acceptable behaviour of his time and the use he made of his weapon overstepped the conventional usage of arms by his social equals.

On the 19 November 1600 he was charged with assaulting one Girolamo Stampa,²⁶ a painter, dealing him several blows with his stick and making a thrust at him with his sword.²⁷ Sometime before the 7 February 1601 he wounded a guard of Castel Sant'Angelo in his hand leaving him with a permanent scar.²⁸ On 24 February 1604 he was charged with hurling a plate of badly cooked artichokes at a waiter's head in a tavern; on 20 October he was jailed for throwing stones at the police and on 18 November of the same year he was imprisoned for insulting the police with obscene words when he was asked to produce his licence for carrying sword and rapier.

In 1605 he was arrested and jailed for abusive carrying of arms. In July of the same year he wounded a notary named Mariano Pasqualone in the head because the notary had some association with a woman named Lena who was Caravaggio's model and may also have been his

mistress.²⁹ On 1 September he again clashed with the police because he threw stones at his former landlady's window and broke it.³⁰ He had also failed to pay her the rent for six months. On 24 October he was wounded in the neck and left ear, probably during a brawl, and was kept in the house of a friend until he recovered.

Towards the end of May 1606 he slashed, with his sword, the canvas of a fellow artist while the latter was still painting it. On the 28 or 29 of the same month he was involved in a squabble over a wager of ten *scudi* on a tennis match. He was badly wounded in the head but, as already stated, he killed his opponent Ranuccio Tommasoni and had to flee from Rome.³¹

While in Messina in 1608, following his escape from Malta, he attacked a schoolmaster causing him a grievous wound and fled to Naples.³² He remained a fugitive from justice and from his adversaries for the rest of his life which came to an end two years later.

Violence in Caravaggio's Art.

Caravaggio was a man of violence. This streak in his personal makeup is projected in his artistic work at about the same time as the beginning of his known delinquent record when representations of beheadings, shedding of blood and of death start to form the themes of his canvases and substitute his earlier still-life pictures of fruits and flowers and the portrayal of such scenes as *A Boy with a Basket of Fruit*, *A Boy Peeling Fruits*, *The Fortune Teller*, *The Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, *St. Matthew and the Angel* and the *Calling of St. Matthew*.³³

Two outstanding examples of this change of direction may be mentioned, i.e. *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (1598/99) and the *Medusa* (1597). In *Judith and Holofernes* we witness the gory and brutal

24. M.L. Patrizi. *Un pittore criminale. Il Caravaggio*. Recanati, 1921, p. 161

H. Hibbard, *op. cit.*, p. 254

R. Guttuso, *op. cit.*, p. 85

S.S. Ludovici, *op. cit.*, p. 117

25. H. Hibbard, *op. cit.*, p. 28, 30, 88, 130 & 261.

26. M.L. Patrizi, *op. cit.*, p. 279

27. H. Hibbard, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

R. Guttuso, *op. cit.*, p. 84

28. *Ibid*, p. 84

E. Fabiani, *loc. cit.*, p.161

S.S. Ludovici, *op. cit.*, p.173

29. H. Hibbard, *op.cit.*, p. 191

R. Guttuso, *op. cit.*, p. 84

S.S. Ludovici, *op. cit.*, p. 173

30. R. Guttuso, *op. cit.*, p. 84

31. *Ibid*, p.84

M.L. Patrizi, *op. cit.*, p. 160

H. Hibbard, *op. cit.*, p. 206

S.S. Ludovici, *op. cit.*, p. 177

32. M.L. Patrizi, *op. cot.*, p. 161

33. *Ibid*, p. 165

decapitation of Holofernes. In the *Medusa* painted on a shield, in addition to the spurting of blood from the severed neck, there is also the horror of a terrifying visage of a creature in agony evocative of the head of a woman that had bounced on to the floor from the block of the executioner. It may be recalled that in classical mythology the shield bearing the image of the Medusa was carried by the goddess Minerva to terrify her enemies and freeze them to stone through fear.³⁴

In the same vein are his later paintings showing the *Sacrifice of Abraham* (1603), *David with the Head of Goliath* (1609/10) and the *Beheading of St. John* (1608).³⁵

In *David with the Head of Goliath* the severed head of the giant has been interpreted as being a self-portrait of Caravaggio - swarthy complexion, dark eyes, coarse black eyebrows and hair, flared nostrils and fleshy lips. It has been remarked that here we have the identification of Caravaggio with the loser who in the conflicts of life is finally overpowered by superior forces and destroyed. In fact he died during the same year in which this work was painted.

