'Their eyes were opened, and they knew him: A study of narrative and temporal ambiguity in Caravaggio and Rembrandt's 'Supper at Emmaus'.

'What unites Rembrandt and Caravaggio...in their very different worlds of Protestant Holland and Counter-Reformation Italy, is the success of their quests to find pictorial solutions to express the great themes of humanity'.

Duncan Bull, Caravaggio-Rembrandt (Zwolle, 2006)

The 2006 exhibition *Rembrandt-Caravaggio*, organised by the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, sought to revive the artistic parity granted to Caravaggio and Rembrandt in the eighteenth century.² The works of 'the Rembrandt of Italy' were paired alongside those of Rembrandt, 'said to be the Caravaggio from beyond the Alps', seeking to recover those characteristics common to the two artists.³ This exhibition, the first to bring together works of the two seventeenth-century masters, emphasised both artists' matchless realism and consummate handling of light and dark, to create works of deep, emotional penetration.4 While the dominant view indeed remains that the artists are united principally by their employment of strong chiaroscuro, Bull briefly considers that Rembrandt's paintings display 'an uncertainty, or ambiguity...as to the actual subjects that is not dissimilar to that surrounding Caravaggio's'. This claim is here advanced further: ambiguity, not merely chiaroscuro, is a unifying characteristic of Rembrandt and Caravaggio's paintings. By analysing and comparing the artists' construction of narrative in their first versions of the Supper at Emmaus, in light of the religious contexts of their creation, this study examines Duncan's perception that the artists, from their respective climates of Protestant Holland and Counter-Reformation Italy, can be united by their 'quests to find pictorial solutions to express the great themes of humanity', one of which is ambiguity. 6 It will reveal that only the viewer can resolve the ambiguity of these two paintings, and their fluctuation between revelation and obscurity, presence and absence.

The Supper at Emmaus

Both Caravaggio and Rembrandt returned to represent the gospel story of the Supper at Emmaus more than once, to which ambiguity is intrinsic. Saint Luke narrates:

"Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything

¹ D. Bull et al.: Caravaggio-Rembrandt, Zwolle 2006, p. 23.

² The exhibition was organised to commemorate the four-hundredth anniversary of Rembrandt's birth

³ 'il Rembrante dell'Italia', F. Algarotti: *Saggio sopra la pittura*, Bologna 1762, p. 167; 'detto da alcuni il Caravaggio degli Oltremontani', L. Lanzi: *La Real Galleria di Firenze*, Florence 1782, p. 139 (my own translations).

⁴ Bull et al., op. cit. (note 1), p. 20.

⁵ Bull et al., *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 18.

⁶ Bull et al., op. cit. (note 1), p. 23.

that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. [...] As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, 'Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.' So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?' They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, 'It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.' Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread."⁷

In this account, ambiguity is rooted in the disciples' failure to recognise Christ, until His revelation as a Divine presence in the bread. Divine ambiguity is also tacit in the disciples' ability to sense Christ in the burning of their hearts, though they remain incapable of perceiving Him as a visible presence. The inherent ambiguity of this gospel account and Christ's mysterious nature are most successfully made manifest in both artists' first rendition of the narrative: Caravaggio's 1601 Supper at Emmaus (Fig.1), now at the National Gallery in London, and Rembrandt's c.1628 version (Fig.2), at the Musée Jacquemart-André in Paris. While Caravaggio's painting compositionally attends to Luke's narrative, Lorenzo Pericolo discusses how it is an "unheard-of kind of pictorial narrative [...] that structurally incorporates ambivalence and subjectivity."8 Christ is placed centrally at the table, alongside the two disciples, and raises His hand in a gesture of blessing. However, the conventionally-bearded Christ is replaced with a beardless youth and a fourth figure is also included: an innkeeper who looks on at Christ, seemingly oblivious to the Divine revelation. Caravaggio's Christ makes a single gesture of blessing, but the bread in front of him is already broken. The right disciple's outstretched arms and the frozen, clenched pose of the second indicate that recognition is taking or has taken place, generating the same temporal ambivalence. 10 Concurrently, the innkeeper remains composed; his expression remains oblivious and unaware of the occurring miracle. Rembrandt's version, in contrast, presents a starkly silhouetted profile view of the main subject. Light emanates from Christ, rendering the seated disciple's recognition unmistakable. The second disciple kneels at Christ's feet, completely submerged in darkness. Christ simultaneously appears to emerge from and disappear into darkness: either Christ reveals his identity by virtue of the disciples' recognition, or this revelation

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⁷ Luke 24:13-35 (New International Version).

⁸ L. Pericolo. 'Appearance and Disappearance: On Caravaggio's London "Supper at Emmaus"', The Art Bulletin Vol.89, no. 3, (September, 2007), p. 519.

⁹ Charles Scribner identifies the third bystander as the innkeeper. He argues that the innkeeper's covered head reveals that he is excluded from Christ's miraculous revelation and remains oblivious to Christ's identity, in C. Scribner III: 'In Alia Effigie: Caravaggio's London Supper at Emmaus', *The Art Bulletin* Vol. 59, no. 3, (September, 1977), pp. 375-382.

¹⁰ Luke 24:18 names one of the disciples as Cleopas, the other remains unidentified. The left disciple has traditionally been identified as Cleopas; Walter Friedlander identifies the right disciple as Simon Peter. This corresponds to the outstretched position of the figure's arms that prefigure his, Peter's, own crucifixion, in W. Friedlander, *Caravaggio Studies*, Princeton 1974, pp. 164-167.

has already occurred, and Christ is vanishing. Pericolo points out how Christ seems to disappear *while* breaking the bread on his lap, and as the apostle kneels at his feet, recognising him "even before the epiphany is completely fulfilled." In both paintings, Christ is portrayed outside the iconographic norm; Rembrandt's use of chiaroscuro and Caravaggio's transformation of Christ's face into a beardless, mask-like perfection conceive a figure perched on the boundary between revelation and concealment, creating uncertainty over the narrative moment depicted. ¹² This essay will explore the significance of these visual and temporal ambiguities for the exegesis of the Emmaus narrative.

