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Bartolomeo Cavarozzi
The Sorrows of Aminta

BARTOLOMEO CAVAROZZI

(Viterbo 1587 - 1625 Rome)

THE SORROWS OF AMINTA

Oil on canvas

82.5 x 106.5 cm.; 32 1/2 x 41 7/8 in.

Provenance

With Julius H. Weitzner, New York, by 1955;

Naples, Piedimonte collection;

With Galleria Paolo Saponi, Spoleto;

With Matthiesen Gallery, London, by 1989;

Private collection.

Literature

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A. Bayer in *A Caravaggio Rediscovered: The Lute Player*, exh. cat., edited by K. Christiansen, New York, 1990, pp. 68-69.

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E. Bologna, *L'incredulità del Caravaggio e l'esperienza delle «cose naturali»*, Torino 1992, pp. 305-306.

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S. Benedetti in *Darkness & Light. Caravaggio & His World*, exh. cat. Melbourne 2003, pp. 122-123.

S. Benedetti, *Alcune osservazioni sugli influssi italiani agli inizi della pittura naturalistica in Spagna*, in "Caravaggio e l'Europa: il movimento Caravaggesco internazionale da Caravaggio a Mattia Preti", exh. cat. edited by L. Spezzaferro and B. Calzavara Milano, 2005, p. 67-68

A. Cottino, *L'incantesimo dei sensi. Una collezione di nature morte del Seicento per il Museo Accorsi*, exh. cat. Torino 2005, pp. 38-43.

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D. Sanguineti, "Bartolomeo Cavarozzi e le 'Sacre Famiglie': tracce per una congiuntura caravaggesca tra Genova e la Spagna", in *Bartolomeo Cavarozzi. 'Sacre Famiglie' a confronto*, exh. cat. Milan 2005, pp. 15, 18, 22, 25, 33.

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Exhibitions

Rome, Musei Capitolini, *La natura morta al tempo di Caravaggio*, 15 December 1995 - 14 April 1996.

Munich, Kunsthalle der Hypo-Kulturstiftung; and Florence, Palazzo Strozzi, *Natura morta italiana tra Cinquecento e Settecento / La natura morta italiana: da Caravaggio al Settecento*, 6 December 2002 - 23 February 2003 (Munich); 26 June - 12 October 2003 (Florence).

Sydney, Art Gallery of New South Wales; and Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria, *Darkness & Light: Caravaggio and His World*, 29 November 2003 - 22 February 2004 (Sydney); 11 March - 30 May 2004 (Melbourne).

Rome, Accademia di Francia a Roma Villa Medici, *I bassifondi del Barocco. La Roma del vizio e della miseria*, 7 October 2014 - 18 January 2015.

Verona, Palazzo della Gran Guardia, *Arte e Vino*, 11 April - 16 August 2015.

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The present painting is one of the most significant and refined versions of Bartolomeo Cavarozzi's *Lamento di Aminta*, a composition central to the reconstruction of the artist's Roman Caravaggesque phase.¹ In his 2015 catalogue raisonné on the artist, Giovanni Papi dated the present canvas (ex Piedimonte collection) to the latter part of the second decade of the seventeenth century and accepted it as an unequivocally autograph, mature rendition of the subject.²

The scene represents two youths absorbed in grief and recollection. The title derives from the open score laid on the table, placed between bunches of grapes and a violin seen in foreshortening.³ The music has been identified as *Dolor che sì mi crucii*, a madrigal from Torquato Tasso's pastoral drama *Aminta*, based on the Ovidian myth of Piramo e Tisbe, set to music by Erasmo Marotta and published in Venice in 1600. Cavarozzi's image thus hinges on an exact literary and musical reference: far from being just a generic, learned prop, the painted score is the actual key to the subject. The episode evokes the emotional core of the pastoral narrative, in which the shepherd Aminta, believing his beloved nymph Silvia to be dead, is driven to despair. The figures' melancholic concentration conveys the psychological register of lament.

Scholars have not agreed on the identity, and even the sex, of the second figure: it has been read as Dafne, Silvia's companion, or alternatively as Tirsi, Aminta's friend. That uncertainty does not diminish the composition's force. What matters is the interplay between the two half-length figures and the table still life, through which Cavarozzi transforms a literary lament into a meditation on loss and memory. One youth plays the flute; the other, having set down the violin, rests a pensive face upon a tambourine. Similar physiognomies, characterised by the distinctive disposition of the eyes, can be observed in other paintings by Cavarozzi, as his David and the Isaac in the *Sacrifice* (figs 1-2). Another relevant point of reference at this stage of the artist's career is Orazio Gentileschi, whose influence can be detected in the smooth profiles, flawless, almost stylised shapes and splendid rendition of textiles - see for example Orazio's graceful *Lute Player* now at the National Gallery in Washington (fig. 3).

¹ The other known four versions are: Former Perolari collection, Bergamo (current location unknown), oil on canvas, 88 × 113 cm. Published by G. Papi, *Bartolomeo Cavarozzi* (Soncino, 2015), p. 198, no. 14; pp. 112–113, pls. XVI–XVII. Paris, Musée du Louvre (inv. RF 1937 6), oil on canvas, 100 × 120 cm; donated by Paul Jamot in 1937. Published in Papi 2015 (no. 15) and discussed by Papi (2023), where autography is considered with reservation. With Galerie Canesso, oil on canvas, 78 × 102.5 cm. Provenance includes a possible identification with a work in the collection of Don Juan de Tassis y Peralta, Count of Villamediana (1615). Philadelphia Museum of Art (inv. 2010-228-1), oil on canvas, 99.6 × 75.6 cm. Published by Papi (2015, fig. 15) as a copy after Cavarozzi.