A further instance of this self-identification with the vanquished or victim is provided, in my view, by the *Beheading of St. John* where Caravaggio seems to equate himself with the murdered saint to the extent of writing his first name - Michelangelo - in the blood streaming from the cut neck of the Baptist as his head is severed. This is the only known signature of Caravaggio in his entire artistic career.³⁶

This preoccupation with the theme of death pervades the paintings of his last years. It has been observed that his *Sleeping Cupid* already mentioned, looks like a dead body with parted lips, exposed teeth and a swollen abdomen suggestive of incipient decomposition.³⁷ In the *Death of the Virgin* (1605-6) Caravaggio shows the Madonna not in the act of dying - as traditionally represented in "dormition" - but as already dead. In fact this painting was rejected by the Fathers of Santa

34. H. Hibbard, *op. cit.*, p. 67

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 53, 69, 165 & 263

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 69, 262 & 267.

E. Sammut "The Glory of St. John's", *The Order of St. John in Malta*, XIII Council of Europe ART Exhibition, Malta, 1970, p. 54.

J.A. Cauchi. *The Church of St. John in Valletta*, Malta, 1978, p. 55.

37. H. Hibbard, *op. cit.*, pp. 262 & 331

Maria della Scala who had commissioned it, because they objected to the depiction of the Madonna as a "swollen corpse". Others accused Caravaggio of making the Madonna "look like a drowned prostitute fished out of the (river) Tiber".³⁸

When painting the *Resurrection of Lazarus* (1609) he insisted on "having a newly disinterred corpse" to serve him as a model and when his assistants objected to hold the corpse for him because of its stinking smell, he bullied and beat them to stay at the job. No wonder that one of his biographers described him as a man "to be feared from every point of view".³⁹

Caravaggio's Sex Life.

Caravaggio's sex life is another facet of his personality that presents salient features to the psychiatrist as seen in his early secular paintings. These contain more than a tinge of monoerotic (homosexual) art as we see in the *Boy with a Basket of Fruit* (1594) where, it has been observed, the clothes may have been "deliberately pushed off the shoulder" as an erotic gesture; in the self-portrait as *Bacchus (Bacchino malato)* (1593-4) and the other *Bacchus holding a Wine Glass* (1595/6).⁴⁰ This was the period when Caravaggio was under the protection of Cardinal del Monte who is believed to have had similar inclinations and for whom Caravaggio painted pictures with a muted erotic atmosphere such as the sensual nudity of the three youths in *Concert of Youth* (1695) and the suggestive appeal emanating from the "languid" pose and "parted lips" of *The Luteplayer* (1596).⁴¹ In the *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (1594-5) our attention is drawn to the erotic pose of the angel-musician with his back towards us and with the added suggestion of "frontal nudity" suggested by the way that his scant drapery clings to his body. There is a far more obvious homoerotic emphasis in the figure of *St. John the Baptist in the Wilderness* (1601-2) where the subject is shown with exposed genitals embracing a ram - the symbol of sexuality - instead of the usual lamb; in the nude *Christ Child with the Madonna and Saint Anne* (1605-6) (*Madonna dei Palaferrieri Galleria Borghese*)