Such temporal ambiguities are harder to find in the artists' subsequent painting representation of the same narrative, either in Caravaggio's 1606 version (Fig.3) or Rembrandt's 1648 painting (Fig.4). In both later versions, Christ, His disciples and the innkeeper, are depicted around the table engaged totally and exclusively in the moment of Christ's blessing. The artists no longer rely on vivid gestures to highlight the disciples' shock at the Divine revelation. In Rembrandt's 1648 painting, the disciples react to Christ in more serene astonishment, as also implied by the soft aura of light around Christ's head. Christ himself gazes upwards, suggesting a more spiritual, and less forceful, theophany. Caravaggio's second version equally favours a much more contemplative atmosphere. All additional details, objects, and colour have been removed to maintain only the essential, with Christ's gesture of blessing remaining the painting's absolute focal point. The traditional, easily recognisable, bearded Christ has returned, to whose revelation the disciples react with a softer sentimentality. Most significantly, in both later versions, Christ, his disciples, and the innkeeper are depicted around the table engaged totally and exclusively in the moment of either Christ's blessing or breaking. The disciples in both paintings react expressively in recognition, while the innkeeper maintains his usual state of unawareness. There is no temporal chasm between Christ's actions and the respective reactions of the bystanders; their responses are clear and coherent, generating no ambivalence over the moment depicted. Caravaggio's disciples react at the same time: one with a hand gesture and the other by furrowing his forehead. Equally, the subtle hand movements of Rembrandt's two disciples indicate that both have recognised Christ. Rather than depicting the figures in multiple states of awareness, as occurs in both artists' first painted versions, both have chosen a single moment of revelation to both disciples. This essay explores why the painters chose to convey the crucial moment of the narrative as multiple stages of realisation and acceptance in their first versions, and how the ambiguous structure of narrative in the two early paintings mirrors and makes present to the beholder the Divine mystery that is the crux of the Emmaus gospel narrative.

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¹¹ Pericolo, *op. cit* (note 8), pp. 521-522.

¹² Judith Levy has explored the boundary between presence and absence in Caravaggio's *Supper at Emmaus* in terms of finding and loss, invoking the Lacanian notion of the Real to suggest that Caravaggio's painting simultaneously captures the re-discovery of God and implicates separation from Him through His disappearance. See J. Levy: 'Between Presence and Absence: Caravaggio's *The Supper at Emmaus*', in L. Boldt-Irons et al.: *Images and imagery: frames, borders, limits: interdisciplinary perspective*, New York 2005, pp. 267-277.

Atemporal or narrative?

'Istoria without any action whatsoever'. 13 Giovanni Pietro Bellori, Caravaggio's biographer, thus characterised Caravaggio's narrative paintings: action is absent, yet they reveal powerful naturalistic and mimetic skills. Svetlana Alpers sustains Bellori's sixteenth-century view, arguing that Caravaggio's works display a 'combination of an attention to imitation or description with a suspension of narrative action'. ¹⁴ For Alpers, a realistic depiction of the exterior world is only achieved through sacrifice of action, which gives paintings a frozen pictorial quality. 15 Louis Marin examines this notion of suspended action more extensively, arguing that, specifically in Caravaggio's narrative paintings, temporality 'has been reduced to the intensity of a single instantaneous impression'. 16 He explains that Caravaggio's spatial construction consists of a dark background and an intense use of light, which only picks up and projects forward certain elements of the composition into the viewer's space. Thus, according to Marin, the painter presents a series of symbolic moments rather than a narrative which unfolds before the viewer.¹⁷ These moments are 'seized the way a snapshot instantaneously captures a flash of a second...the action is immobilised and made into a statue'. 18 Judith Levy's discussion of the boundary between presence and absence in Caravaggio's Supper at Emmaus, in fact, argues that the artist has intentionally suspended action, at the instant either before or after the blessing, due to the impossibility of capturing the sequential moments of the evolving narrative.¹⁹ Modern scholarship has thus equated Caravaggio's realism and suspension of action to photography – an instantaneous, mimetic representation of the exterior world.

This modernist identification of mirror-like realism with photography is deeply misleading for interpretation of both artists, although Caravaggio's distinctively smooth surface facture permits such an analogy. For modern beholders whose perception is conditioned by photography, Caravaggio's smooth paint application (Fig.5) appears to negate its own existence as a painted surface, and so also negates an authorial presence. The painting rejects the temporal act of its making and so equates itself to a snapshot, an atemporal mimesis of the exterior world. However, as Pousao-Smith has shown, the equation of smooth or 'neat' painting to atemporality is an inherently modern concept. Alpers considers Rembrandt's coarse, impastoed paint application (Fig.6), in contrast to Caravaggio's, as 'substantial (or "rough")...[which] calls attention to itself as a work done in the studio'. This categorical distinction between two modes of paint application

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¹³ 'historia è affatto senza attione', G. Pietro Bellori: *Le vite de 'pittori, scultori et architetti moderni,* Rome 1672), p. 207 (my own translation).

¹⁴ S. Alpers: 'Describe or Narrate? A Problem in Realistic Representation', *New Literary History* Vol. 8, no. 1 (Autumn, 1976), p. 15.

¹⁵ S. Alpers: *The Art of Describing: Dutch art in the Seventeenth Century*, London 1983, pp. xx-xxi.

¹⁶ L. Marin: *To Destroy Painting*, trans. M. Hjort, Chicago 1995, p. 161.

¹⁷ Marin, op. cit. (note 16), pp. 162-164.

¹⁸ Marin, *op. cit.* (note 16), p. 163.

¹⁹ Levy, *op. cit* (note 10), pp. 267-277.

²⁰ Maria-Isabel Pousão-Smith: 'Concepts of brushwork in Northern and Southern Netherlands in the seventeenth century', unpublished Ph.D diss. (Courtauld Institute of Art, 1998), pp. 25-44.

²¹ S. Alpers: *Rembrandt's Enterprise: The Studio and the Market*, London 1988, p. 29.

prevailed in seventeenth century art theory: Karel van Mander, in *Het Schilder-boek* (1604), explicitly distinguished between 'net oft rouw' (neat or rough) painting.²²

Modernist perceptions of surface facture have, however, convoluted such a categorisation to the degree that smooth painting is regarded as a denial of the act of painting, whereas rough painting asserts the canvas as a painted surface.²³ In *Modernist Painting* (1961), Clement Greenberg affirmed Modernism's self-critical enterprise by arguing that 'each art had to determine, through its own operations and works, the effects exclusive to itself.'²⁴ Painting, to distinguish itself from other media, had to exhibit the characteristics intrinsic to itself, including the declaration of surface facture. Pre-modern painters had, according to Greenberg, dismissed such qualities for fear of subverting painting's illusion of three-dimensional space.²⁵ Modern artists were now stimulated to experiment and revise the potential of paint application; the acknowledgement of a painting's material surface texture was encouraged as it simultaneously addressed the limitations and essence of the self-definition of paint as an artistic medium.²⁶ This modernist call for painting to assert itself as a material, painted surface has produced an anachronistic interpretation of van Mander's distinction between smooth and rough painting.

