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THE TRUTH OF NIGHT IN THE ITALIAN BAROQUE

THESIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Art History and Visual Studies
in the School of Art and Visual Studies
at the University of Kentucky

By

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Asheboro, North Carolina

Chair: Dr. Robert Jensen, Professor of Art History and Visual Studies

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

THE TRUTH OF NIGHT IN THE ITALIAN BAROQUE

In the sixteenth century, the nocturne genre developed in Italian art introducing the idea of a scene depicted in the darkness of night. This concept of darkness paired with intense light was adopted by Caravaggio in the late sixteenth century and popularized by himself and his followers. The seemingly sudden shift towards darkness and night is puzzling when viewed as individual occurrences in artists' works. As an entire genre, the night scene bears cultural implications that indicate the level of influence culture and society have over artists and patrons. The rising popularity of the theater and the tension between Protestantism and Catholicism intersected to create a changing view on the perception of darkness and light. This merging of cultural phenomena affected Caravaggio and his contemporaries, prompting them to develop the nocturne genre to meet the growing demands for darker images.

KEYWORDS: Nocturne, Caravaggio, Theater, Protestantism, Catholicism
Darkness

THE TRUTH OF NIGHT IN THE ITALIAN BAROQUE

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I. Introduction

> In view of the present sensitivity to the formal, expressive, and psychological values of art, it can be stated that we realize better than the early theorists the changes that occurred in the pictorial language about 1600. The most essential innovation in it can be defined as the 'discovery of darkness', or the 'discovery of night'. This is naturally connected with the way of using light.[1]

In their article on tenebrism in seventeenth century paintings, Maria Rzepinska and Krysyna Malcharek, argue that the psychological value of art during the Baroque period was the innovation of darkness.[2] Analyses of art from the seventeenth century, particularly paintings, have frequently addressed this use of tenebrism and the dramatic, emotional contrast between light and darkness. These analyses have approached the treatment of light and darkness in paintings as a stylistic device and attributed the development of such dramatic chiaroscuro to the Italian artist Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio. Out of this growing desire for darkness and concentrated light, the nocturne, night scene, genre developed in the sixteenth century and was popularized in the seventeenth century due to Caravaggio's influence on art. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Caravaggio depicted scenes using light and darkness with increasing intensity and drama. This usage of light allowed Caravaggio to focus on the characters in the scene, and to highlight the climactic moment in his narrative. While Caravaggio

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[1] Maria Rzepinska and Krystyna Malcharek, "Tenebrism in Baroque Painting and Its Ideological Background," *Artibus et Historiae*, 7, 13, (1986), 92.
[2] Ibid.

influenced the development of seventeenth century art with his emotionally theatrical and tragic nocturnes, the discovery of the dramatic effects of darkness in painting occurred prior to Caravaggio's work and thus influenced his own style.

The development of the nocturne in Italian art occurred throughout the sixteenth century, popularized by Caravaggio and his 'Caravaggesque' style. Art historians have presented multiple theories regarding this attraction to darkness in late Renaissance and Baroque art. Jaroslav Pelikan, a medieval religious scholar, analyzed the appearance of light and dark imagery in the writings of Martin Luther, indicating the prevalence of these concepts in theological thought of the sixteenth century.[3] Ellis Waterhouse furthers this idea, citing the impact of the Counter-Reformation on the presence of intense light and darkness, and profound emotion in Caravaggio's works.[4] These prevailing ideas indicate that this attraction to dramatic, theatrical light and darkness in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries as a result of cultural influences. This cultural effect altered the idea of perception of light and darkness within the context of night.

When discussing Caravaggio and his predecessors that dealt with nocturnes, the literature neglects to analyze the larger concept of this tendency towards darkness. Indeed, in the older literature it was common to accuse Caravaggio and his many imitators of hiding their artistic flaws in the darkness of their paintings. This line of thinking sees the darkness as a negative that often seemingly

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[3] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Light of the World: A Basic Image in Early Christian Thought,* (New York: Harper, 1962), 11-13.
[4] Ellis Waterhouse, "Some Painters and the Counter-Reformation before 1600," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society,* Fifth Series, 22. (1972), 104.

overwhelms the scenes, disguising many of the figures and other attributes of the paintings.

Despite the growing doctrinal tension between Protestants and Catholics in the sixteenth century, Caravaggio and his fellow artists chose popular biblical narratives, such as Judith slaying Holofernes, bathing the figures in the darkness of night. This indicates closer adherence to Biblical text than the artists of the Renaissance, but also a changing cultural desire for greater darkness. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the influence of culture, specifically theatrical and Christian culture, as well as the artistic precedents that led to the development of Caravaggio's biblical nocturnes.

II. The discovery of night in 16th and 17th century Italian art

When analyzing the concept of lighting in Caravaggio's nocturnes in sixteenth and seventeenth century and the revealing of humanity through this light, the presence of darkness, the nocturne itself in Italian art must be considered first. The intense, experimental lighting techniques utilized by Caravaggio in the majority of his later works coincide with his depiction of nocturnes and the development of the nocturne genre in Italian art. The majority of Caravaggio's contemporaries and followers, such as Adam Elsheimer and Artemisia Gentileschi, portrayed their own nocturnes based on the influence of Caravaggio's works. The nocturne genre evolved through the sixteenth century, gaining prominence with the influence of Caravaggio, evolving further in the seventeenth century. While theological and philosophical changes during the Renaissance greatly affected the appearance of painting, influencing the work of Caravaggio and his contemporaries, developments in technology at the end of the fifteenth century, particularly in candle-making, also shaped the appearance of the nocturne genre in the sixteenth century.

The nocturne can be classified as a painting portrayed in darkness, either a night landscape or a darkened interior. By contrast, for most of the Renaissance the setting of paintings revolved around well-lit interiors, or a daytime landscape backgrounds. This constant presence of light in Renaissance painting allowed artists to fully explore line and color within their paintings, as well as the growing desire to accurately depict the human form. Depending on the subject matter, artists would occasionally ignore the setting of the narrative to better portray the figures in the scene and to display their artistic style.

This gradual shift towards dark settings in the sixteenth century painting can be found in the contrast between the portrayals of *Judith with the head of Holofernes* by Andrea Mantegna and Antonio Allegri da Correggio's treatment of the same subject. Although only painted a few decades apart, Correggio's *Judith with the head of Holofernes* (fig. 1) is much darker; he explicitly portrays candlelight as the source for illumination for his figures, setting his scene at night in a dark tent. By contrast, Mantegna's *Judith* (fig. 2) is lit with muted lighting, defining Judith's form and the environment of the scene. At this stage in Italian Renaissance art, nocturnes were uncommon and other artists' treatment of the Judith and Holofernes theme depicted the Old Testament heroine in ambiguous lighting rather than the nightscape that her narrative describes. The darkness clearly evident in Correggio's image significantly anticipates the later interest in dramatic lighting effects that develop later in the century.

This turn toward the nocturnal image in Italian art can be explained in part by the revival of a Greco-Roman tradition known through classical texts. In the first century A.D., Pliny the Elder described the reflection of flames on human skin as a unique achievement of Antiphilos, a well-known painter from antiquity.[5] Although the paintings to which Pliny refers no longer exist, descriptions of them became part of Renaissance humanist discourse. Among Pliny's descriptions of Antiphilos' work is the motif of a boy blowing on a firebrand. This motif was reintroduced into Italian artistic tradition, following the revival of Greco-Roman art during the fifteenth century and lays behind the growing use of chiaroscuro and tenebrism in the

[5] Paolo Berdini, *The Religious art of Jacopo Bassano*, (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 103.

sixteenth century. Beyond the classical precedent, the growing prominence of nocturnal scenery in part may have been simply a matter of artists looking for innovative treatments for popular scenes and new subject matter. For example, the northern Italian artist, Jacopo Bassano began to specialize in moonlit landscapes, fire-lit scenes, and darkened interiors.[6] Rather than limiting themselves to the firebrand, artists started to employ torches, lanterns and candles to create the same or a similar effect of cast light on human faces.

Caravaggio's own northern Italian training in Milan with Simone Peterzano, a student of Titian, indicates that he would have been exposed, or at least aware of the work by the Bassano family workshop. Bassano's workshop and his followers were among the most prolific artists in Venice in the late sixteenth century, and his works were well known in northern Italy. However, Caravaggio did not utilize the boy with firebrand motif, or fire lit scenes for his nocturnes as Bassano did, choosing instead to use a more ambiguous light source, that is to say, he did not paint the light source but rather placed the light off scene, usually but not exclusively entering from the left side of the painting and more in front than behind his figures.

The innovations of Bassano and his workshop nonetheless do not fully explain why nocturnal images became popularized in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Several decades prior to Bassano's notable experiments with firelight Correggio painted the ethereal nightscape in his *Judith and her Maidservant,* referred to above. Similarly to the firebrand motif, the candle illuminates the figures

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[6] Sergio Benedetti, "Darkness and Light," from Darkness and Light, Caravaggio and his world, by Edmund Capon and John T. Spike, (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2003), 30.

in the paintings with a warm, but flickering light. On the right side of the scene, Judith's maidservant, Abra, holds the candle with her left hand as she struggles to hold the bag steady, accepting the head of Holofernes from her mistress. The candle highlights the left side of Abra's face and Judith's profile as she calmly lowers Holofernes' severed head into the waiting bag. The calm expression on Judith and the maidservant's faces belie the drama of the scene, and the evenness of the light playing across the women's faces does not reflect the flickering of the candle.

Giorgio Vasari notes that Correggio was influenced through his career by more mainstream and influential artists, such as Leonardo and Mantegna. He noticed that similarly to Mantegna, Correggio liked to attempt difficult artistic motifs and challenges.[7] Vasari's remarks indicate that Correggio's motivations for portraying *Judith and her Maidservant* as a nocturne was to challenge himself artistically, measured against these older masters, by portraying a scene within a low light spectrum. The portrayal of Correggio's *Judith and her Maidservant* as a nocturne also follows Vasari's description of Correggio's character as an artist. V Vasari states that Correggio laboriously devoted himself to his art in order to support his family, referring to it as an immense burden.[8] His zeal drove him to further study, focusing his efforts on realism of the human figure as well as accurate depictions of emotions and narratives. Correggio's fervor for artistic perfection and exploration is what prompted his choice in depicting his Judith as a nocturne, breaking established fifteenth century artistic traditions. Correggio's *Judith* reflects

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[7] Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Most Eminent Painters,* (New York: The Heritage Press, 1967), 359-360.
[8] Ibid, 355.

his and his contemporaries' usage of sfumato and chiaroscuro, particularly in the use of modeling of the human figure. Both techniques were developed and used by sixteenth century artists as ways of maximizing the effect of light and atmosphere in paintings.