38. Malta's Heritage in Art, *Malta this Month*, No. 73, April 1979, p. 5

39. M.L. Patrizi, *op. cit.*, p. 163

H. Hibbard, *op. cit.*, pp. 329, 384

40. H. Hibbard, *op. cit.*, pp. 18, 22-23, 42

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 30, 33 & 37

with exposed genitals "almost to the point of offence"; and finally in the overt exhibitionistic display of the male sexual organs in the pose of *Victorious Cupid* (*Amor omnia vincit*) (c 1601-2) with its unmistakably homoerotic appeal.⁴²

One might argue that these sensuous figures are not necessarily the manifestations of Caravaggio's homosexual leaning and that in fact he seems to have had "an emotionally charged relationship" with at least one woman – the Lena of Rome already mentioned; on the other hand it must be observed that Caravaggio does not depict female nudity in his works and has never painted any of the traditional erotic females such as Venus, Diana or Europa.⁴²

Creativity and Psychopathy.

The personality of Caravaggio presents two contrasting aspects which *prima facie* appear to be inconsistent with one another – creativeness and rebelliousness. He was a man of talent and artistic bent, an innovator in the art of painting in the late 16th and early 17th centuries by breaking away from the academic style of painting of his predecessors to turn to nature and depict it as it presents itself to our observation not only in relation to light and space but also to the appearance of the human form.⁴⁴ In fact he endeavoured to convince his contemporaries to use the simple folks or humbler classes of society as models for the protagonists of their canvases. As instances of how he put his concept of realism into practice one may point to the *Crucifixion of St. Andrew* where he depicts a woman with a prominent goitre – a medical condition said to have been common in the environs of Naples where the picture was painted in 1607;⁴⁵ and of the "gaping wound with everted margins" in the *Doubting Thomas* (1602-3) with the saint poking his right index finger into it – a surgical detail which an art critic felt to be unbearable because of its extreme realism.⁴⁶

Caravaggio's creative trait was combined with a rebellious and aggressive temperament – a facet of his character which permeated his

42. *Ibid*, pp. 55, 153, 157, 185, 191 & 257

43. *Ibid*, pp. 87-88

44. *Ibid*, p. 47

R. Guttuso, *op. cit.*, p. 6

45. H. Hibbard, *op. cit.*, p. 221

46. *Ibid*, p. 167

whole life and which began to manifest itself in his adolescence at the time when he was an apprentice at Milan. At this period he has been described as having been of "a litigious and disordered" temperament so much so that following "some clashes" he had to flee from Milan to Venice.⁴⁷ As he grew older we find evidence of arrogance and contempt of civil and religious authority; an iconoclastic attitude of mind which aroused the animosity of his contemporaries by his disdainful criticism of the old masters including Raphael.⁴⁸ In this flouting of the traditional approach to art and of his far from devotional treatment of sacred subjects, he showed no concern for the sensibilities of others. Outstanding examples of this tendency to outrage the susceptibilities of people are, in my view, the complete nudity of the Christ Child with the Madonna and St. Anne; the depiction of the hindquarters of the bent workman shown in the *Crucifixion of St. Peter* – this part of human anatomy being brightly illuminated and thrust prominently at us as we enter the Cerasi Chapel of Santa Maria del Popolo at Rome. In the *Conversion of St. Paul*, in the same chapel, our attention is reveted by the huge mass of the posterior anatomy of the horse which is placed directly to our view and fills three-quarters of the canvas so much so that we have to seek for the saint to find him sprawled on the ground. Indeed an art critic has aptly remarked that the protagonist of the picture is not the figure of St. Paul but that of the horse or better still the hind parts and thigh of the "beast in its rising like a column".⁴⁹

Due to his explosive temperament, Caravaggio was intolerant of criticism; incapable of self-restraint and prone to resort to disparaging comments to belittle his rivals. He was subject to easy anger and to outbursts of aggression on the slightest provocation so much so that in a fit of extraordinary rage at some comments, which he considered unfavourable, concerning a painting of St. Lazarus which he had just completed, he directed his wrath against the painting itself and slashed it with his dagger.⁵⁰

He had an unstable work performance – painting fitfully and interrupting his artistic activity for weeks on end. In these non-

47. G.P. Bellori, *op. cit.*, pp. 202 & 214

48. R. Guttuso, *op. cit.*, p.5

H. Hibbard, *op. cit.*, pp. 120 & 124

W. Friedlaender, *Caravaggio Studies*, Princeton, New Jersey, 1974, p.xi.

50. H. Hibbard, *op. cit.*, pp. 382 & 387

productive phases he wandered from one tennis court to another with a rapier at his side "ready to argue and to fight". At other times he is described as having been "distracted and restless".

