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### Thomas, Troy. Caravaggio and the Creation of Modernity

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translation, these texts engage the reader in their gripping tales of suffering in love.

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**Thomas, Troy.**

***Caravaggio and the Creation of Modernity.***

London: Reaktion Books, 2016. Pp. 272 + 67 colour ill. ISBN 978-1-78023-676-6 (hardcover) US\$22.

This richly illustrated volume, organized both chronologically and thematically, is a comprehensive examination of the life and career of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio. In particular, Troy Thomas's treatment of Caravaggio's mature Roman period (1599–1606) offers a detailed investigation of the compositional innovation of Caravaggio's work that has distinguished his unique style and established his reputation as a master of modernity.

Thomas's book identifies a major compositional innovation of Caravaggio's work: uncompromising realism. Although a formulaic pattern of representation was often used in pre-modern religious painting, Caravaggio deliberately avoided traditional religious visual rhetoric. In approaching art from an unconventional angle, Caravaggio could reimagine almost any religious narrative as a genre scene. This novel approach to subject matter is best illustrated in his *Penitent Magdalene* (ca. 1595–96). In the sixteenth-century, Mary Magdalene was customarily painted nude and with a religious accessory. Yet Caravaggio, departing from traditional Magdalene iconography, painted the Christian figure as an ordinary and modest woman in contemporary dress. Sitting before an ointment jar and jewellery, she is the visual realization of a scene from a religious text recast as a living drama.

Caravaggio's keen sense of realism is further evidenced in his *Calling of St. Matthew* (1599–1600). Here again, we see how a religious drama is imaginatively reinterpreted as a contemporary event. Since the conceptualization of a sacred event from an earthly and realistic view was widely recognized as new at the time, Thomas has argued that Caravaggio was successful in introducing modernity and sophistication to his work while simultaneously transforming

the practice and experience of visual art. Through the medium of painting, Caravaggio stimulated his viewers' thoughtful curiosity and invited them to contemplate humankind's relationship with the divine.

Another important innovation discussed in the text is Caravaggio's initiation of emphasis on humanity over divinity in art. The origin of this innovation, which is uncovered in Thomas's study of the artist's relationship to religion, philosophy, and science, is rooted in Caravaggio's conviction that divine nature is unknowable. The belief that humankind is isolated in a world removed from heaven—that we are limited in our understanding of God—compelled Caravaggio to approach religious subject matter from a deeply human perspective.

Naturally, this viewpoint precluded Caravaggio from depicting the heavenly world in his work. However, it allowed the artist to explore his personal understanding of divine nature through an innovative use of dramatic light and shade. Use of a tenebrous void to represent the mystery of divinity was not a common feature of pre-modern painting. The appearance of a dark space in Caravaggio's *Martyrdom of St. Matthew* (1599–1600) and *Entombment of Christ* (1602–04) thus expanded the repertoire of religious imagery in the early modern period.

The third and most fascinating compositional innovation examined in this book is Caravaggio's use of ambiguous and enigmatic expressiveness. Indeed, Thomas considers it to be the most salient feature of the artist's modernity. We learn that although the Caravaggisti were unable to replicate this pictorial innovation in their work, it can be found in modern art in the ambivalent expressiveness of Courbet's plebeian subject matter.

By capturing the psychology of men and women directly from life, and avoiding the stock emotional expressiveness of past art, Caravaggio created art with intelligence. Of course, complex art existed before Caravaggio: Botticelli's *Primavera* (1477–82) and Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* (1535–41) are exemplary of early modern multi-interpretational art. However, Thomas has argued that in the pre-modern period, Caravaggio was singular in creating progressive and dynamic art. By including the poor and the wealthy, the spiritual and the secular, and the negative and the positive in his work, Caravaggio heightened the role of his viewer, who was now made to study a work to uncover and interpret any religious significance and cryptic expressiveness that may have been invested therein.

Caravaggio is often celebrated for his use of realism and tenebrism. However, this book has effectively demonstrated that one must look beyond heightened naturalism and pronounced chiaroscuro to fully appreciate the ground-breaking work that Caravaggio produced during his short and turbulent career. Highlighting compositional opposition and ambiguity in Caravaggio's work has allowed Thomas to shed light on the artist's ingenuity and sustained influence. This book is both well written and well documented, and is an excellent read for those looking to broaden their understanding of Michelangelo Merisi as a man, a master painter, and a revolutionary whose personal manner of making intellectually and sensually engaging art helped lay the foundation for painting in the modern age.

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**Trapnel, Anna.**

***Anna Trapnel's Report and Plea; or, A Narrative of Her Journey from London into Cornwall.* Ed. Hilary Hinds.**

The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series 48 / Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 503. Toronto: Iter Press / Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2016. Pp xv, 155. ISBN 978-0-86698-558-1 (paperback) US\$34.95.

*Anna Trapnel's Report and Plea; or, A Narrative of Her Journey from London into Cornwall*, published as a volume in the well-received Toronto series *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe*, definitely positions Trapnel as a significant "other voice." Editor Hilary Hinds, professor of English at Lancaster University (UK), has published widely on seventeenth-century radical religious women writers, including an edition of Trapnel's *The Cry of a Stone*, which relates her prophecies predicting Oliver Cromwell's downfall and the restoration of the English monarchy. The most famous of these prophecies, spoken during her eleven-day trance in a public eating house in the London district of Whitehall in January 1654, imprints Cromwell's face upon the leader of a herd of cattle charging Trapnel to place "his horn to my breast."