The development of these techniques and the shift towards darkness is linked to Italian humanism and the greater focus on humanity and realism in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The lighting and shading developed to accurately reflect the contours of the human face, the softness and hardness, was then used to accurately depict the environment, giving definition and temporal distinction to images.

Correggio's *Judith and her Maidservant* is arguably the first nocturne in sixteenth century Italian art, and it is the first use of a candle to illuminate a darkened scene. This is not surprising as prior to the sixteenth century the use of candles was limited to the church, royal courts and houses of the extremely wealthy.[9] Artists would not have been able to access candles in order to study their illuminative properties for long periods of time. However, towards the end of the fifteenth century, French nobleman Sieur de Brez developed the mass production of candles utilizing molds.[10] This allowed for candles to be more accessible for the common person, and is what influenced Correggio's choice in light source. A drip of wax is slowly making its way down the side of the candle away from the hot flame towards Abra's unprotected hand. This detail obviously shows familiarity with how

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[9] Bernard Neary, The Candle Factory: Five Hundred Years of Rathborne's, Master Chandlers, (1998: The Lilliput Press, Dublin), 14.
[10] Ibid., 14.

candles behave. On the other hand, the fact that the maid is holding the candle without attending to the potential of being burned by the melting wax suggests that Correggio was more concerned with artistry than with accuracy. The intense light cast on the two figures' forms also suggests that Correggio was concerned more with the idea of the candle illuminating the scene rather than the actuality of the candle's properties.

Despite Correggio's popularity and the growing usage of sfumato and chiaroscuro to accurately portray the three dimensional quality of people and the play of light optics, the depiction of figures at night or in darkened spaces did not become prominent until the latter half of the sixteenth century. This indicates that the movement behind Jacopo Bassano and his contemporaries' depictions of nocturnes was greater than the motivation behind Correggio's nocturnal depiction of *Judith and her Maidservant*. The differentiation is due to the difference in society and culture from the early sixteenth century and late sixteenth century. The latter half of the sixteenth century was rife with political and religious turmoil due to the Protestant Reformation and the subsequent Catholic revival as part of the Counter-Reformation. Correggio's nocturne is viewed as an isolated incident in this case, with the majority of the innovation of the nocturne genre of the sixteenth century occurring in the works of Bassano and his contemporaries.

In his analysis of the Bassano workshop's depiction of nocturnes, Paolo Berdini argues that Bassano's initial interest with religious nightscapes was part of the growing tradition in northern Italian art that attempted to strictly adhere to the

biblical narrative, to bring, as it were, the Bible stories alive.[11] This tradition rose not only out of the religious fervor of the Counter-Reformation, but also the focus of Italian humanists on the importance of humans and human achievements. The subject matter of Bassano's religious nocturnes ranged from popular themes from the Renaissance, such as the nativity or the annunciation of the shepherds, to topics increasing in popularity, like the workshop's painting *Christ Praying in the Garden of Gethsemane* (fig. 3). Bassano and his workshop were particularly interested in portraying scenes from the paschal night. Berdini believes that Bassano was concerned with visualizing the spiritual and emotional darkness of the nights leading to Easter for liturgical purposes.[12] While Bassano started portraying nocturnes as a way to adhere to the biblical narrative, his desire for liturgical imagining of the text required Bassano to darken the scene and heighten the emotion of the figures in order to better connect the audience to the scene.

Vasari took little interest in the work of Bassano, focusing instead on his fellow Venetian artists Giorgione and Titian. Keith Christiansen states that Bassano is recognized today for his original style and contribution to sixteenth century Italian art, particularly the development of the nocturne.[13] Berdini in fact describes Bassano's works as a natural progression of the Renaissance nocturne, the confrontation between the human form and light, but with more emphasis placed on

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[11] Berdini, *The Religious art of Jacopo Bassano*, 106.
[12] Ibid., 107.
[13] Keith Christiansen, "Jacopo dal Ponte, called Bassano (ca. 1510–1592)". In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000. accessed April 18 2015. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/bass/hd_bass.htm (March 2009).

the contrast between light and darkness.[14] These qualities of his art are especially present in Jacopo Bassano's *Deposition of Christ* (fig. 4), which depicts a single candle in the center of the picture that serves to illuminate the scene. Titian, by comparison, in portraying the same subject, *Deposition of Christ in the Tomb* (fig. 5), just a decade earlier, deploys the standard generalized source of illumination, set outside and slightly in front of the scene depicted. His light is diffused and color dominates over tonal contrasts, as if the garden tomb is being visited during daylight as the figures lower Christ into the stone coffin. The emotional impact of this painting differs greatly from Bassano's, whose nocturne utilizes the darkness of the scene and the dim lighting of the candle to emphasize the emotional content of the figures surrounding Christ's body. Similar to what we discovered in the comparison between Mantegna's and Correggio's treatment of the *Judith*, Titian and Bassano's depictions demonstrate another visual shift towards dark/light effect. Bassano's emphasis on darkness not reached by the candlelight represents an attempt to tell the biblical narrative as found in the Bible, rather than through conventional lighting effects. According to St. Luke's gospel, during Christ's crucifixion and death, the sky darkened towards mid-afternoon and the sun no longer shone as Jesus breathed his last.[15] The removal of Christ's body and his burial occurred a short time later in the hours of twilight just before nightfall due to Jewish regulations of Sabbath law[16]. While not a true night scene, Bassano portrayal of the

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[14] Berdini, *The Religious art of Jacopo Bassano*, 111.
[15] Luke 23:44-45.
[16] John 19:31.

scene stays true to Luke's dark description as the cross and the ladder used to take down Christ's body is visible in the hazy background.

Titian's wispy depiction of Christ's burial in a partially lit garden focuses on the interaction of the figures in the scene while Bassano de-emphasizes the figures in the dim light of the candle. Bassano is primarily concerned with the emotional content of the painting, and the grief portrayed by the people present. He thereby also achieves a heightened emotional content that Titian's picture lacks, although both scenes place emphasis on the body of Christ by placing it in the composition as the focal point. Luke does not describe the emotions of the followers of Christ after the crucifixion, but describes the women prior to his death as mourning and wailing for his impending fate.[17] Bassano's depiction of Mary grieving over Christ's body is a popular Renaissance and Baroque theme, showing the cost of humanity's sin and a mother's grief at the price paid but Bassano brings a new intensity to the subject. The focus on emotionally wrought narratives for Bassano's nightscapes reflects a shift in artistic style as well as a growing desire for scenes of darker nature and subject matter.

Bassano and his contemporaries' development of the nocturne genre and the presence of more emotion and drama in the dark scenes forges a link between late fifteenth and early sixteenth century "nocturnes" and the dramatic, theatrical nocturnes of Caravaggio and his contemporaries in the early seventeenth century. Caravaggio's works maintain an extreme level of contrast and theatricality not present in Bassano's paintings. Seventeenth century biographer Giovan Bellori,

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[17] Luke 23: 27.

picking up where Vasari left off, records that Caravaggio studied art and color both in Milan and Venice before moving to Rome some time prior to 1600.[18] Bellori infers that Caravaggio fled to Venice to escape a murder charge in Milan, though contemporary art historians also imply that he was taken to Venice by his teacher, Simone Peterzano, a pupil of Titian.[19] This supports Benedetti's belief that Caravaggio was influenced by the Bassano family and other Venetian artists in his pursuits of experimental lighting techniques and the nocturnal narrative.[20] Like Bassano, Caravaggio chose emotionally wrought, and often violent Biblical subjects for his nocturnes, which were popular subjects in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

Within Caravaggio's oeuvre, biblical nocturnes represent a small percentage. However, the dramatic contrast and composition of these narratives influenced many of his contemporaries and succeeding artists in the seventeenth century to depict their own nocturnes, usually portrayed as candlelit scenes. Due to his familiarity with Venetian experimental lighting practices of Bassano and his contemporaries, Caravaggio developed his own intense lighting style, increasing the contrast to heighten the emotion and drama of the scenes. The study of nocturnes and candlelit scenes of his contemporaries and followers reveals the influence of Caravaggio on his fellow artists. However, the study of Caravaggio's own nocturnes exposes the influence of contemporary culture and beliefs, as well as the artist's own thoughts, emotions and personal demons.

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[18] Giovan Pietro Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 179.
[19] Stefano Zuffi, *Caravaggio,* (New York: Prestel, 2012), 12.
[20] Benedetti, "Darkness and Light," 30.

Caravaggio's nocturnes, specifically *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (1598), *The Taking of Christ* (1602) and *The Denial of Peter* (1610), provide visual insight into the stylistic motivations of Caravaggio's later works. The large amount of darkness present in these paintings shadows the majority of the image, leaving only the figures and a few environmental factors in focus. This is a compositional device in order to focus the attention on the figures, as well as to enhance the theatricality of the painting with the spotlight illuminating the 'players' in the scene. The alteration in style for his later work occurred as a result of the influence of late sixteenth and early seventeenth century theatrical practices. These influences on Caravaggio and other artists of this period resulted in a change in philosophical thought towards the concept of light. As a result, darkness became more pronounced, both emphasizing and diminishing the presence of light in Caravaggio's works.

The presence of profound darkness in paintings during this period matured with the later works of Caravaggio. When describing Caravaggio's depiction of *Martha and Mary* (fig. 6), Peter Robb mentions the darkness of the background and on Martha's face, noting especially the shadows created by the light from an out-of-scene window that is reflected in the mirror by Mary's left hand.[21] This painting embodies the transition towards darkness in Caravaggio's career as it directly precedes his first nocturne, *Judith Beheading Holofernes.* Robb poetically refers to Martha representing the future of Caravaggio's art, since her figure is bathed in darkness, anticipating the darkened paintings that comprise the last ten years of his

[21] Peter Robb, *M The Man who became Caravaggio,* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, LLC., 1998). 94.

life, in which the artist placed his models in a dimly lit room with only a high window on the left to provide light for the scene.[22]

Caravaggio continued the experimental lighting traditions of the northern Italian artists, but in an extremely dramatized style. His darkened scenes differed greatly from the nightscapes produced by Bassano and his contemporaries. Rather than sprawling darkened landscapes and scenes lit by candlelight or the divine light of God, Caravaggio's nocturnes display shallow, unadorned spaces similar in appearance to his studio. This allowed for the emphasis to be placed on the figures acting in the scene, and focus on the emotional and dramatic quality of the paintings.