Alpers' perception that in Rembrandt's paintings, 'the visual presence of the paint interferes with...the implicit access to the surfaces of the world', is a result of Greenberg's modernist exegesis.²⁷ The notion that Rembrandt's painting asserts its status as a physical, painted surface counteracts the atemporality of Caravaggio's works. Rough painting reiterates the presence of a maker and infers a temporal process of creation. The perception emerges, therefore, that Rembrandt's painting has an inscribed temporality, whilst Caravaggio's approximates an instantaneous 'snapshot'. The repercussion of this is that modern scholars, such as Marin and Alpers, acknowledge the narrative capability of Rembrandt's Supper at Emmaus but reduce Caravaggio's scene to the representation of a suspended moment, failing to regard it as an unfolding narrative. Alpers argues that Rembrandt's 'figures and objects, which appear to emerge into the light from the obscured, darker surroundings, are bound in an extraordinary way to the paint surface'.²⁸ This perception closely aligns with Marin's view that Caravaggio's chiaroscuro allows certain elements of his paintings to be pushed forward. The emerging attitude is, therefore, that Rembrandt's figures are anchored within the painted surface, where they re-assert its materiality. Rembrandt's act of representation occurs within the pictorial space; Caravaggio's smooth painting, in contrast, detaches his figures from the painted surface to encourage representation to occur *outside* of the canvas.

Marin's perception is challenged by Samuel van Hoogstraten's 1678 treatise on painting, which sustains van Mander's distinction between smooth and rough painting. Van Hoogstraten further acknowledged that smooth painting is important 'in the spatial articulation of the image, an uneven paint facture making objects advance and a smooth

²² K. van Mander: *Het Schilder-boek*, Haarlem 1603-1604, fol.47v-48v, stanza 27, trans. in Pousão-Smith, *op. cit.* (note 20), p. 8.

²³ Pousão-Smith, *op. cit.* (note 20), p. 33.

²⁴ C. Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting', in F. Frascina, C. Harrison and D. Paul ed: *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, London, 1982, p. 5.

²⁵ Greenberg, *op. cit.* (note 24), pp. 5-10.

²⁶ Pousão-Smith, *op. cit.* (note 20), p. 28.

²⁷ Alpers, *op. cit.* (note 21), p. 14.

²⁸ Alpers, *op. cit.* (note 21), pp. 14-33.

paint application making them recede'.²⁹ His view that a smooth painting creates an *internal* representation, into which the viewer is invited, counteracts Marin, who has equated the mirror-like realism of smooth painting to an instantaneous, *outward* projecting representation. A discord thus emerges between seventeenth-century and modern scholarship, attributable to modern familiarity with photography as a mimetic form of representation and modernist definitions of what painting should aspire towards. Such contention reveals the degree to which the authority of modern scholarship has subverted interpretations of Caravaggio and Rembrandt. This essay seeks to challenge such modernist anachronisms. Examination of the narrative strategies employed by both artists will now proceed from visual analysis, alongside an appreciation of the religious contexts of their creation.

Emmaus and the Eucharist

Whilst Caravaggio's 1601 Supper at Emmaus is grounded in Counter-Reformation Rome, Rembrandt's later 1628 version is rooted within the Reformed, Protestant tradition, as Calvinism was the official faith of the Dutch Republic.³⁰ The positions of the two paintings on different sides of the Western religious schism, which erupted in and disrupted the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, goes some way to explain the artists' construction and dislocation of the Emmaus biblical narrative through the employment of visual and temporal ambiguities. Discrepancies between Catholic and Calvinist teachings on the importance of the sacraments have impacted the artists' construction of narrative. The catechism of the Catholic Church institutes the existence of seven sacraments: Baptism, the Eucharist, Confirmation, Penance, Matrimony, Holy orders and anointing the sick.³¹ In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin instead affirms only two sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper (communion).³² While neither artist directly depicted the Last Supper, attitudes towards communion are of paramount importance to the Emmaus narrative, in which Christ replicated his actions from the Last Supper – the blessing and breaking of bread. In response to the Protestant Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church re-asserted the sacramental doctrine of the ecumenical Council of Trent (1545-1563). The conciliar decrees re-affirmed transubstantiation, wherein 'by the consecration of the bread and of the wine, a conversion is made of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of His blood'.³³ In his Short Treatise on the Lord's Supper, Calvin rather denies Christ's corporeal

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²⁹ 'Ik zeg dan, dat alleen de <u>kenlijkheyt</u> de dingen naby doet schijnen te zijn, en daer en tegen de <u>egaelheyt</u> de dingen doet wechwijken: daerom wil ik, datmen 't geen voorkomt, rul en wakker aensmeere, en 't geen weg zal wijken, hoe verder en verder, netter en zuiverder handele. Noch deeze noch geene verwe zal uw werk doen voorkomen of wechwijken, maer alleen de <u>kenlijkheyt</u> of <u>onkenlijkheyt</u> der deelen', Samuel van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderkonst* (Rotterdam, 1678), p.307, trans. in Pousão-Smith, *op. cit.* (note 16), p.11.

³⁰ S. Perlove and L. Silver: *Rembrandt's Faith: Church and Temple in the Dutch Golden Age*, University Park Pennsylvania 2009, pp. 17-18.

³¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1210,

http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p2s2.htm, accessed on 10/4/2018.

³² J. Calvin: *Institutes of the Christian Religion: The First English version of the 1541 French Edition*, trans. E. Anne McKee, Grand Rapids Michigan 2009, pp. 495-584.

³³ J. Waterworth ed. and trans.: *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent*, London 1848, p. 78. These decrees were from 1551.

presence in the bread: he sustains that the bread and wine are "visible signs" of Christ's body and blood, but that transubstantiation "has no foundation in Scripture, nor any evidence from the ancient church." Calvin's understanding of sacraments as "visible signs" accepts the bread and wine as more than symbolic of Christ's body and blood, but rejects their physical transformation. Instead, he maintains that Christ's "body is contained in heaven where it was received until he will come for judgement." The role of the Holy Spirit is rather emphasised, who "is like a canal or channel by which all that Christ is and possesses comes down to us." The focus is therefore on a *spiritual* rather than *physical* engagement with Christ.

In the Catholic tradition, Augustine acknowledged the disciples' non-recognition of Christ at Emmaus as a justification for the sacramentality of the Eucharist. He instructs:

'where did the Lord wish to be recognised? In the breaking of bread... It was for our sake that he didn't want to be recognised anywhere but there, because we weren't going to see him in the flesh, and yet we were going to eat his flesh...The Lord's absence is not an absence. Have faith, and the one you cannot see is with you.'³⁷

Augustine explained that the disciples only became one with Christ through the Eucharist; only in the Eucharist does His presence become material. The Emmaus story thus becomes a timeless expression of how faith in the Eucharist makes manifest Christ's Divine presence.

