

BARTOLOMEO CAVAROZZI circle of

Boy Bitten by a Crab
Oil on canvas, 65 x 49 cm

PROVENANCE

Private Collection, United States.

EXHIBITION

Caravaggio and his Time: Friends, Rivals and Enemies, Tokyo, The National Museum of Western Art, 1 March 2016 - 12 June 2016, exh. cat., pp. 76-77, cat. n. 8 as attributed to Pietro Paolini.

LITERATURE

A. G. de Marchi in *Lights and shadows, Caravaggism in Europe*, exh. cat. edited by V. Rossi and M. di Martino, Lampronti Gallery, London, 29 June - 31 July 2015, p. 30 cat. n. 8.

The playful subject of a youthful boy bitten by a crab achieved relative success in Rome and Florence during the early half of the seventeenth century. This subject allowed painters to portray their models with extreme and theatrical expressions, an attractive feature among the followers of Caravaggio. In this painting, the youthful man is shown bitten by a crab although the same subject can be presented bitten by other smaller creatures, based on a formula conceived by Caravaggio in his early painting of a *Boy Bitten by a Lizard*, known in two versions, at the Fondazione Longhi and the National Gallery, London (fig. 1-2). There are many ways of reading the ambiguous choice of subject matter; an allusion to the Sorrows of Life is the most convincing one.

Although modern viewers might find this subject unusual, surviving inventories record many paintings of this type in notable early modern collections. For example, a painting recorded among the possessions of the Cardinal Carlo Barberini in 1663 was " *Un' quadro in tela con 2 figure, frutti, et un' grancio attaccato ad un' dito, alto p.mi 3 1/4 e largo p.mi 4 1/2...*"¹ while the Roman inventory of Giuseppe Pignatelli registered in 1647 records a similar painting as stated in f. 294v: " *Una testa d'un buffone con un granchio che li morde cornice indorata di Carlo Piamontese alto p.mi...*"² The latter painting is attributed to the hand of the Piedmontese painter Carlo Battaglia, also known as Paiola. Little is known today of this painter, who specialised in miniature bird paintings, yet he must also have experimented with this genre of portraiture.

The technical mastery of the present painting evokes the name of Bartolomeo Cavarozzi's among the circle of better-known painters of Caravaggio's school, although it should be noted that his artistic output has yet to be categorised.³ The attribution of this painting remains therefore open to debate: certain features can be traced in the works of the so-called RG Monogrammist, a very complex personality whose works were sometimes attributed to other artists. This issue can be applied to a *Vanitas* in La Spezia (Lia Museum, inv. 42), cautiously attributed by Zeri and myself to a Sienese master, Pietro Paolini (fig. 2).⁴ Consequently, *Boy bitten by a crab* could be referred to an artist from a broad artistic *milieu* situated in Low Tuscany or Lazio, and dated from around 1620/25. Among the

1 The head of a fool with a crab that is biting him, and a gilded frame by Carlo Piamontese; height p. mi..

2 A painting on canvas with two figures, fruits, and a crab attached to a figure; height 3 ¼ p.mi and wide 4 ½ p.m.

3 See *David* of unknown location attributed to the artist by G. Papi in *The first "Aminta's lament" ...*, in *Paragone*, 2008, 685, table 24.

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artists from this region, Cavarozzi was well esteemed, and thus based on stylistic evidence the present painting can tentatively be attributed to his circle.

The state of conservation is good.

Andrea G. De Marchi

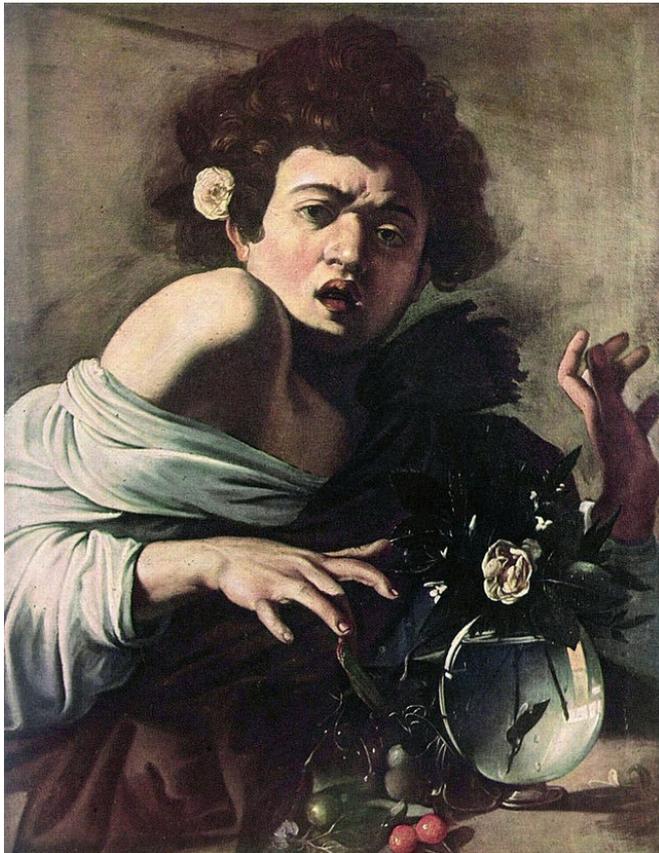


Fig. 1 Caravaggio, *Boy bitten by a lizard*, oil on canvas, cm 65.8 x 52.3, Longhi Collection, Florence.

4 F. Zeri, A.G. De Marchi, *La Spezia. Museo Civico Amedeo Lia. Paintings*, Cinisello Balsamo, Milan 1997, n°184.

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Fig. 2 Caravaggio, *Boy bitten by a lizard*, oil on canvas, cm 66 x 49.5, National Gallery, London.

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Fig. 3 P. Paolini (?), *Vanitas*, oil on canvas, cm 96 x 71, Museo Civico Adameo Lia, La Spezia.