A few years before the turn of the seventeenth century, banker and arts patron Ottavio Costa commissioned Caravaggio to paint *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (fig. 7), a popular subject matter of the Renaissance period.[23] The room and figures in the scene are bathed in darkness with only a light shining from the upper left side illuminating the figures. Caravaggio depicted the exact moment of triumph for Judith and tragedy for Holofernes as the heroine cuts into his neck using his own sword. Inspired by contemporary, violent executions and the expressive, passionate nature of his model, courtesan Fillide Melandroni, Caravaggio created a depiction of Judith capitalizing on the violence of the story and the emotional betrayal of a lover.[24] The darkness surrounding the figures increases the emotional quality of the scene and the horrific nature of the violence displayed by the young woman.

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[22] Ibid., 95.
[23] Zuffi, *Caravaggio,* 64.
[24] Robb, *M The Man Who Became Caravaggio,* 96.

The presence of copious amounts of darkness in this scene reflects the northern Italian style of narrative accuracy, present in Bassano's works, but also a dramatic quality otherwise unaccounted for in Caravaggio's contemporaries. While Caravaggio's use of intense, experimental lighting in *Judith Beheading Holofernes* acts as a spotlight on the figures in the painting, it also draws attention to the darkness filling the void where the light is not focused. Influenced by the violence and turmoil of his time, Caravaggio's darkness surrounds and overwhelms the figures, blanketing them and disguising the space around them. It clings to Judith's figure and face, swallowing Holoferenes and the maidservant's bodies.

Although the use of darkness in this scene follows the narrative of the nocturnal story of Judith and Holofernes, it also heightens the drama of the scene by emphasizing the 'darkness' of Judith's actions. Caravaggio presents Judith not as a victorious, virtuous heroine like his predecessors, Mantegna and Correggio, but as a determined, yet conflicted young woman, fully aware of the evilness and deceit of her actions. This humanizes her character. Rather than depicting her as a sainted, holy figure, Caravaggio makes Judith more relatable with the viewer. The darkness then becomes a representation of the 'darkness,' or sinfulness, of her actions.

This depiction and manipulation of darkness as more than just a staging or narrative device is further expanded and embellished in Caravaggio's later nocturnes *The Taking of Christ* (fig. 8) and *The Denial of Peter* (fig. 9). Rather than emphasizing the physical violence like in *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, the darkness in these later images becomes a dramatic, visual representation of the spiritual 'darkness' of the narratives. The betrayal and denial of Christ by Judas and Peter are

biblical narratives wrought with spiritual turmoil and tragedy. Caravaggio shrouds the figures in darkness, masking the background and giving the illusion of space.

Having already received a commissioned piece from Caravaggio the previous year, in 1603, Italian nobleman and art collector Ciriaco Mattei commissioned Caravaggio for a painting on the betrayal of Christ in the garden.[25] Interestingly, this seems to indicate that the demand for Caravaggio's dramatic, darkened style was greater among private patrons rather than the more public commissions derived directly from the Catholic Church.

Caravaggio's obsession with darkened paintings and figures grew and expanded in the last years of his career, his emotionally charged nocturne *The Denial of Peter* being one of his last paintings. Bellori states that Caravaggio was commissioned to paint *The Denial of Peter* for the sacristy of San Martino in Naples.[26] But this commission came after Caravaggio fled Rome to escape prosecution for murder.

The last years of Caravaggio's life was a particularly dark period for the artist as he faced not only scorn in professional circles, as his works were criticized for being too realistic, but also violence and spiritual turmoil in his personal life. This period is marked with large amounts of darkness in his works, not just in the nocturnal scenes, particularly evident in the correlation between his nocturne *The Denial of Peter* and what is thought to be his last paint, a reclining *John the Baptist*. The darkness present in his later works gains greater emotion and understanding when analyzed with the 'darkness' present in Caravaggio's life. In *The Denial of*

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[25] Robb, *M The Man Who Became Caravaggio,* 209.
[26] Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects,* 183.

Peter, rather than overwhelming the figures in darkness to represent sinful or violent behavior as with his other nocturnes, the darkness is weighted to represent loss. As Peter denies Christ to the soldier and maid outside Caiaphas's house, the darkness fades around the figures slightly, providing more background information while the light causes intricate shadows to envelope their forms. This darkness represents a sense of loss and shame; loss as Christ had predicted that Peter would deny him and shame on the part of Peter that he would deny his Lord.

Caravaggio identified with these feelings, experiencing a great sense of loss as he was exiled from Rome and shame as his patrons started rejecting and removing his paintings.[27] The darkness in *The Denial of Peter* is not as visually imposing as the inky shadows in his previous nocturne *The Taking of Christ*. This is not customary for Caravaggio's later period as his reclining *John the Baptist* is bathed in darkness. *Judith Beheading Holofernes* and *The Taking of Christ* are weighted down with darkness, representing the direct action of behavior associated with the scenes. However, in *The Denial of Peter*, the action present is indirect, representing a weakness of spirit. That same weakness is present in the darkness as it fades around the figures. Peter viewed his faith as strong, claiming that he would never abandon his Lord, only to be told that he would deny his very existence.[28] His faith became his weakness, indicating a meekness of spirit, shown by the faded, washed out darkness in the background of the scene. This weakness was felt in Caravaggio's personal life as his realistic artwork was suddenly hindering his ability to gain commissions and plagued him during his last years until his death.

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[27] Ibid., 183.
[28] Luke 22:33-34.

During his brief but prolific career, Caravaggio left a lasting legacy, influencing many of his contemporaries and seventeenth century artists with his dramatic, emotional work, highlighted by the intense use of contrast and dramatic staging. Caravaggio's influence perpetuated the presence of nocturnes in Italian art well into the seventeenth century.[29] Notable artists of the period, such as Peter Paul Rubens, Rembrandt and Diego Velázquez, were inspired and intrigued by Caravaggio's emotional, dramatic usage of light and darkness with nocturnal images and attempted the "Caravaggesque" style as well. However, very few of these Northern European artists continued with the style, and abandoned the technique later in their careers. This pattern was mirrored in the works of Italian artists of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, but more widespread during the years of Caravaggio's career.

At the height of Caravaggio's career and popularity in Rome, German immigrant Adam Elsheimer became acquainted with the master artist and was intrigued by his dramatic style and dark nocturnes. Elsheimer briefly followed Caravaggio's style, resulting in a beautifully arranged *Judith and Holofernes* (fig. 10) nocturne based on Caravaggio's own rendering of the subject. However, soon after completing the painting, Elsheimer grew dissatisfied with the Caravaggesque style, and abandoned it all together.[30] Elsheimer's *Judith and Holofernes* depicts a darkened interior, lit by a single candle situated in the far left side of the room. Holofernes's face is twisted in fear and agony, reminiscent of Caravaggio's depiction

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[29] Sebastian Schutze, "Caravaggism in Europe," from *Caravaggio and His Followers in Rome,* ed. David Franklin, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 26.
[30] Desmond Shaw-Taylor, "Elsheimer's Mocking of Caravaggio," *Zeitschrift fur Kunstgeschichte,* (1991), 207.

of Holofernes, as Judith's hand is fisted in his hair, wrenching his head back to allow for a clean strike at his neck. Judith's maidservant is barely visible as a shadow behind a curtain beyond the Old Testament heroine's figure.

When analyzing Elsheimer's use of Caravaggism in *Judith and Holofernes,* Desmond Shaw-Taylor infers that Elsheimer moved away from Caravaggio's style due to the shallow spaces and intense use of darkness employed by the Italian master.[31] Elsheimer's later night scenes, such as the *Flight into Egypt* (fig. 11), bear greater similarity to the nocturnes produced by Jacopo Bassano and his workshop, focusing on the reality of darkness rather than the idea of darkness and its emotional quality. The presence of darkness in Elsheimer's *Judith and Holofernes* resembles Caravaggio's depiction of darkness as it crowds and clings to the figures, forming shadows and heightening the emotional content of the scene. It is not only the reality of darkness, indicating the setting of a nighttime narrative, but the concept and idea of darkness present in Elsheimer's painting. Elsheimer uses darkness as a way to heighten the ugliness of the scene, the violence committed by Judith. Shaw-Taylor mentions Elsheimer's usage of physical deformity in his works as a way to translate evilness into a visual form.[32] While Holofernes' face is twisted in a grotesque manner, it is the darkness in the scene that implies the evilness, not just in Holofernes but in Judith as well. The darkness adds shadows to their figures, making them more three-dimensional as well as human.

While Elsheimer abandoned the Caravaggesque style after only a few paintings, Caravaggio had other followers that imitated his style, carrying his legacy

[31] Ibid., 212-213.
[32] Ibid., 211.

well into the seventeenth century. The culmination and advancement of Caravaggism, particularly in reference to nocturnal scenes, is seen in the works of notable female artist Artemisia Gentileschi. Artemisia was the daughter of one of Caravaggio's contemporaries and pupils, Orazio Gentileschi. Despite being several years older than the young artist, Orazio quickly adapted to his style and encouraged his daughter to work in a similar manner.[33] Artemisia modeled her multiple depictions of *Judith and Holofernes* after Caravaggio's own depiction of the subject, using darkness in a similar manner.

Artemisia's nocturnes of Judith and Holofernes bear resemblances to both Caravaggio and Elsheimer's depictions of the same subject, indicating her familiarity with both artists' styles. Her first depiction of the narrative, the Naples *Judith beheading Holofernes* (fig. 12), features the cold, harsh light of Caravaggio's nocturnes and the darkness partially cloaking the figures. However, Artemisia advances Caravaggio's style, creating more dramatic and emotionally intense images later in her career, such as her candlelit nocturne *Judith and her Maidservant with the Head of Holofernes* (fig. 13). The same presence of theatricality and tension developed in Caravaggio's works is present in the overpowering authority of the larger than life Judith towering over her maidservant in Holofernes's tent as they plan their escape.