He was neglectful of his personal hygiene and "once he put on a suit of clothes he changed it only when it had fallen into rags". Many times he went to bed at night "fully dressed with his dagger, from which he never parted, at his side".⁵¹

He was immune to feelings of brotherly affections. In fact when his brother Battista, who was a priest, went to Rome on purpose to visit him, Caravaggio refused to have anything to do with him and did not even own that he had a brother at all; yet Battista was the only brother he had and was the one who had entered surety for him when Caravaggio, at a very young age, was apprenticed to the painter Peterzano to launch him on his artistic career.⁵²

Throughout his life Caravaggio was unable to tame his behaviour in response to reward or to punishment – even when the latter took the form of painful physical injury to his own body. On the whole, though in spite of his violent manners he found favour and protection with the highest and the mighty in society, "by princes and by popes",⁵² Caravaggio remains a lonely and embittered figure incapable of cultivating and retaining the friendship and sympathy offered by his more understanding contemporaries.

The personality of every one of us is made up of an inborn combination of compatible but sometimes also conflicting and contrasting elements which together determine our behaviour. Those of us who are endowed with a stable and mature personality succeed in harnessing its discordant facets into an orderly pattern so that our behaviour comes to conform, at least outwardly, with the dictates of our social and conventional milieu. Some of us, however, are born with an unstable personality structure that never reaches maturity and

51. *Ibidem*, pp. 373 & 386
S.S. Ludovici, *op. cit.*, pp. 28 & 69
G.P. Bellori, *op. cit.*, p. 24
52. S.S. Ludovici, *op. cit.*, pp. 31 & 82
W. Friedlaender, *p. cit.*, p. 118
53. H. Hibbard, *op. cit.*, p. 378 & 355
S.S. Ludovici, *op. cit.*, p. 116

consequently renders us incapable, throughout life, of achieving a compromise between our emotional drives and intellectual endowment and those restraining forces imposed upon us by social requirements, legislative measures and morality. The result of this absence of compromise – which is beyond the self-control of the individual – is manifested in deviant and maladjusted conduct. The layman is often led to regard such untoward behaviour and violation of conventional standards as deliberate and wilful wickedness for he finds it difficult to understand how innovative ideas, a fertile imagination and artistic skill can co-exist and be interwoven with defiant and aggressive behaviour in the same individual. This is why Caravaggio's life-style can be misunderstood and why he has been denounced as having been "a disseminator of scandals", "an evil genius" and even as demoniacally possessed.⁵⁴

On the contrary, this fusion of aberrant conduct with outstanding artistic productivity poses no quandary to the psychiatrist thanks to his familiarity, in clinical practice, with this combination of disordered behaviour with creative ability. In fact to the psychiatrist, Caravaggio's artistic creativeness with its accompanying matrix of turbulence and amorality fits neatly into the morbid psychiatric syndrome of the Psychopathic Personality or Personality Disorder and more specifically into that of the Aggressive-Creative Psychopath.

Who is the psychopath? He is an individual who from early childhood or adolescence and through out life shows an impairment of self-control which results in conduct that is at variance with the behaviour of the average person and that repeatedly manifests itself in anti-social and violent acts. He experiences no feeling of guilt and is incapable of self-criticism and therefore makes no efforts at self-correction. Although he shows no intellectual impairment, he fails to learn from experience, to respond to penal measures and to reform himself and hence he is a relapser in crime. He is amoral and, therefore, incapable of accepting, and conforming with, the ethical standards of the society in which he lives. The psychiatrist sees in such an individual a mentally disordered person whose life-pattern of rebellion springs from an inborn mental