² G. Papi, *Bartolomeo Cavarozzi*, Soncino 2015, pp. 22-23.

³ See F. Trinchieri Camiz, "Due quadri musicali di scuola caravaggesca", in *Musica e Filologia. Quaderno della Società Letteraria*, 1, 1983, pp. 100-103.

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The painting is an important document of early Roman Caravaggism. Its allegiance to the new current appears in the strong *chiaroscuro*, in the compositional balance, and in the choice of a subject aligned with the Caravaggesque repertoire of musicians and emotionally charged half-length figures. At the same time, the work is fully personal in conception. The still life of grapes and instruments is not incidental ornament. This element isn't required by the narrative in any obvious way; its inclusion is justified pictorially, as a display of Cavarozzi's independent gifts as a painter of still life, built on a deep assimilation of Caravaggio's lesson - one might think of the *Canestra* at the Ambrosiana (inv. no. 151) or the Uffizi's *Bacchus* (inv. no. 5312). Such display of pictorial prowess in the depiction of still lifes had been already put in practice in his *Supper in Emmaus*, today at the Getty Museum (fig. 4). The musical elements find a close comparable in the *Saint Cecilia*, now in a private collection. In this respect the *Lamento di Aminta* is a touchstone for assessing his place among Roman painters of still lifes active in the second and third decades of the century.

The present version is especially distinguished by the treatment of surfaces and by its softened luminism when compared with the earlier canvases. The white shirt, articulated across light and shadow, is handled with a delicacy characteristic of Cavarozzi: the folds are modelled with palpable structure and a vibratory paint surface, distinct from the harder illusionism often associated with Cecco del Caravaggio. In our painting, this passage is further nuanced by a soft *chiaroscuro* orchestration and fold patterning that suggest an openness to Guido Reni's style.⁴ The grape leaves, described as more harshly backlit in previous versions, are here lit with greater suppleness; the grapes themselves are rendered with exceptional truthfulness and a smoother, more atmospheric touch. These differences support the assessment of the present canvas as a later and more resolved redaction, characterised by a softer and more graceful lyricism.

Bartolomeo Cavarozzi was born in Viterbo on 15 February 1587 and moved to Rome at about thirteen. He trained first with the Viterbese Tarquinio Ligustri and then with Cristoforo Roncalli, called Pomarancio. Through Roncalli he entered the orbit of the Crescenzi family, whose patronage proved decisive. Not only would Cavarozzi study in the academy of art established by Giovanni Battista Crescenzi (1577–1635) but he eventually assumed the name of Bartolomeo del Crescenzi.

Giovanni Baglione, who knew him personally, records the artist's turn away from Pomarancio's *maniera* by around 1610 towards painting from life with great diligence, placing him among the earliest Roman Caravaggisti. Yet Cavarozzi developed his

⁴ See Papi 2015, p. 22.

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own distinctive style. He avoided the overtly dramatic presentation of many of Caravaggio's followers, instead favouring more tender, restrained figures.

Little is known of Cavarozzi's *œuvre* during the first half of the 1610s but by around 1615 he had fully adopted Caravaggio's manner. His best pictures from this period include: *The Disputation of Saint Stephen*, in a private collection, which fuses the influences of Caravaggio and Pomarancio; the already mentioned *Supper at Emmaus*, in the Getty, Los Angeles; and a *Saint Jerome with two angels* from 1617, in the Pitti Gallery, Florence.⁵

In 1617 Cavarozzi travelled to Spain, with a stop in Genoa, in the retinue of Crescenzi, appointed by Philip III as superintendent of the royal works. Early sources attest to his activity in Spain; among the best-known works of this phase is the *Holy Family with Saint Catherine* in the Prado, Madrid (inv. no. P000146). The precise date of his return to Rome is uncertain, but by the early 1620s he was again in the city where he died on 21 September 1625, his career cut short at an age when, as Baglione lamented, his gifts promised much more.⁶

⁵ See D. Sanguineti, *Bartolomeo Cavarozzi, 'Sacre Famiglie' a confronto*, exh. cat., Turin 2005, pp. 16-17.

⁶ G. Baglione, *Le Vite de' Pittori, Scultori et Architetti...*, Rome 1642, p. 287.

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Fig. 1. Bartolomeo Cavarozzi, *David with the Head of Goliath* and detail, c. 1613, oil on canvas, 124.5 x 90.5 cm. With Galerie Giovanni Sarti, Paris.



Fig. 2. Bartolomeo Cavarozzi, *Sacrifice of Isaac*, c. 1617, oil on canvas, 116 x 173 cm. Princeton University Museum.

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Fig. 3. Orazio Gentileschi, *The Lute Player*, c. 1612-1620, 143.5 x 129 cm, oil on canvas. Washington, National Gallery of Art.



Fig. 4. Bartolomeo Cavarozzi, *The Supper at Emmaus*, c. 1615-1625, oil on canvas, 139.7 x 194.9 cm. Los Angeles, Getty Museum.

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COLNAGHI *London*

26 BURY STREET, LONDON SW1Y 6AL
UNITED KINGDOM

MONDAY TO FRIDAY
10AM-6PM

+44 (0)20 7491 7408

contact@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI *Madrid*

CALLE GENERAL CASTAÑOS 9
PLANTA BAJA, DCHA.
28004 MADRID

MONDAY TO FRIDAY
BY APPOINTMENT

spain@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI *New York*

23 EAST 67TH STREET, FOURTH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10065
USA

MONDAY TO FRIDAY
10AM-6PM

+1 (917) 388-3825

newyork@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI *Brussels*

RUE JACQUES JORDAENS 30
1000 BRUXELLES
BELGIUM

BY APPOINTMENT ONLY

brussels@colnaghi.com