For Calvin, by contrast, the disciples' recognition of Christ was not bound to the breaking of bread, but came about because Christ 'employed his peculiar and ordinary form of prayer, to which he knew that the disciples had been habitually accustomed'. This suggest that it was the disciples' *memory* of the Lord's Supper that activated their recognition. Indeed, Calvin spoke of "spiritual eating", whereby the believers, only through faith, partake in the body and blood of Christ through the intercession of the Holy Spirit. He affirmed that "the flesh of Christ is eaten by believing, because it is made ours by faith, and that that eating is the effect and fruit of faith." The Supper at Emmaus, therefore, is not an expression of how Christ anachronistically becomes corporally present in the Eucharist, but how both this recognition of Christ and communion is given by grace of the Holy Spirit: the Spirit brings faith that conquers human inability to recognise Christ's presence. The Supper at Emmaus, therefore, is not an expression of how Christ anachronistically becomes corporally present in the Eucharist, but how both this

³⁷ Saint Augustine of Hippo, Sermon 235.3 in E. Hill trans. and J. E. Rotelle ed: *The works of Saint Augustine: a translation for the 21st century: Sermons III/7 (230-272B) on the liturgical seasons,* New Rochelle and New York 1993, p. 41. Saint Augustine was a Doctor of the Catholic Church, a title designated to those who made significant contributions to the interpretation of the Scriptures or to the development of doctrine.

³⁴ J. Calvin, "Short Treatise on the Lord's Supper (1541)" in John Kelman Sutherland Reid ed: *Calvin: Theological Treatises* Volume XXII, London 2000, p. 157.

³⁵ Calvin, *op. cit.* (note 32), Book IV, Chapter 12, p. 556.

³⁶ *Ibid*.

³⁸ J. Calvin: *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists: Volume 3*, trans. William Pringle, Edinburgh, 1846, p. 363.

³⁹ Calvin, op. cit. (note 32), Book IV, Chapter 12 "On the Lord's Supper".

⁴⁰ Calvin, op. cit. (note 32), Book IV, Chapter 12, p. 560.

recognition of Christ and communion is given by grace of the Holy Spirit; the Spirit conquers human inability to recognise Christ's presence.

Temporal ambiguity

According to Charles Scribner, Caravaggio deliberately removed all indicators of Christ's identity (Fig.7) to underscore the Catholic belief in Christ's corporeal identification in the Eucharist. Scribner argues that 'His hands have been placed in such a way that it is impossible to determine whether the wounds are there or not...Christ's face is not that of the Crucified...recognition, therefore, is the result of his gesture alone'. He further links Caravaggio's non-canonical Christ to the Gospel of Mark, which recounts that Christ appeared to his disciples 'in another form'. He Jesuit book of engravings, *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines* (1593), might have inspired Caravaggio to synthesise the Emmaus accounts of the two evangelists. This book, which pictorially represents Gospel narratives alongside meditative and explanatory inscriptions, served to evangelise and reinforce Catholic doctrine. The central scene of the Emmaus engraving (Fig.8) depicts Christ and the disciples at a table. Christ has blessed and broken the bread; it is now being distributed. Inscribed verses, from both Luke 24 and Mark 16, accompany the engraving, which is significant to Caravaggio's painting for two reasons. Firstly, it could have acted

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⁴¹ Scribner III, op. cit. (note 9), p. 379.

⁴² Scribner III, op. cit. (note 9), p. 378; 'In Alia Effigie', Mark 16:12 (NKJV).

⁴³ Friedlaender suggests that Caravaggio was aware of Jesuit practices and religious views because of their popularity in Rome. He does not, however, suggest a direct link between Caravaggio and the Jesuits, in Friedlaender, *op. cit.* (note 12), pp.117-135. Although the book was published in Antwerp, the Jesuit Curia and mother church were in Rome, so Jesuit publications would have been well-known there.

⁴⁴ H. Natali: Evangelicarum Historiae Imagines: ex ordine Euangeliorum quae toto anno in Missae sacrificio recitantur, in ordinem temporis vitae Christi digestae, Antwerp, 1593.

⁴⁵ Natali, op. cit. (note 38), pl. 141. The inscription has subdivided the gospel narrative into different steps A-K, which correspond to different sections of the engraving. These sections pictorially illustrate the sequence of the narrative. The inscription reads: 'A. Pergunt Hierosolymis Emaunta Cleophas & Amaon. B. Appropinquat Iesvs colloquentibus. C. Comitem se illis adiungit; tenentur oculi eorum, ne eum agnoseant; variè verbis suis illos permouet Iesvs, ardet eorum cor Iesvs se longius ire simulat. D. Persuadent illi, vt cum ipsis maneat. E. Emaus in tribu Beniamin sexaginta sta diis ab Hierusalem, quò vehementer rogant, vt secum diuertat. F. Domus Cleophae, quò deductus est Iesvus. G. Ibi recumbens cum illis, consecratum & fractum panem porrigens, ab oculis eorum euaneseit. H. Repleti dono et agnitione coelesti Iesvm agnoseunt, & quae ab eo in itinere audiuerant plenius intelligunt. I. Redeunt è vestigio Hierosolymam. K. Reperiunt congregatos vndecim, narrant quae gesserat Christus; audiunt eum Simoni apparuisse.' Translated as: A. Cleopas and Amaon are going from Gerusalemme to Emaus. B. Whilst they are talking amongst themselves, Jesus draws near to them. C. He joins them on their journey: although they see him, they do not recognise him. With His words Jesus moves their hearts in various ways. Their hearts burn. Jesus indicates that he wants to leave and continue his journey further on. D. They persuade Him to stay with them. E. Emaus is in the Tribe of Benjamin, sixty stades from Jerusalem; there they implore Jesus to remain with them. F. Jesus allows them to lead him to Cleophas' house. G. Whilst at the table with them, and handing them the blessed and broken bread, He vanishes from their sight. H. Filled with celestial bounty and understanding they recognise Jesus & understand better what they had heard throughout the journey. I. At that point they leave for Jerusalem. K. They find the eleven apostles gathered together; they tell them of the things Jesus had done. They hear that He had also appeared to Simon.' (my own translation).

as a precedent to Caravaggio's pictorial synthesis of the two textual narratives.⁴⁶ Secondly, the act of distribution of the bread foreshadows the administration of the Eucharist during Mass, highlighting, again, that the Emmaus narrative aims to underline the sacramentality of the Eucharist. Walter Friedlaender suggests that Caravaggio was familiar with Jesuit spirituality and religious practices, particularly Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, making it possible that he was directly introduced to the *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines*.⁴⁷