54. M.L. Patrizi *op. cit.*, p. 163
H. Hibbard, *op. cit.*, p. 221
E. Sammut, *loc. cit.*, pp. 78 & 89.
E. Fabiani, *loc. cit.*, p. 161

abnormality for which he is not responsible and from which he cannot escape. This is the case of Caravaggio who like all psychopaths was trapped in the mould of his morbid personality from which no one and nothing could rescue him. Seen in this light of psychiatric understanding, Caravaggio wins our sympathy as a mentally sick man and also our forgiveness for when we view him to-day at a distance of almost 380 years from his death we feel that he has ultimately redeemed himself by enriching posterity with a unique artistic heritage.

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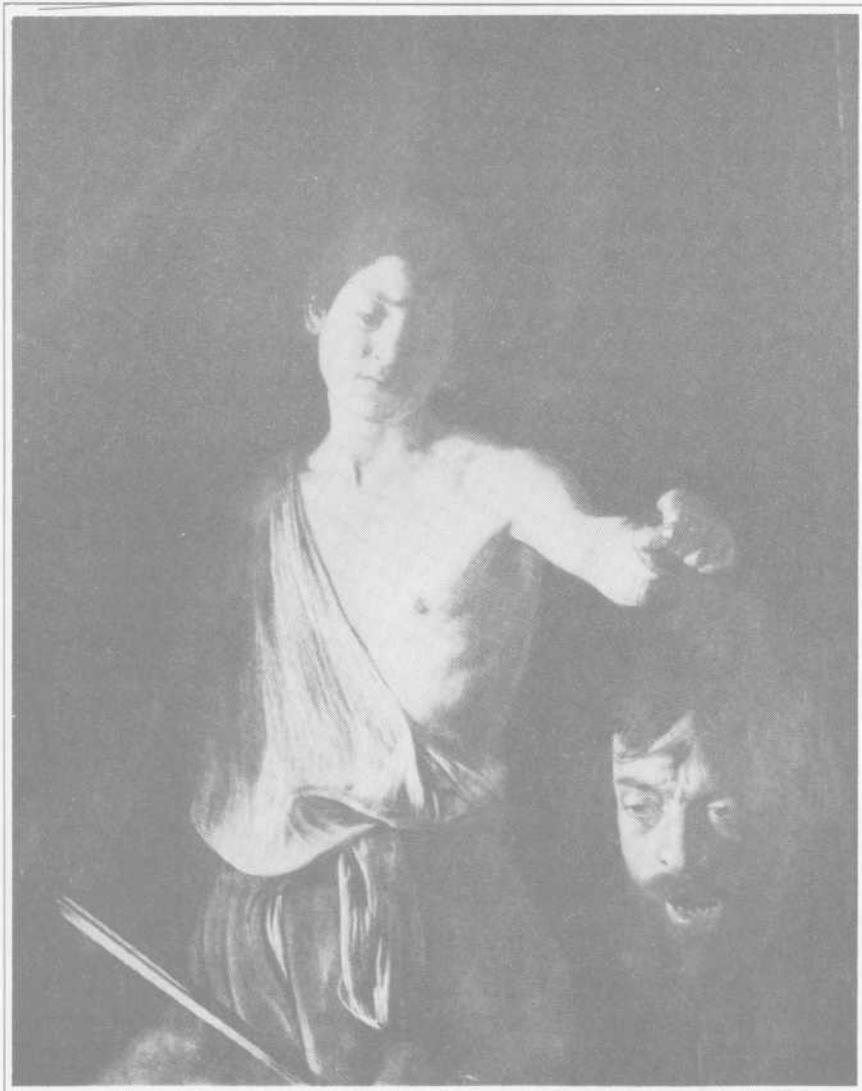
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1. Portrait of Caravaggio from an engraving in G.P. Bellori's *Le vite de' pittori, scultori ed architetti moderni*, Rome (1728 ed.)



2. Caravaggio *David with the Head of Goliath*, Galleria Borghese, Rome.