Not as overtly obvious in her early versions of the Judith narrative, Artemisia manipulates darkness and shadows in her final Judith and Holofernes depiction by using a combination of night darkness and cast shadows in order to create a more

[33] Schutze, "Caravaggism in Europe," 34.

tense and dramatic scene. By placing a light source in the scene rather than continuing to use off canvas sources as in her previous depictions, Artemisia was able to create a play of shadows across Judith's face, giving the woman a sense of dark determination. The sword tightly clutched in her right hand, ready to strike, is a reminder of the dark deed already committed. Holofernes's decapitated head is cast in shadow as the maidservant is carefully placing it in a bag. Artemisia's use of shadows indicates that she does vilify Judith slightly. Rather than completely identifying her as a sinful character, the shadows add to Judith's strength and determination, creating not a reluctant heroine that Caravaggio depicted, but a fully active woman willing to commit atrocious acts for the sake of her people.

This violent and active darkness, casting Judith as a strong, resolute woman, reflected Artemisia's personal life in the same way as Caravaggio's *Denial of Peter* reflected his own turmoil and weakness. Raped as a teenager by her painting teacher, Artemisia was put through the torture and humiliation of a seventeenth century rape trial.[34] Although convicted, Agostino Tassi, Artemisia's painting instructor, never served time for her rape and resumed working relations with her father. This experience darkened Artemisia's outlook and gave her a feeling of powerlessness in a male dominated society. Similarly to Caravaggio's later paintings, Artemisia funneled the darkness in her personal life into her artwork, portraying women participating in great acts of violence towards men. Caravaggio allowed the darkness in his works to suffocate his figures as a type of self-loathing or self-deprecation. However, Artemisia used darkness and shadows to give

[34] Mary Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1933), 20.

strength and character to Judith figures by emphasizing her status as a legendary heroine but not disregarding her humanity.

The growing presence of darkness in paintings and the subsequent development of the nocturnal scene in the sixteenth century arose out of a desire for biblical accuracy. With the influence of Caravaggio and Caravaggism in Italy and Northern Europe, darkness gained prominence in paintings, taking on an emotional quality in images, often relaying the artist's own person darkness and turmoil. While the copious amounts of emotional, dramatic darkness in paintings drew criticism for the nocturnal subject and caused many artists to abandon the genre, the intense and unusual lighting techniques utilized to balance the darkness sparked additional interest in the subject of Italian nocturnes for this period.

III. The use of light in sixteenth and seventeenth century Italian nocturnes

While the nocturnal narrative, such as the Judith and Holofernes, was popular in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, what differentiates the nocturnes of the Renaissance from the Baroque period is the presence of intense light and darkness. Shadows and darkness gained prominence in these scenes, the defining characteristic of a 'night scene.' Although the Baroque period is described as the 'discovery of night' with this increase in physical and psychological darkness, this description can also be categorized as the re-definition, or re-evaluation of light. Medieval Christian theology scholar Jaroslav Pelikan has analyzed the view of light present in Medieval Europe, and summarize it with a simple phrase taken from the book of Psalms, "In thy Light, we see Light." Pelikan's argument examines the writings of early church father Athanasius to define how light was viewed in Medieval Europe. According to Pelikan, Medieval theologians viewed light as the ultimate expression of God.[35] Light was the first thing that God created, and Christ referred to himself in John as the "Light of the World."

In his analysis on the theological concept of light, Pelikan utilizes the writings of Athanasius as a basis, but compares them with the writings of Martin Luther. Pelikan's analysis of these works identifies the 'darkening' of the world, or the increase in turmoil and sinfulness, as the cause for the change towards the perception of light. He states:

> "… Such was the condition of man since the fall into sin. His world had become a darkling world because he refused to face the light of God. Like a

[35] Pelikan, *The Light of the World: A Basic Image in Early Christian Thought,* 11-13.

bat, he pretended that this darkling world was the only world there was, and that the light was no more than an illusion…"[36]

This statement not only signifies the shift towards darkness, but also identifies it as the reason why the view of light started to change during the sixteenth century. Rzepinska refers to the light most often seen in Renaissance art as natural, or divine light. Natural or divine light are often interchanged in Renaissance literature, since the common belief was that natural light was the presence of God itself.

In a time of humanist thought, reasoning and philosophy, Martin Luther identifies human understanding as bathed in darkness, or in the nature of darkness.[37] Pelikan touches on this thought and the atmosphere of sixteenth century philosophies when he mentions a 'darkling world,' one that has descended into sin. In contrast to this thought, Luther further states that God's understanding and wisdom is personified in the light of day.[38] This belief is commonplace in Medieval theological literature, influencing the vast presence of light in the religion-dominated Italian Renaissance art. Prior to the sixteenth century, the treatment of light in Renaissance art remained fairly consistent. The shift towards darkness in the sixteenth century away from fifteenth century ideals and practices is visible in Mantegna and Correggio's depictions of the Judith narrative..

While divine light was used in nocturnes in the sixteenth century, as evident in *Christ Praying in the Garden of Gethsemane* by Bassano's workshop, the majority of light in nocturnes was artificial light, such as candlelight or Caravaggio's

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[36] Ibid., 42.
[37] Martin Luther, *Table Talks*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 132.
[38] Ibid., 132.

theatrical lighting. As previously stated, Marin Luther purported that the light of day, or divine light represented God's wisdom and understanding.[39] This light was capable of driving away darkness, the symbol of human wisdom, humanity's sin. However, this symbolism cannot be applied to nocturnal images, where the figures are bathed in darkness, only partially lit with artificial lighting. This form of lighting is representative of a visual continuation of Italian humanism in the sixteenth century. Renaissance humanists, while emphasizing the importance of *studia humanitatis,* or the study of humanities, were acutely aware of the successes and failings of the human condition. Petrach, one of the early fourteenth century Italian humanists introduced the themes of 'the dignity of man' and 'the misery of the human condition.'[40] Each theme addressed a facet of humanity, the striving to be like God, as well as the failings of the human condition and how the presence sin prevent humanity form reaching the divine. The use of artificial light in nocturnes visually represents this struggle; the light representing mankind's attempt towards God's wisdom, but the looming darkness of nocturnes portrays the inability of humans to overcome their sin through their own wisdom. Darkness became the outlet for reality and human emotion, a constant reminder of sin and the suffering of humanity, while light exposed an artificial reality. The change in attitude towards light due to the influence of humanism occurred gradually through the fifteenth century until the religious turmoil in the sixteenth century prompted a re-evaluation of theological principles and the human condition.

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[39] Ibid.
[40] Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought,* (Chicago, Il: The Chicago University Press, 1970), 173.

While the mass production of candles through technological development of molds may explain Correggio's usage of candlelight in his *Judith*, it does not really explain the reappearance of the candle image in Italian art nearly fifty years later in the works of Bassano and his contemporaries. Rather than the candle itself, these artists were drawn to the concept of artificial lighting portraying human weakness and fallibility in Biblical scenes.

Jacopo Bassano and Caravaggio's nocturnes in the latter half of the sixteenth century and the early seventeenth century portray the adaptation of the altered perception of light, Bassano with his use of candlelight and Caravaggio with his depiction of artificial, theatrical lighting. It is intriguing that Bassano, so devoted to biblical accuracy as to immensely darken his scenes and to mute his colors, would include a sixteenth century lighting device in the center of his *Deposition.*

In traditional catholic liturgy, a tall, bleached white candle represents the body of Christ. The whiteness of the candle signifies the purity of Christ and the significance of a virgin birth, while smaller, white candles symbolize Christians and their desire to imitate Christ.[41] This symbolism was utilized in art in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries with St. Joseph holding a small, lit candle, emphasizing his role as the protector of Christ as he grows.[42] Bassano's usage of the candle in his *Deposition* does not follow the accepted symbolism of the candle, rather representing the change in theological perception of light. In *The Deposition*, Bassano situates the candle in the center of the scene, illuminating the form of

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[41] Rev. William H. Leach, The Use of Candles in Christian Fellowship, (New York: Goodenough & Woglow Company, 1940), 10-11.
[42] Getrude Grace Sill, A Handbook of Symbols in Christian Art, (New York: Collier Books, 1975), 129.

Christ's body and the figures mourning around it under the cross. The candle in this scene is an artificial light source, representing the human understanding of the moment. Mother Mary, Mary Magdalene, Joseph of Arimathea and other followers of Christ are mourning around his body, not understanding the necessity of Christ's death or what would come of it. The wax dripping from the side of the candle, indicating the diminishing lifespan of the object, embodies the belief of the figures in the impermanence of Christ and his death on the cross was the end. This is supported in the gospels with the appearance of the three women at Christ's tomb with burial spices two days after his crucifixion.[43] If the candle represents the body of Christ in catholic tradition then Bassano is utilizing the limited lifespan of the melting candle to emphasize the belief of Christ's end in those that had seen him crucified.

While the physical aspects of the candle represent the limited understanding of human thought, the light produced by the flame also emphasizes the failings and weakness of humanity. The presence of natural, divine light in biblical scenes, such as Bassano's depiction of *Christ Praying in the Garden of Gethsemane*, illuminates scenes in such a way to hide or hold back the darkness. In his *Deposition*, the candlelight depicted is slight and weak while the majority of the scene is bathed with darkness. The candle illuminates Christ's supine body and the grief-stricken faces of the surrounding figures, but only highlights these figures rather than fully revealing the entirety of their forms. The light is incapable of dissipating the surrounding darkness, instead being consumed and overwhelmed. This

[43] Luke 24:1

demonstrates the incapability of humans to understand the divine, and ultimately God because the light emphasizes the deadness of Christ: his bleeding wounds and the sallow color of his skin. The combination of the low candlelight and the vast darkness creates a feeling of great tragedy without the hope that natural light provides to emotionally charged scenes. As the darkness represents the emotional quality and sinful actions of the scene, the candlelight highlights human understanding of truth and reality.

This altered perception of light in reference to theologically based principles is further expounded in the nocturnes of Caravaggio. Rather than visually depicting the source of artificial light as Bassano did with his candles, Caravaggio utilizes light as a spotlighting effect, emphasizing his theatrical influences and perpetuating the usage of artificial light. Sergio Benedetti, the former head of the National Gallery of Ireland accredited with the rediscovery of a version Caravaggio's *The Taking of Christ* states in his article on light and darkness:

> The symbolic and spiritual value of light appears with varying intensity in a great number of the works painted by Caravaggio up to the time of his death. Although he was not the first painter to have employed light in this way, he was certainly the one who put it to the most dramatic use and achieved the greatest result.[44]

Benedetti discusses Caravaggio's approach to light as the most innovative of the period, which can be seen in a visual comparison between Bassano and Caravaggio's nocturnes. Caravaggio set the stage for nocturnal paintings, particularly candlelit

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[44] Benedetti, "Darkness and Light," 32.

artists in the seventeenth century with the development of his intense, dramatic lighting style.