Heidi Hordnik and Mikael Parsons have re-emphasised how Caravaggio's representation of the scene does not wholly adhere to Luke's text, but he has attempted to synthesise the two gospel accounts to underscore the significance of the Eucharist. 48 They argue that Caravaggio has specifically dislocated the moment of Christ's recognition.⁴⁹ The sequence of Christ's actions at Emmaus, as narrated by Luke, can be divided into four significant gestures: 1. Christ takes the bread, 2. He blesses it, 3. He breaks it, 4. He gives it to the disciples. The textual narrative explicitly asserts that 'He was known to them in the breaking of bread', at Christ's third action. 50 In Caravaggio's painting, however, Christ's hand is raised in the act of blessing. The bread beneath his left hand already appears to be broken, unlike the loaf in front of Cleopas. Caravaggio has thus ruptured the temporal progression of the narrative. Christ simultaneously has and still has to break the bread, whilst the gestures of both disciples indicate that recognition is already taking place. Judith Levy argues that Caravaggio has intentionally suspended action at this instant either before or after the blessing because of his inability to capture the sequence of moments of the evolving narrative; she thus considers this iconographic deviation as intentional.⁵¹ Closer inspection, however, reveals that he has shifted the moment of recognition to one action earlier, to the act of blessing. Rather than representing the breaking of the bread as the most significant moment, which prefigures and affirms the liturgy of the Eucharist during mass, Caravaggio has moved the painting's emphasis to the moment of consecration, where Christ becomes corporeally manifest in the bread. Thus, by means of the Emmaus story, Caravaggio directly responds to the Counter-Reformation call to re-affirm transubstantiation as a dogma of faith.

That Caravaggio depicts the moment of blessing to re-assert the doctrine of transubstantiation does not, however, resolve the painting's temporal and visual ambiguities. Temporal incongruity is also perceptible in the reactions of the disciples. Luke's textual narrative speaks of *one* critical moment of recognition, in which *both* disciples perceived Christ's presence. In the painting, however, the disciple on the right appears to have already made that step of recognition. The figure's hands are outstretched as if in shock, yet his eyes do not appear as wide open in astonishment as Cleopas' on the

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⁴⁶ The link between Caravaggio's painting and *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines* was first suggested by Scribner in Scribner III, *op. cit.* (note 9), p. 379 and later re-iterated by Heidi Hornik and Mikael Parsons in H. J. Hornik and M. C. Parsons: 'The Supper at Emmaus by Caravaggio (Luke 24:13-35)' in *Illuminating Luke: The Passion and Resurrection Narratives in Italian Renaissance and Baroque Painting Vol.3*, London and New York 2007, pp. 129-130. I am further claiming that the Emmaus engraving acted as a pictorial precedent for Caravaggio's synthesis of the two gospel accounts.

⁴⁷ Friedlaender, *op. cit.* (note 12), pp. 117-35. See also Joseph F. Chorpenning, 'Another Look at Caravaggio and Religion', *Artibus et Historiae* 8, no. 16, 1987, pp. 149-158.

⁴⁸ Hornik and Parsons, *op. cit.* (note 46), pp. 128-132.

⁴⁹ Hornik and Parsons, op. cit. (note 46), p. 129.

⁵⁰ Luke 24:35.

⁵¹ Levy, *op. cit* (note 10), pp. 267-277.

left. His expression is of understanding; the position of his arms, in the form of a cross, purposefully suggests that he has already comprehended that it is the resurrected Christ in front of him. A further temporal gulf is thus created: between the shock of his body language and the comprehending expression of his face. By contrast, Cleopas, in contrast, to recognise fully. His brow is furrowed and his hands clench the chair, as though he is raising himself up to behold the scene more closely. However, this is a pose of reaction rather than understanding; Caravaggio insinuates an incomplete change. Meanwhile, the revelation has not yet completed the full circle of the table to reach the oblivious innkeeper. Such disparity in their reactions indicates that the painting does not depict that *single* moment of revelation in the blessing of the bread, as suggested by Hornik and Parsons. Rather, a temporal extension emerges.

The effect of such temporal disjunction is that the viewer is given scope to bring Christ and the Emmaus story into the present, into the now. The sequence of reactions of the figures allows a circular, sequential narrative to form within the single canvas, rather than the suspension of action as suggested by Levy.⁵² Christ blesses the bread, the right disciple has recognised this, Cleopas is about to recognise it, and the innkeeper still has to. The only missing pictorial moment in the sequence is the *present*, *instant* recognition, which corresponds to Christ's corporeal manifestation in the Eucharist. Caravaggio has left the reaction to Christ's manifestation now to the subjectivity of the viewer. Sheila McTighe has suggested that the fruit basket's "vulnerable position" on the edge of the table "creates a visual parallel to the immanent change in [the viewer's] view."⁵³ Pericolo further suggests that the image's "close-framing" and "centripetal" structure forces viewers to ostensibly focus "on their relationship to the blessing Jesus." ⁵⁴ By assuming the empty space at the table, they are encouraged to resolve the painting's ambiguities and experience, for themselves, the present recognition of Christ. Without the viewer's activation of the scene and their current awareness of Christ's presence, the narrative, as much as the Eucharist, remains a representation or a re-enactment of an already occurred event. Thus, Caravaggio's Supper at Emmaus exists not as a suspended moment, nor as a sequential narrative. The viewer's capacity to activate and re-activate the painting's narrative makes it anachronistic: in Philip Pfatteicher's words, 'Caravaggio portrayed not a static moment of time as it occurred a millennium and a half before, but rather a dynamic conjunction of moments, an intersection of past, present, and future, that lies outside of time'.55

Caravaggio's invitation for the viewer to undertake the step of recognition for themselves is further suggested through his use of light. The different degree of illumination of the figures' faces corresponds to their state of awareness. Christ's face also appears half in light, half in shadow, reflecting the viewer's split recognition of Him. The viewer can pictorially recognise the scene and its protagonists. Only the faithful,

⁵² Levy, op. cit (note 9), pp. 274-275. Levy argues that "the moment rendered is in fact one of a lack of action."

⁵³ S. McTighe: *Representing from Life in Seventeenth-century Italy,* Amsterdam 2020, p. 60. On the fruit basket see also Susanne J. Warma, "Christ, First Fruits, and the Resurrection: Observations on the Fruit Basket in Caravaggio's London 'Supper at Emmaus'", *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 53, no. 4 (1990), pp. 583-586.

