

Caravaggio: Reflections and Refractions. Lorenzo Pericolo and David M. Stone, eds. Visual Culture in Early Modernity. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014. xxi + 358 pp. \$129.95.

Do we need another book on Caravaggio? The coeditors of this anthology, finding “a certain tiredness and repetitiousness” (1) in recent publications on the artist, believe these essays raise the level of discourse while “epitomizing the vitality of North American baroque studies” (3). The project was inspired by sessions of the same name given at the 2009 RSA conference in Los Angeles, with ten of the nineteen participants and four nonparticipants sharing their thoughts in this collection. The book’s first chapter, David Stone’s “Caravaggio Betrayals: The Lost Painter and the ‘Great Swindle,’” makes a strong case for increased curatorial responsibility in light of the frequent inclusion of overly optimistic attributions in museum exhibitions. Blame for “the thorny, the confusing, and in some cases outrageous world of recent Caravaggio attributions” (26) is rightly assigned to those who write unforthcoming catalogue entries about works lent by importunate collectors and dealers.

Stone’s “Betrayals” calls for more stringent connoisseurship in the field of Caravaggio studies, and two essays in *Reflections and Refractions* address that need. Larry Keith’s

“Caravaggio’s Painting Technique: A Brief Survey Based on Paintings in the National Gallery, London,” reiterates the importance of laboratory analyses of the artist’s working methods, especially with respect to the use of brushed underdrawings and incisions made in wet primer. Keith further argues against “the rather lazy model of a simple linear development toward even looser and expressive brushwork” (40–41). A case study in connoisseurship is provided by Keith Christiansen in “Caravaggio’s *Portrait of Maffeo Barberini* in the Palazzo Corsini, Florence.” The portrait in question is a rather stiff likeness of the ebullient individual who was later to become Pope Urban VIII. Years ago, the picture descended into virtual oblivion after Roberto Longhi removed it from the canon of autograph works, and here Christiansen reaffirms the picture’s authenticity through rigorous visual and technical analysis along with a close reading of early inventories and biographies. One wishes he had gone further to explore why Caravaggio’s contribution to portraiture remains “nebulous,” with so few of the portraits attributed to him in early sources being identifiable today.

A second cluster of essays focuses on the interpretation of a single canvas or single theme. Erin Benay, in “Touching is Believing: Caravaggio’s *Doubting Thomas* in Counter-Reformatory Rome,” relates the painting to devotional practices connected to the cult of Saint Thomas and the veneration of the holy shroud in Turin. Frances Gage’s “Caravaggio’s *Death of the Virgin*, Giulio Mancini, and the Madonna Blasphemed” explores the nature of the response that led to the altarpiece’s rejection by the clergy of S. Maria della Scala. Stephen Ostrow’s “Caravaggio’s Angels” examines how the realist painter reified the divine in his sacred work. In complementary essays, Catherine Puglisi’s “Talking Pictures: Sound in Caravaggio’s Art” addresses the auditory overlay present in many of the works, while Jonathan Unglaub’s “Caravaggio and the ‘Truth in Painting’” underlines the ambivalence of certain gestures in his narrative compositions. Finally, Philip Sohm’s “Caravaggio the Barbarian” discusses his *fortuna critica* in terms of the various myths attached to his name.

Less pertinent, given the title of the volume, are four essays that explore quite different matters. Richard Spear’s “The Bottom Line of Caravaggesque Painting” is about the prices paid for works by followers; Elizabeth Cropper’s “Galileo Galilei and Artemisia Gentileschi” never mentions Caravaggio by name; and H. Perry Chapman’s “Rembrandt and Caravaggio” is primarily about Rembrandt. More relevant for those with eyes focused on Caravaggio himself is Gail Fiegenbaum’s comparative study, “Cardsharps and Fortune Tellers by Caravaggio and La Tour.”

The volume ends with the thoughtful chapter by the coeditor Lorenzo Pericolo, “Interpreting Caravaggio in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century: Between Galileo and Heidegger, Giordano Bruno and Laplanche.” Examining the work of four modern art historians — Argan, Bologna, Bourdon, and Bersani/Dutoit — the author stresses how their creation of Caravaggio’s identity has been shaped by methodological forerunners in other disciplines. It is easy to imagine many of the essays in this volume providing stimulating reading for undergraduate or graduate seminars on Caravaggio. Given the book’s relatively high price and wide range of topics, art libraries

and specialists will want it on their shelves but teaching faculty may prefer to pay copyright fees for reproducing only those essays deemed pertinent to their course objectives.

JOHN VARRIANO, *Mount Holyoke College*