The lighting in Caravaggio's *Judith Slaying Holofernes, The Taking of Christ* and *The Denial of St. Peter* highlights the critical moment of each scene, emphasizing the moment of great violence or turmoil. A notable scholar of candlelight masters, Christopher Wright observed that most scenes depicted in candlelight from the seventeenth century are often scenes of great violence.[45] This evolved out of Caravaggio's use of artificial lighting in his nocturnal scenes and his predilection for depicting dramatic moments. Caravaggio's particular lighting technique developed partially out of how he staged his compositions and his realistic painting style as well as the changing perception of light. Bassano's use of candlelight in *The Deposition* focuses on human perception and understanding of the scene merged with Catholic symbolism of the candle. In his nocturnes, Caravaggio's light emphasizes the 'artificialness' of humanity in the same way that the darkness exposes the reality of the human condition.

In *Judith Slaying Holofernes,* Caravaggio illuminates the scene using a harsh, white light shining down on the figures. The light cools the scene, tempering the violence of the narrative, giving Judith a sense of grim or reluctant determination. Caravaggio's understanding of humanity in this early nocturne extends mainly to the figures portrayed in the image, primarily Judith. He identifies her as a reluctant heroine, repulsed by her actions but bearing the weight of responsibility in order to protect her people. As he grows in this style, Caravaggio adjusts his experimental

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[45] Christopher Wright, *The Masters of Candlelight* (Landshut: Arcos Verlag, 1995), 7.

technique to reveal more about the depicted figures as well as an introspective look into his own life. This is immensely clear in his later works *The Taking of Christ* and *The Denial of Peter.* Caravaggio portrayed himself in *The Taking of Christ* on the right-hand-side, holding a lantern aloft to better observe the scene amid the chaos of the charging soldiers. Adrian le Harivel, curator of the National Gallery of Ireland, states that Caravaggio is revealing what is happening in the scene by holding the Chinese lantern, casting a soft, eerie glow.[46] Le Harivel surmises that Caravaggio's presence in this painting is due to his love for drama and violence, rather than personal introspection on the physical act of betraying Christ. Caravaggio visits this same sense of betrayal in *The Denial of Peter*, using the same harsh, but muted light.

Contrary to le Harivel's explanations of Caravaggio's presence, his appearance in *The Taking of Christ* holding an artificial light source in the form of a lantern reveals an acute awareness of his own limited understanding of the scene and the weakness of his humanity. He remains physically and psychologically separated from Christ. As the soldiers crowd toward Judas and Christ, Caravaggio is pushed back into the role of a spectator, the lantern in his hands emitting a very weak light. He creates a dual image, displaying the weakness of the fleeing disciples, the approaching soldiers, and even Christ as he resolutely accepts his fate, and Caravaggio's own artificial understanding as he holds the lantern. The light cruelly indicates the narrative figures' desires to follow holy or just convictions but with the inability to do so; only Christ is adequately illuminated, touched by the darkness of

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[46] "Behind the Painting: Caravaggio's 'The Taking of Christ,'" Youtube video, 2:58, posted by "nationalgalleryie," 2 July 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5DURJGv7-vI

Judas's presence and his betrayal. Caravaggio is further removed from the scene, his lantern revealing the artificialness of his presence in the scene as well as his own failings as a human. This same harsh light is present in *The Denial of Peter*, used in similar manner to reveal the failings of humanity.

Elsheimer mimicked Caravaggio's style and lighting in his portrayal of *Judith Slaying Holofernes.* But, Elsheimer's work merely imitates the chiaroscuro effects in Caravaggio's work rather than demonstrates his understanding of Caravaggio's motivations for using artificial lighting. Rather, Artemisia Gentileschi was truly Caravaggio's successor in her use of intense chiaroscuro and her understanding of the need for weighted darkness and harsh lights in nocturnal images. Artemisia grasped both Caravaggio's technique of artificial lighting, with its spotlight effect, and effective use of candlelight as a directed source of illumination. And she followed both in humanizing the normally abstracted visions of saints and other holy figures. In her Naples and Florentine versions of *Judith Slaying Holofernes,* Artemisia experiments with the temperature of the light for the scene, using a whiter, cooler light similar to the light used in Caravaggio's depiction of the narrative in the Naples version, and a warmer, more yellowish light in her later depiction. This experimentation indicates her desire for more than just revealing the humanity of the figures through the use of artificial light. Artemisia's light reveals a deeper look at the emotional concept of Judith portrayals. The cooler, white light of the Naples *Judith*, Artemisia delves into Judith's psyche, revealing a saddened, but determined woman similar to the notion expressed in Caravaggio's painting. This is accomplished through Artemisia's use of a cooler light, similar to Caravaggio's

Judith, expressing a more somber tone. In the later, Florentine depiction *Judith and Holofernes* (fig. 14) Artemisia uses a warmer light, emphasizing the reds and golds of the scene. This highlights Judith's strength and fortitude, as well as the gruesomeness of the violent act without the atmosphere of grim determination present in the earlier version.

Artemisia's final known depiction of the Judith narrative, *Judith and her Maidservant with the Head of Holofernes*, utilizes artificial lighting but with the light source, a single dark candle, present in the scene. This bears resemblance to Elshemier's *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, but with the emotional quality of Caravaggio's works. Artemisia furthers these stylistic effects by having Judith interact with the light in the scene by placing Judith's hand near the candle to partially block the light, which causes a dark shadow to fall across Judith's face. Judith's engagement with the candle indicates her acceptance of her humanity, and her inability to fully escape the darkness. Her body language with the sword still clutched tightly in her hands supports this awareness of humanity as Judith is acutely aware of the danger she and her maidservant are still facing. Judith's sharp awareness and fear of being caught emphasizes that she knows that slaying Holofernes was a vile act though done for the right reasons. The candle, highlighting her profile, creates a dual image of Judith as she herself casts the majority of her face in darkness by placing her hand over the flame, acknowledging her own mortality and limited understanding.

The intense usage of light and darkness by Caravaggio and his contemporaries and followers developed out of an understanding of the reality of humanity, but also its artificial nature. The scenes were composed in such a way to

heighten the drama and the contrast between light and darkness that the paintings gained an air of falseness, or impossibility about them. This emerged out of Caravaggio's experimental lighting practices and his desire for drama and theatricality.

IV. The theatricality of Caravaggio's nocturnes and development of theatrical Baroque

While the religious and psychological changes in the perception of light affected how Caravaggio arranged and illuminated his works, sixteenth century Italian theatrical practices also influenced his nocturnes and the development of his "theatrical" style. Caravaggio's nocturnes are depicted with figures clustered and tangled together coming out of the darkness with a bright light streaming down on them from the upper left side of the paintings. Dramatic, theatrical and dark are often terms utilized by viewers, art historians and critics to accurately describe Caravaggio's work, particularly his later period after his move to Rome.

This theatrical style emerged out of Caravaggio's own exposure to theater and theatrical practices, and his desire to replicate the emotion and drama of stage plays in his works. Theatrical stages and plays were popular forms of entertainment during the Renaissance and Baroque eras. Larry Norman, a professor of theater at the University of Chicago, argues that the reason the seventeenth century was so theatrical in terms of culture and drama was because of the opulence of festivities and a culture of extravagance.[47] Norman mostly refers to the lavishness of French court culture, but this same abundance and love of theater culture were present throughout the entirety of Europe. Notable playwrights such as William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlow created plays and stories that have a long lasting legacy on the English stage; they were in turn influenced by, Italian theatre.

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[47] Larry F. Norman, "The Theatrical Baroque," from *The Theatrical Baroque,* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 2001), 7.

Richard Andrews, scholar of Italian Renaissance Theater, asserts that despite the lack of scripts and play reviews from this period, historians believe that the Italian theater of the late sixteenth century widely acknowledged its importance for the development of theatrical practices elsewhere in Europe. Andrews also suggests that due to these textual lacunae this influence has not yet been fully analyzed.[48]

During the sixteenth century, Italian theater experienced a renaissance of growth and development. These changes were due, in part, to the religious tension of the sixteenth century, but also the growing interest in theatrical stages. As mentioned previously, candles became more secularized with development of technology to allow for quicker production. This production allowed for candles to be utilized for stage lighting in Italian theaters in the later part of the sixteenth century. Stage constructions and arrangements were adjusted to accommodate chandeliers in the rafters over the stage and the house, and candles positioned to function as spotlights and footlights.[49] In his article on the development of lighting and carpentry in the theater, A. Hyatt Mayor states that the usage of candlelight for lighting technique and the manipulation of daylight through clever construction is part of what made the Italian theater so noteworthy and popular in the late Renaissance and Baroque periods.[50] This popularity of Italian theater means that Caravaggio would have been exposed to this theater culture while he was living in

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[48] Richard Andrews, *The Renaissance stage,* 31.
[49] Larry Wild, "A Brief Outline the History of Stage Lighting," (2013), http://www3.northern.edu/wild/LiteDes/ldhist.htm accessed <03/01/15>.
[50] A. Hyatt Mayor, "Carpentry and Candlelight in the Theater," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin,* (February 1943), 198-200.

Venice and then later in Rome. His compositions and treatment of light and darkness reflect the dramatic action of a scene from a stage play.

Caravaggio painted using models and a staged scene in his studio, creating a dark space to control the light effect and the emotional quality of the scene.[51] If we consider, as Christopher Wright argues, artists depicting candlelit images could not painted them from life, but only from previous study and imagination, it is important that Caravaggio, rather than painting from memory, chose to paint from life, and in doing so had to re-create dramatic stage lighting in his studio.[52] English artist David Hockney put forth the theory that western artists from the fifteenth century onward worked with mirrors and lenses to create a varying intensity of light in their studios.[53] Hockney supports his theory using visual analysis of Caravaggio's works and textual support regarding the creation of mirrors. He states that the Murano glass corporation formed in Venice in 1564, produced large quantities of Venetian glass and large, flattened mirrors, different from the small, bull's eye mirrors of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.[54] Due to his work in Venice, Caravaggio would have had knowledge of the mirrors produced by Murano glass and would have been able to procure mirrors for his theatrical lighting experiments. It is possibly therefore that Caravaggio erected large mirrors in his workspace to enhance the lighting and control, which the artist would then have projected onto his staged models.