⁵⁴ Pericolo, *op. cit* (note 8), pp. 532-532.

⁵⁵ P. H. Pfatteicher: 'Caravaggio's conception of time in his two versions of the 'Supper at Emmaus'', *Source: Notes in the History of Art* Vol. 7, no. 1, (Autumn 1987), p. 13.

however, can perceive the true significance of the scene as an expression of Christ's corporeal revelation in the Eucharist.

Similar temporal and visual ambiguities characterise Rembrandt's Supper at Emmaus. Christ again shares a meal with his disciples, as indicated by the pilgrim bag hanging on a nail above the seated figure. The rich tablecloth, the spread of food and the innkeeper from Caravaggio's painting are, however, all missing. Instead, a silhouetted woman works in the background, replacing the traditional oblivious innkeeper. Like Caravaggio's Cleophas, the seated disciple's left hand seems about to exteriorize his impending recognition, while the upturned chair in the foreground indicates that the second disciple has already made this step of awareness: he kneels at Christ's feet, cloaked in complete darkness, made almost indistinguishable from Christ's silhouette itself. The position of this second figure, with his upturned feet, likely derives from Caravaggio's Madonna di Loreto and Madonna of the Rosary; the latter painting was definitely in Amsterdam c. 1616 until at least 1619.56 Even if the young Rembrandt did not see this painting first-hand during this time, its composition would have been known to him thanks to a copy by Louis Finson, an art dealer and Caravaggio copyist.⁵⁷ Rembrandt's potential reference to Caravaggio's kneeling pilgrims might suggest that his figures are not necessarily distinct portrayals of the two Emmaus disciples, but representative of all pilgrims. Indeed, in stripping back all superfluous detail to only the essential features of the bread and bowls, Rembrandt appears to simultaneously dislocate the event from necessarily occurring in an inn, while also re-emphasising it as a simple, everyday scene from an inn. This possible dislocation and casting of the disciples as ordinary-seeming pilgrims, brings the event more believably into the viewer's reality, granting everyone the possibility to perceive Christ spiritually, if not physically. It also underlines the Reformed view of the existence of a temporal gap between Christ's revelation then and his spiritual perception now. This is achieved through Rembrandt's equally non-canonical portrayal of Christ. Christ is not depicted blessing or breaking the bread. As with Caravaggio, there is a temporal disjunction between the illuminated disciple's expression of recognition and the fact that the bread remains unbroken. Christ, rather than in action, is portrayed in profile, silhouetted by darkness. This manipulation of light heightens the ambivalence of the moment depicted, rendering it unclear whether Christ is still present, just silhouetted, or if Christ is disappearing. ⁵⁸ This stark transition from light to dark, and Christ's defined profile, conveys the idea of Christ's image being imprinted; Christ is a representation rather than a present, embodied entity. Christ's representation becomes sign of a referent that is elsewhere in time; it acknowledges the temporal gap between then at Emmaus and the now in front of the faithful viewer. This notion of Christ as representation harmonises with the Calvinist belief in Christ's spiritual, not corporeal, presence in the bread and reevokes Christ's words at The Lord's Supper: "do this in remembrance of Me." The breaking of bread becomes a memory of the Lord's Supper and thus Emmaus becomes a representation of that biblical event,

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⁵⁶ E. van de Wetering et al. eds: *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings, Vol. I 1625-1631,* The Hague 1982, p. 200; I. Schaudies, "Trimming Rubens' Shadow: New Light on the Mediation of Caravaggio in the Southern Netherlands", *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, vol. 55 (2004), pp. 353, note 89. See also W. Prohaska, "Untersuchungen zur 'Rozenkranzmadonna' Caravaggios", *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien,* Band 76 (1980), pp. 111-132.

⁵⁷ Schaudies, *op. cit.* (note 56), p. 353.

⁵⁸ Pericolo, *op. cit* (note 8), p. 522.

⁵⁹ Luke 22:19

rather than a present action. This aligns with Calvin's view that the disciples only recognised Christ through their memory of him previously breaking the bread.⁶⁰

Christ's spiritual presence and the conception of the Emmaus narrative as a memory of the Lord's Supper are further underscored by Rembrandt's stark chiaroscuro and rough painting, which allow the painting to evade any realistic detail and make the narrative appear almost transient. 61 A detailed depiction of Christ would be more akin to the Catholic notion of Christ as an embodied presence. Instead, Christ, submersed in darkness, appears to be floating rather than anchored within the pictorial space. The ephemerality of the narrative, which asserts Emmaus and the breaking of bread as a memory of a past event, is further suggested by Rembrandt's application of paint in rough, circular motions, which obstruct the vertical join of the walls, behind the central disciple (Fig.9). This same impastoed application of paint has created a cracking effect, in the bottom right-hand corner, which interrupts the verticality of the wooden planks of the walls behind Christ (Fig. 10). These interventions give the impression that the painting and narrative are slowly crumbling and vanishing, much like a transient memory and Christ himself after recognition⁶². These discernible brushstrokes act to remind the viewer that Christ is *spiritually* perceived. Rembrandt's rough painting thus allows this dislocation into the viewer's reality without completely occluding the temporal gap between then and now; his brushstrokes serve to weave together the present with the past as a memory.

Differences between Catholic and Reformed perceptions of Christ as embodied and *spiritual* presence can also be equated to differences in the viewing distances of rough and smooth painting. Vasari's perception of rough painting, unlike modern attitudes, is significant to the exegesis of Rembrandt's composition. Although commenting on Titian, Vasari writes: 'his last [works] are executed with broad brush-strokes and brush-marks, in such a way that they cannot be seen up close but appear perfect from afar.'63 For Vasari, rough painting is best seen from a distance, as it is more symbolic than definite; smooth painting is amenable to close-up viewing.⁶⁴ These respective viewing modalities complement disparities between Catholic and Reformed perceptions of Christ's divine presence in the bread. Rembrandt's viewer is detached and remains at a distance, whereas Caravaggio's viewer is up close, participating corporeally in the meal. The distance between Rembrandt's painting and his viewer corresponds to the temporal chasm between Christ's presence at Emmaus and His spiritual presence now. Equally, the intimacy between Caravaggio's painter and viewer harmonises with the Catholic occlusion of the gulf between past and present. The position of Caravaggio's viewer at the empty place at the table comes to embody their physical participation in the Eucharist

⁶⁰ Calvin, op. cit (note 38),p. 363.

⁶¹ On Rembrandt's rough painting see N. Suthor: *Rembrandt's Roughness*, Princeton and Oxford 2018.

⁶² Luke 24:31 recounts that Christ, as soon as the disciples recognised him, vanished from their sight.