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[51] Robb, *M The Man who became Caravaggio*, 95
[52] Christopher Wright, *The Masters of Candlelight*, (Landshut, Germany: Arcos Verlag, 1995),
[53] David Hockney, *Secret Knowledge,* (London: The Penguin Group, 2001), 12.
[54] Ibid., 205.

Sergio Benedetti indirectly supports Hockney's theory with his description of Caravaggio's nocturne *The Taking of Christ.* He describes the background of the painting as "stripped to its essentials," and notes how the light falls from above the scene "but only where the artist wants it."[55] This lighting strategy mimics the spotlight effect produced for theatrical plays illuminated by candles and lanterns in order to draw the audience's attention to the most important aspects of the scene. In any case, the 'spotlight' effect in Caravaggio's nocturnes is indicative of the artist's desire to create theatrical composition design. His constant use of models and staged scenes, which drew profound criticism for his work by his contemporaries, drove Caravaggio to attempt to heighten the realism present in High Renaissance art. Due to his reliance on staged scene and models, Caravaggio's light in nocturnes translates as artificial or unnatural light because his manipulation of his studio light source is unnatural. It provided the sense of "falseness" referred to earlier that undermines the realism of Caravaggio's style, causing the paintings to truly resemble a theatrical set.

This focused light draws attention to the figures in the scene, and allows for the majority of the painting to be cast in darkness, following the spirit and idea of a nocturnal setting. The spotlight on the figures limits the amount of light and emphasis placed on background and scenery elements, reducing the setting to the barest elements. In *Judith and Holofernes*, Caravaggio allows the light to strike a dark red curtain in the background, just suggesting the presence of Holofernes' bed while he concentrates the lighting on the three figures in the foreground.

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[55] Benedetti, "Darkness and Light," 32.

It appears that the relationship between painting and the theatrical did not go in one direction alone. Vasari notes the impact of the Florentine artistic practices on the development of theatrical scenery in the early sixteenth century.[56] Artists developed the use of the foreground, middle ground and background in paintings, which was then translated into theatrical set design. As theater developed in the sixteenth century, more emphasis was placed on the actors themselves and less on the scenery, particularly after the employment of lighting devices. Jack D'Amico states that Italian Renaissance Theater emphasized the three-dimensionality of stages and scenery to maximize the usage of space, and focused the attention on the actors and the unfolding narrative.[57] The stage and set became part of the narrative, but took a secondary role to the main proponent, the characters in the scene. The emotional quality of the players and the complexity of the play became center stage, while the intricate settings and backgrounds were regulated to supporting positions.

Theatrical emphasis on human gesture and expression was part of a greater Italian tradition appearing not only in visual works such as theater and art, but also in music and prose. John Varriano, a professor of Italian Renaissance culture, has argued that Italian art culture through the Renaissance and Baroque periods predominately catered to humanity and the expression of humanity through

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[56] Giorgio Vasari and Thomas A. Pallen, *Vasari on Theatre,* (Carbondale, Il: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 21.
[57] Jack D'Amico, "The Treatment of Space in Italian and English Renaissance Theater: The Example of 'Gl'Ingannati' and 'The Twelfth Night,'" *Comparative Drama,* (Fall 1989), 266.

emotion and movement.[58] Here we have a visual distinction between Italian art and that of their Northern European contemporaries, as Northern artists placed more emphasis on the creation of narratives using props, complex scenery and stage setting while Italian artists sought to accurately depict humanity within the scope of a narrative by using expressions and gestures to replicate the realness of emotions within the artificialness of paintings and theatrical stages.

The Italian art historian Kristina Fiore has visually identified this difference between Northern European and Italian artistic practices with her analysis of Caravaggio's *Taking of Christ* in relation to Durer's woodcut *The Taking of Christ* (fig. 15). Fiore argues that Caravaggio based his depiction of *The Taking of Christ* off of Durer's print, drawing correlations between the closeness of Judas and Jesus in the two images and the crowd of gathering soldiers.[59] Unlike Durer's woodcut, Caravaggio cropped the scene to bring the entirety of the focus on the figures of Christ, Judas and the soldier with several other disciples and soldiers as background characters of the scene. This focus allowed the viewer a closer, more personal perspective of Christ's emotions, and the agony he felt at being betrayed by one of his close friends. Nonetheless we should note that Fiore's analysis does not take into account the emphasis on human emotion and interaction mentioned by Varriano or the theatricality of Caravaggio's painting.

The shift towards more human-centered theatrical performances and Caravaggio's own interpretation of such drama continued the symbiotic relationship

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[58] John Varriano, *Caravaggio The Art of Realism,* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 101.
[59] Kristina Herrmann Fiore, "Caravaggio's 'Taking of Christ' and Durer's woodcut of 1509,"*The Burlington Magazine, 137, 1102,* (January 1995), 24.

between Italian art and theater practices. While these innovations in lighting and scenic spaces were prevalent in all forms of dramas, the predominant usage for these theatrical developments was in context of Italian tragedy. According to Joseph Kennard, adjustments in scenery and stage composition were especially involved in the revival of the tragedy in Italian theater early in the sixteenth century.[60] Another theatre scholar, Salvatore DiMaria agrees with Kennard's assertions, although he places more emphasis on the analysis of Aristotle's writings, particularly his writings on dramatic and tragic action as the reason for the revival of classical tragedies.[61]

The idea of tragedy reflected the truthfulness of human emotion, and the darkness of the human condition. This reality and 'realness' is what was sought after in sixteenth century Italian theater, making tragedies popular subjects. Due to this revival, tragedies grew in popularity throughout the century, displaying heightened emotions and revealing the tragic conditions of humanity. Numerous comedies and pastoral dramas accompanied tragedies on the Italian stage, but the craving for intense emotions by the public was only met by the tragedy. This desire for tragedy is attributed to a development in viewing taste, but also the dramatic and tragic atmosphere caused by religious and political unrest. The intense emotions of the characters on stage allow for the audience to escape their own emotional depravity and chaos, and lose themselves in the unfolding story.

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[60] Joseph Kennard, *The Italian Theater: From Its Beginning to the Close of the Seventeenth Century,* (New York: William Edwin Rudge, 1932), 137-138.
[61] DiMaria, *The Italian Tragedy in the Renaissance,* 29

DiMaria notes that Italian playwrights of the sixteenth century boasted about their ability to capture the reality of human emotion within the falseness of the theater stage.[62] These playwrights would encourage audience interaction with the scene, drawing the viewer into the play itself and making the emotions feel all the more real. This sparked Caravaggio's interest in developing his own, hyper-realistic style focused on realistically portraying emotions as well as eliciting emotional responses. Sergio Benedetti affirmed that Caravaggio's style transition to more dramatic, theatrical works occurred around the turn of the seventeenth century, creating an almost painfully realistic style.[63] Through his earlier work, Caravaggio exhibited his intense, emotionally realistic style but it was not until after his move to Rome that his works started to adopt the theatricality of his mature works.

This desire for emotional realism both in art and on the stage prompted Caravaggio to depict particularly tragic or emotional scenes. What made Caravaggio's works unique among his contemporaries and predecessors is this desire to translate the emotional quality of theatrical tragedy to two-dimensional works of art. Visually, Bassano's tragic *Deposition* is emotionally stagnant in comparison to Caravaggio's *The Entombment of Christ* (fig. 16). Caravaggio actively drew the viewer into the scene by painting the figure of Nicodemus staring out at the viewer while the women figures openly mourn and weep over Christ's broken body. In terms of narrative placement, Bassano and Caravaggio's paintings are similar but contain different emotional qualities. Bassano portrays a reserved sadness, emphasized by his usage of a candle to light the scene but controlled

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[62] Ibid.
[63] Benedetti, "Darkness and Light," 29.

through the faintness of the light source and calmness of the figure's reactions. On the contrary, Caravaggio exaggerated the emotions of the figures, giving them a palpable quality. This emotional quality is stressed further in the tragedy and drama of Caravaggio's nocturnes.

Using light and shadow to extreme effect, Caravaggio's translated the reality of human emotion through tragic or violent biblical night scenes. In *The Denial of Peter,* Caravaggio depicted the rock of the Christian church as a hesitant, frightened elderly man, using intense light deepen the shadows on his face and hand gestures to emphasize his denial of Christ. The common, recognizable gestures used by the three figures in the scene create a psychological response within the viewer as they automatically connect Peter's hands curling back against his breast as defensive behavior at being confronted in such a manner. The tilt of his body backwards away from the forward motion of the soldier also suggested such feelings, while the heavily wrinkled face speaks of grief and shame. Caravaggio utilized such familiar expressions and gestures to create a link between the viewer and the figures in the scene. Peter becomes not a legendary saint, but a real person who felt great fear in the time directly preceding and succeeding the crucifixion of Christ. By forging this link, Caravaggio expresses the reality of Peter, and closely cropping the image to expose the entirety of his weaknesses. He bared the soul of Peter through the drama and the painfulness of his realistic style, causing the audience for his work to also internalize their own fears and weaknesses and truly empathize with Peter.

By comparison Adam Elsheimer, despite mimicking Caravaggio's dramatic lighting style with his nocturne *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, lacked the theatricality of

Caravaggio's mature works. The intense scenery and ornamentation of the setting depicted in Elsheimer's painting hinted at his Germanic roots even though the entirety of his artistic career was spent in Italy. As in other ways, Artemisia Gentileschi was significantly more successful in incorporating Caravaggio's theatricality into her own art, along with his dramatic lighting to produce her intense portrayals of the Judith narrative. Rather than suggesting emotional realities as Caravaggio did, Artemisia forced emotions with the strength portrayed by Judith, frightening and awe-inspiring the viewers with the power wielded by the determined woman.

The symbiotic relationship between theater and art gave birth to the "theatrical Baroque" period, starting with the dramatic works of Caravaggio and the Caravaggisti. These artists reflected the drama and chaos present in European society, depicting it in a theatrical manner in order to better portray the reality of life around them. This allowed artists more opportunity to connect the artwork, further emphasizing the desire for humanity in the work of Caravaggio and his followers.