⁶³ G. Vasari: *Vita di Tiziano*, ed. G. Milanesi, Pordenone 1994, p. 24, 'queste ultime, condotte di colpi, tirate via di grosso e con macchie, di maniera che da presso non si possono vedere, e di lontano appariscono perfette'.

⁶⁴ Vasari, *op. cit.* (note 63), p. 24; Vasari's association of surface facture to viewing distance can be traced back to Horace's *Ars Poetica*, in which he distinguishes between two of manners of painting and two kinds of poetry. In turn, Horace's distinction is rooted in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and Aristotle's categorisation of two modes of spoken rhetoric.

and in the body of Christ. Thus, Caravaggio's painting is anachronic in Nagel and Wood's sense of occluding the gap between *then* and *now*. 65 Rembrandt's work disregards Caravaggio's sequential, yet simultaneously anachronic, narrative and replaces it with Christ as *representation*.

Conclusion

It is thus clear that an understanding of the ultimate significance of the two Emmaus narratives, either as an expression of Christ's embodiment in the Eucharist or as a channel for a spiritual communication with Christ, is contingent upon the subjectivity of the viewer. Lorenzo Pericolo argues that 'through its vicissitudes, the story calls upon the reader, spectator or beholder to discover how the disrupted order is to be transfigured and re-installed'. Caravaggio's narrative sequence of recognition is only completed by the viewer, without which the scene fails to narrow the temporal gap between Christ's manifestation *then* and his presence *now*. Equally, only the viewer can re-active Rembrandt's material, stilled representation as a spiritual presence.

What triggers this viewer participation? Mieke Bal explains narrative through semiotics; the story conveys itself to its recipients through signs. ⁶⁷ She proposes that 'a sign...is not a fixed thing but an event' which is re-animated by the subjectivity of every new viewer. ⁶⁸ Ambiguity is necessary, however, to stimulate the viewer's curiosity and discernment, so they can activate these signs and trigger the animation of the narrative. Bal names this ambiguity 'the navel', which is 'a metaphor for an element, often a tiny detail, that hits the viewer, is processed by her or him'. ⁶⁹ The navel indicates the presence of something that is not explicitly recognisable, but which subtly interacts with the viewer. Both artists' ambivalent portrayals of Christ, in which He teeters on the edge of concealment and revelation creating temporal uncertainty and disjunction, can be identified as the navel.

Although the presence of Bal's navel involves the viewer, it is not sufficient to elucidate the significance of the narrative. Saint Augustine emphasised the role of faith in Christ's recognition. He asserted: 'what you can see...is bread and a cup; that's what even your eyes tell you; but as for what your faith asks to be instructed about, the bread is the body of Christ... *Unless you believe, you shall not understand* (Is 7:9)'. Equally, Calvin described how the devout man Simeon 'beheld the Son of God with eyes other than the eyes of the flesh...the Spirit of God illuminated his eyes by faith'. Both cases reveal that Christ, for both Catholics and the Reformed, is perceived, whether physically

⁶⁵ A. Nagel and C. Wood: *Anachronic Renaissance*, New York 2010, p. 13. Nagel and Wood describe an anachronic artwork as 'an artifact that has been unmoored from its secure anchorage in linear time and has drifted into an alien historical context'.

⁶⁶ L. Pericolo: *Caravaggio and Pictorial Narrative: Dislocating the Istoria in Early Modern Painting*, London 2011, p. 567.

⁶⁷ M. Bal: Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative Fourth Edition, Toronto 2017, pp. 3-10

⁶⁸ M. Bal, Reading Rembrandt: Beyond the Word-image Opposition, Cambridge 1991, p. 15.

⁶⁹ M. Bal and N. Bryson ed.: *Looking in: The Art of Viewing*, Amsterdam 2000), p. 84.

⁷⁰ Saint Augustine of Hippo, Sermon 235.3 in Hill and Rotelle, *op. cit.* (note 37), p. 41.

⁷¹ Saint Augustine of Hippo, Sermon 272 in Hill and Rotelle, *op. cit.* (note 37), p. 300.

⁷² J. Calvin: *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: A Harmony of the Gospels Matthew, Mark and Luke: Volume 1*, ed. D. W. Torrance and T. F. Torrance, trans. A. W. Morrison, Grand Rapids Michigan 1994, pp. 91-92.

or spiritually, through *faith*; the paintings themselves become acts of faith. Faith in Christ's corporeal presence in the Eucharist is necessary for Caravaggio's painting to become transubstantiation, without which it remains merely a depiction of a past event. Similarly, faith through the Holy Spirit is necessary for Rembrandt's viewer to animate Christ's representation as a spiritual presence.

Thus, the paintings' narrative structure, and their visual and temporal ambiguities, encourage the viewer to embark upon a path of recognition of Christ. They urge the viewer to question whether they possess the strength of faith that will lead this path to completion. Therefore, both paintings reveal themselves as aporetic artworks, a term used by Nagel and Pericolo to describe 'works that not only generate bafflement but that also make interdeterminancy part of their rhetorical structure'. Nagel and Pericolo propose that 'aporia suggests that there was once the possibility of resolution; it points out that there is a way...[and] forces us not merely to come up with a different solution; by necessity it forces a reconsideration of the approach itself'. The paintings achieve precisely this through their temporal and narrative ambiguities. Their fluctuation between revelation and obscurity, presence and absence indicates the potential for resolution, in which the narrative and its meaning become clarified by the viewer. Anomalies and discrepancies between the painted and textual narratives reveal that a greater tool than textual comparison is required to elucidate their meanings. Thus, the viewer is compelled to re-examine their approach and seek another, to which *faith* is the only answer.

This essay has thus demonstrated that the participation of the viewer is essential to complete these two paintings. The need for the viewer to contemplate the strength of their own faith, to unlock in the paintings the miracle that is at the heart of the gospel account, contradicts the modern perception of Rembrandt's painting as a painted surface and Caravaggio's as an instantaneous arrest of narrative action. Modernist re-definition of painting, and subsequent equation of realism to instantaneity, has disorientated and subverted such an exegesis of Caravaggio and Rembrandt's narratives. Rather, *both* paintings are narratives which are animated at the instant of Christ's recognition by the viewer (whether Catholic or Reformed) through an understanding of the significance of the bread and of Christ's actions. Analysis has sought to indicate that the moment preceding this instant of recognition is not a suspension of narrative; it is a pregnant moment of anticipation and contemplation, as the viewer evaluates their necessary approach to resolve the narrative. This is equivalent to an ellipsis, a moment of silence where action is not halted, but in which introspection simmers in hope of resolution.