V. Sixteenth century religious practices and their impact on the art of Caravaggio

The altered perception of light and the psychological emphasis on humanity that occurred in the sixteenth century was the result of turmoil fueled by religious unrest during the Catholic revival at the end of the fifteenth century, and the subsequent Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation. Caravaggio's style and the desire for tragic and emotionally charged scenes evolved out of this turmoil. In the decades following the Protestant Reformation and the iconoclasm that erupted out of the religious conflict, the Council of Trent (1545-1565), initially convened by Pope Paul III in northern Italy and other church leaders, gathered to discuss the growing spread of Protestantism. The outcome of the Council's decrees under Pope Pius IV condemned Protestantism as a heresy and called for a reformation of the Catholic Church. Initially begun to address the grievances of the reformers against the church, the Counter Reformation began a period of Catholic revival that lasted well into the mid seventeenth century. Ellis Waterhouse states that, as part of the last meeting, the church leaders discussed the arts, and the iconoclasm of Reformers.[64] Throughout the Middle Ages and on into the time of the Renaissance, the Catholic church, in general, and the Pope, in particular, had always been protectors and patrons of the arts, utilizing religious based scenes to influence parishioners and evoke proper meditative thoughts. However, on the last day of the Council of Trent, the Council decreed that art commissioned for use in the church would be restricted unless approved by the local bishop. As an explanation for this declaration, Waterhouse reviews the

[64] Ellis Waterhouse, "Some Painters and the Counter-Reformation Before 1600," 103.

writings of Emile Male, an early twentieth century French art historian. Male proposed that the Catholic Church felt threatened by the surging of Protestantism and sought to protect their doctrinal beliefs.[65] It was not until several decades later, after the turn of the seventeenth century that the pope felt the Church's doctrines secure enough to oversee the creation of art that would adhere to Counter-Reformation ideals.

Mary Laven, lecturer at Jesus College in the University of Cambridge cites the first usage of the term 'Counter-Reformation' as a negative term used by German Protestant historians in reference to the period of Catholic hostility and repression following the Council of Trent.[66] These historians were mostly alluding to the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), which resulted as a conflict in central Europe between the Protestants and Catholics. Contemporary church historians use the term more loosely now in reference to the time after the Council of Trent until the mid seventeenth century. This period was fraught with turmoil as the Catholic Church fought against the expansion of Protestantism and implemented plans to restructure and strengthen the Catholic faith. Post-Tridentine Catholicism was repressive and violent in its attempts to draw parishioners back into the fold, as concerned with showing the might and strength of the Catholic Church than making reforms in worship.

Laven further discusses the relationship between Counter-Reformation ideals and practices and its impact upon art in the first half of the seventeenth

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[65] Ibid.,103-104.
[66] Mary Laven, "Encountering the Counter-Reformation," *Renaissance Quarterly, 59, 3,* (Fall 2006), 707.

century. This period favored rigidity and ornamentation not usual in Italian art but seen prior in the works of northern European artists. Seventeenth century Italian master Pietro da Cortona adapted to this style, particularly seen in his *Triumph of Divine Providence* (fig. 17), a massive ceiling fresco in the Palazzo Barberini. This fresco embodied the spirit of seventeenth century Catholicism, disguising emotion and humanity with glamorous details and rigid composition. Walter Vitzthum described Cortona's *Triumph of Divine Providence* as a symbolic representation of the election of Urban VIII as pope, indicating divine providence in the decision.[67] With the massive size and swirl of details and colors, the idea of humanity and emotion is lost in the overwhelming emphasis upon the angelic and divine figures. This fresco contained none of the weakness and drama of Caravaggio's works, but instead it focuses on grandeur and might.

Caravaggio and Bassano's later works originated in a time of papal silence that Waterhouse identified as occurring directly after the Council of Trent and lasting until the turn of the seventeenth century. The Catholic Church as a whole did not regulate works of art during this period; instead, artwork was commissioned by private citizens and individuals for use in churches and/or homes. In this period of papal silence, numerous artists working in Italy created religious works following traditional Catholic principles, such as the depictions of saints or popular Biblical narratives, on their own reconnaissance. These artists created art without the interference of dogmatic practices and standards issued by the Pope, but were still influenced by prevailing religious ideals. Caravaggio himself was influenced by his

[67] Walter Vitzthum, "A Comment on the Iconography of Pietro da Cortona's Barberini Celling," *The Burlington Magazine, 103, 703,* (October 1961), 427.

patron, Cardinal Francesco Maria Del Monte, after his move to Rome and started to heavily depict works with Biblical narratives or Catholic themes.[68] It is during this period of papal silence over the production of art that Caravaggio rose in popularity and gained patronage from numerous religious figures.

However, after the turn of the seventeenth century, the Catholic church began to shift towards displaying more might and power of the Catholic doctrine with artworks commissioned for religious uses. It is during this period that Caravaggio's work was met with great derision and scorn. Bellori states that many of Caravaggio's works were removed from churches and taken down from holy places due to the improper depiction of saints and other holy figures.[69] Caravaggio's strength as an artist was his ability to capture human emotion and pathos. He only painted what was in front of him in his studio, expressing the truthfulness of those involved in the scene. This style was unable to meet with the transcendental images desired by the papacy, causing Caravaggio great heartache and distress in the last few years of his life.

There is a distinct, visual difference between the work of Caravaggio and the Caravaggisti, and the work of Pietro da Cortona and his contemporaries. Unlike the rigidity and control displayed in Cortona's works, Caravaggio mixed his own particular style of intense lighting and painfully realistic figures with religious themes and his own interpretation of Counter-Reformation ideals. In his article on Caravaggio and religion, Joseph Chorpenning assessed the influence that Counter-Reformation ideals had on Caravaggio's works. He stated that Caravaggio's paintings

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[68] Stephano Zuffi, *Caravaggio,* 64.
[69] Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects,* 185.

were modeled after counter-reformation meditative practices, where the meditator imagined a religious or biblical scene as if it were taking place in the room in front of meditators.[70] Laven emphasized that this type of spiritualist practice was highly favored by early Catholic reformers prior to the Protestant Reformation, and had, by the later part of the sixteenth century, been adopted into mainstream catholic practices. While later reformers were concerned with military might and power, and focused on preserving the legacy of the catholic doctrine, early sixteenth century reformers were focused mostly on worshipful aspects of the Catholic faith, such as mediation and prayer.[71] Meditation was used during the counter-reformation to focus on the lives of biblical figures and saints in order to draw practitioners closer to Holy Scriptures and thoughts.[72] The dramatic lighting and emphasized realness of the figures in Caravaggio's religious works allowed for the viewer to connect further with the scene and empathize with the figure in the painting.

It is this relationship with the viewer that caused dissention between the Catholic Church and Caravaggio. The closeness between the viewer and subject of the scenes and the manner in which these biblical figures were depicted reflected Protestant ideals and theology spreading throughout Europe. Luther referred to the Catholic practice of worship as idolatry where the monks and other church officials worshipped the idea of worship while the people turned to the church leaders themselves for salvation.[73] Protestantism sought to avoid this worship of church

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[70] Joseph F. Chorpenning, "Another Look at Caravaggio and Religion," *Artibus et Historiae, 8, 16,* (1987), 150-154.
[71] Laven, "Encountering the Counter-Reformation," 709-711.
[72] Chorpenning, "Another Look at Caravaggio and Religion," 154.
[73] Luther, *Table Talks,* 78.

leaders and holy figures by encouraging a more personal relationship with God through the direct meditation of Christ. While the catholic faith deified saints and religious figures, Protestantism believed these individuals to be servants of God and important to one's history and growth, but still human and ultimately flawed creations. In his *Ninety-Five Theses*, Luther proclaimed that faith and salvation could only be granted through faith in Christ and the Christian doctrine, not the Pope or other men.[74] These references to idolatry and salvation in Luther's works refer to the deification of saints by the Catholic Church and the hierarchy of church officials, which led to corruption within the church. With his writings, Luther sought to return to a more personal relationship between God and individuals in order to prevent further bastardization of the sacraments and misuse of Christian doctrines.

In Italy, the heart of Catholicism, the Protestant doctrine was greeted with much of the same suspicion as elsewhere in Europe. Salvatore Caponetto, a professor of history at the University of Florence, recounts the history and reception of Protestantism in Italy. Caponetto stated that due to the spiritual oppression by the Catholic Church and the tyranny of the pope the Lutheran doctrine was greatly received in the Italian peninsula. Due to its strategic location in northern Italy and its trade connections with central Europe, Venice became the capital for the Protestant Reformation in Italy.[75] Evangelical leaders in Italy such as Luca Paolo Rosello, a priest and Reformation supporter, and Alessandro Trissino, the main supporter of Calvinism in the Veneto region, relocated to Venice creating a melting

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[74] Martin Luther, *The Ninety-Five Theses and Three Primary Works of Dr. Martin Luther,* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 67.
[75] Salvatore Caponetto, *The Protestant Reformation in Sixteenth-century Italy,* (Ann Arbor, MI.: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1999), 191.

pot for protestant doctrine and ideologies. Although in a minority, the Lutheran doctrine and Protestant reform ideas found a toehold in Venice, blending into the very culture and society of the city.

It is this impact of Protestant doctrine that influenced Caravaggio's theatrical style, affecting him during his formative years as an art student in Venice. Caravaggio's desire for realistic paintings started in his early work, but grew after his relocation to Rome. This is due to the direct influence of Post-Tridentine Catholicism in Rome through his patron, Cardinal Francesco Maria Del Monte. The religious tension between the Protestant and Catholic reformers sparked the darker, more dramatic scenes in Caravaggio's works, and also the varying intricacies of his own, unique style. The Biblical scenes chosen by patrons and the monumentality of Caravaggio's artwork indicate the influence of Counter-Reformation dogma, but the painfully realistic, emotionally charged, personal style demonstrates at least a partial influence of Protestant doctrine.

In *The Taking of Christ* and *The Denial of Peter*, Caravaggio depicted the scenes following the late sixteenth century Catholic practice of meditative thought. The viewer reflects on the agony exhibited by Christ and Peter in the nocturnal light, spiritually empathizing with the figures. However, it is this empathy and close relationship between the viewer and the figures in the works that spoke of Protestant influence. The expression and emotion captured by Caravaggio in these scenes emphasize the humanity of the characters. Protestant doctrine stressed the importance of remembering Christ as fully God and fully human at the same time, signifying his ability to understand and portray human emotion. *The Taking of Christ*

emphasized Christ's humanity as it focuses on the intense human emotions of grief and agony when one of his own disciples betrayed him and the others fled in fear. This expression of humanity forges an intimate connection between the viewer and Christ, one not encouraged in Catholic practices. In Catholic dogma, the priest or church father is necessary for building the relationship between people and Christ, interceding for those seeking forgiveness and salvation. By depicting Christ feeling human emotions, Caravaggio created the bond between the viewer and Christ, portraying Jesus as the intercessor between mankind and God, adhering to Protestant belief.