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⁷³ A. Nagel and L. Pericolo ed.: Subject as Aporia in Early Modern Art, Farnham 2010, p. 2.

⁷⁴ Nagel and Pericolo, op. cit. (note 73), p. 9.

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Fig.1. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *Supper at Emmaus*, 1601, Oil and tempera on canvas, 141 x 196.2 cm. The National Gallery, London.

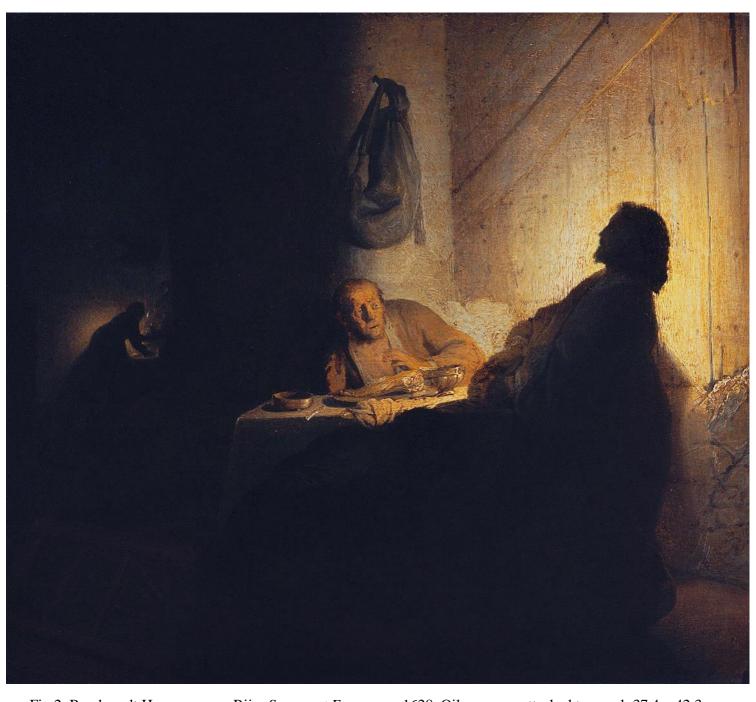


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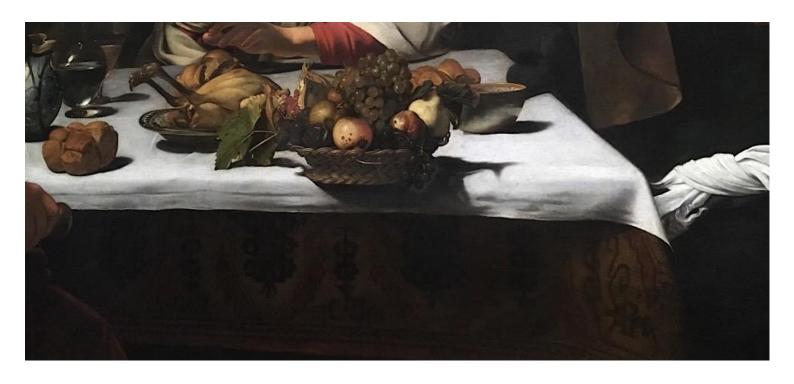


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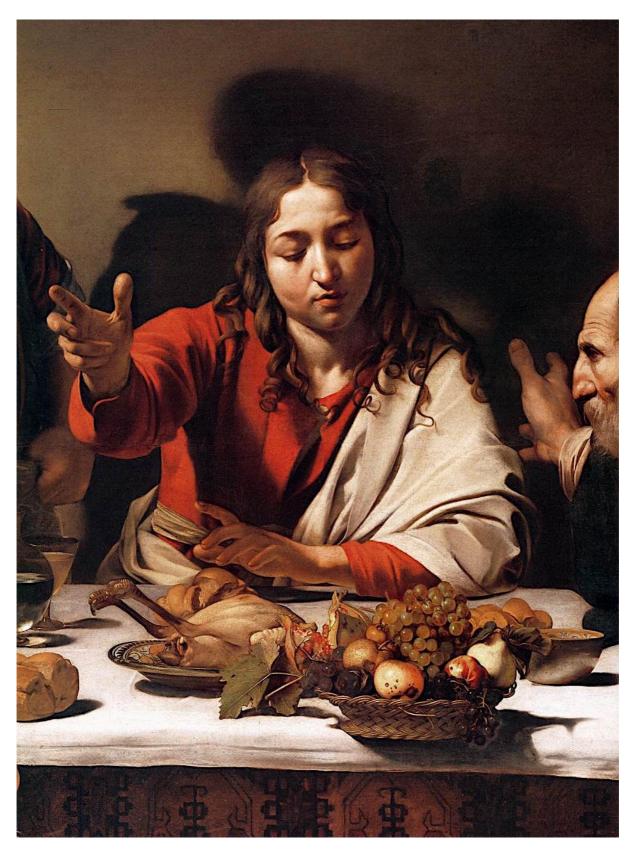


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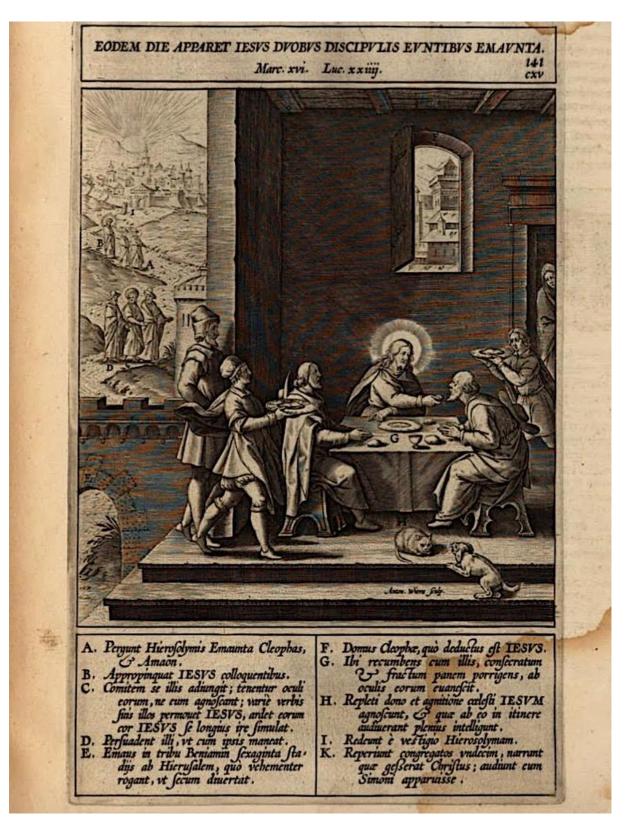


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