Caravaggio implemented similar emotions in his portrayal of St. Peter in *The Denial of Peter*. Catholicism believed Christ's words describing Peter as the rock on which he would build his church.[76] Peter became the foundation of the Christian church in Rome, later evolving into the Catholic Church. The Pope himself then is the head of the church and the heir to Peter. However, Caravaggio does not depict Peter as the strong leader of the faith but rather a small, elderly man, feeling intense shame and fright. As with his depiction of Christ, Caravaggio emphasized Peter's humanity, focusing on his weaknesses presented in the scene.

While it is clear the tense religious atmosphere of the sixteenth century influenced Caravaggio in terms of choice of subject matter, he was also greatly affected by the warring doctrines of the Protestant and Catholic reformers in the portrayal of these biblical subjects. Through the intense use of chiaroscuro, the religious tension and doctrinal conflict of his day is most clearly evidenced in the

[76] Matthew 16:18.

emotional and dramatic portrayal in Caravaggio's nocturnes. The realness of the emotions depicted by Caravaggio counteracts the artificial quality created by the dramatically staged scenes, and is what eventually created problems for him with the hierarchy of the Catholic Church.

VI. Conclusion

> How the eye cannot discern the shapes of bodies within their boundaries except by means of shadows and lights; and there are many sciences which would be nothing without the science of these shadows and lights: as painting, sculpture, astronomy, a great part of perspective and the like.[77]

Italian Renaissance master Leonardo da Vinci observed the function of light and darkness in the ability to perceive human forms. What Leonardo observed in life, Caravaggio explored in his art to the extreme, not only using light and darkness to accurately depict the human form, but the reality of humanity as well. Using his dramatic chiaroscuro, Caravaggio sought to portray a heightened sense of reality with a hyper-realistic painting style, truthfully relating the "reality" of the human condition. This idea of truthfulness combined with the artificialness of Caravaggio's nocturnes creating a frightening impression of artificial reality. The heavy darkness and harsh lighting of his night scenes exposed the reality of humanity in a false, theatrical type setting, creating a sense of unease. Caravaggio's usage of dramatic lighting influenced contemporaries and other artists of the seventeenth century to imitate his theatrical style. Many of the Caravaggisti continued depicting the nocturne genre utilizing the concept of artificial lighting popularized by Caravaggio, either the theatrical spotlight favored by Caravaggio or the more insulated candlelight.

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[77] Leonardo Da Vinci, *On Painting, A Lost Book,* (Los Angeles, Ca.: University of California Press, 1964), 16.

This weighted darkness and theatrical use of artificial light exposed the truth and weakness of humanity, tantalizing and disturbing viewers. It is this uneasy feeling caused by overly dark images that caused the nocturne to remain a small percentage of art created in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Art historians acknowledge Caravaggio and the Caravaggisti's experimental nocturnal depictions and darkened scenes but fail to take into account the sudden appearance of this genre. While the genre remained small, its appearance is significant in the implications it suggests about the culture of the time and the audience that desired and consumed these works. The nocturnal genre developed by Caravaggio and his predecessors suggests a culture shifting towards drama and tension exemplified by the harsh contrast between light and darkness. Understanding the seemingly sudden appearance of the nocturne, and its popularity into the seventeenth century would provide greater insights into the culture of that time and society's influence on art.

Figures

Fig. 1
Antonio Allegri Corregio
Judith with Her Maideservant Abra
1510-1512

Fig. 2
Andrea Mantegna
Judith and Holofernes
1495

Fig. 3
Bassano Workshop
Christ Praying in the Garden of Gethsemane
1570

Fig. 4
Jacopo Bassano
Deposition of Christ
1575

Fig. 5
Titian
The Deposition of Christ in the Tomb
1559

Fig. 6
Caravaggio
Martha and Mary Magdalene
1598

Fig. 7
Caravaggio
Judith Beheading Holofernes
1598-99

Fig. 8
Caravaggio
The Taking of Christ
1603

Fig. 9
Caravaggio
The Denial of Peter
1610

Fig. 10
Adam Elsheimer
Judith Beheading Holofernes
1601-03

Fig. 11
Adam Elsheimer
The Flight into Egypt
1609

Fig. 12
Artemisia Gentileschi
Judith Slaying Holofernes (Naples)
1614-20

Fig. 13
Artemisia Gentileschi
Judith and her Maidservant with the Head of Holofernes
1625

Fig. 14
Artemisia Gentileschi
Judith Slaying Holofernes (Florence)
1620-21

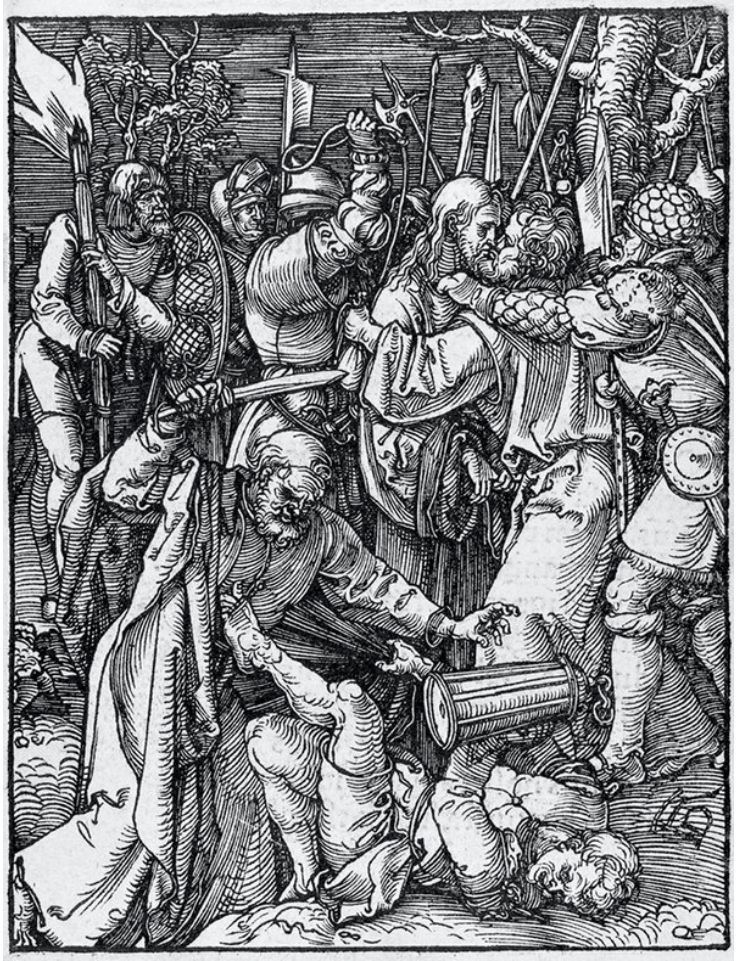

Fig. 15
Albrecht Durer
The Taking of Christ
1509

Fig. 16
Caravaggio
The Deposition
1600-04

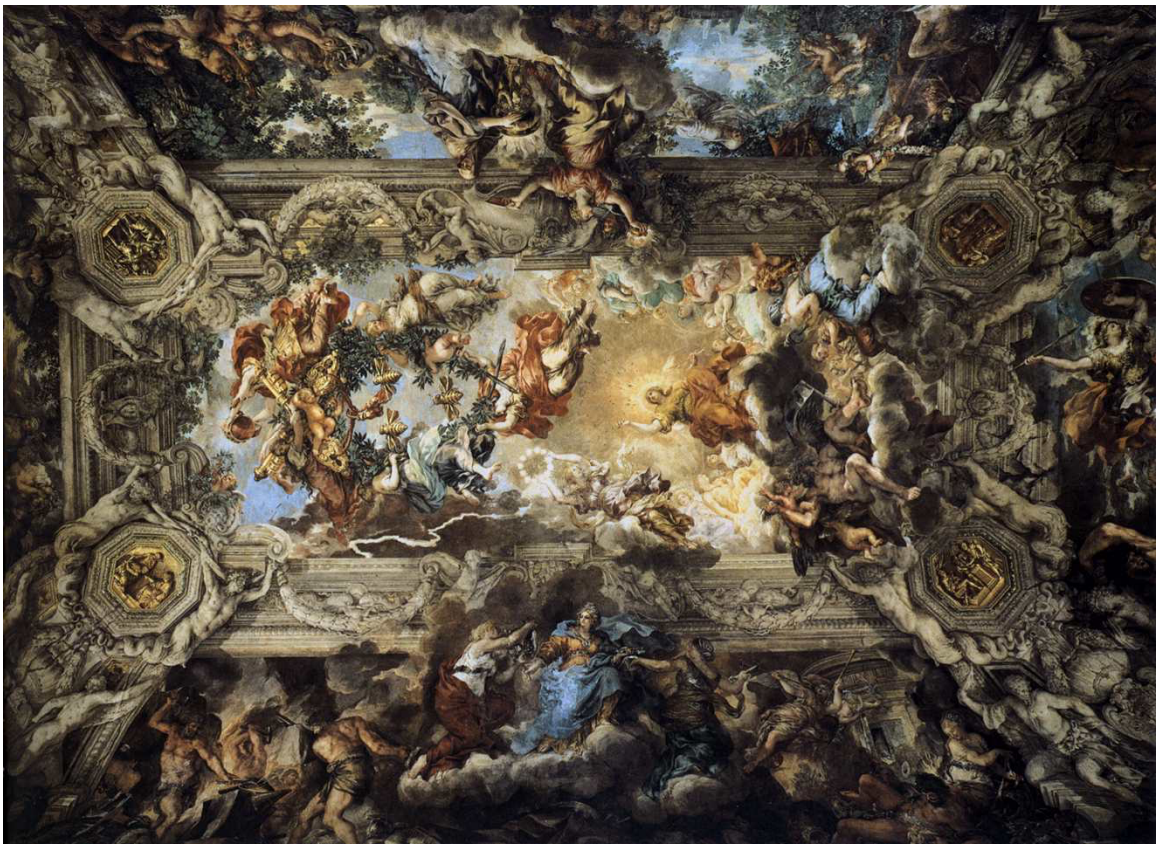

Fig. 17
Pietro da Cortona
The Triumph of Divine Providence
1633-39

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