

Shorter Notice:

Caravaggio and the *Mottetti del Frutto* of Antonio Gardano *

by John T. Spike

From time to time the woodcut frontispiece of the *Mottetti del Frutto* (Venice, 1538-1539) has been mentioned in the literature as one of the earliest Italian still lifes (fig.1).¹ The *Mottetti del Frutto* was a celebrated anthology of sacred motets by contemporary composers published in three volumes by Antonio Gardano in Venice.² The first volume, the *Primus liber cum quinque vocibus, mottetti del frutto* was printed in 1538.³ The anonymous *Frutto* woodcut appears on the title page of each of the part books for the five voices: *cantus*, *bassus*, *tenor*, *altus*, and *quintus*. It has not previously been noticed that Caravaggio used the woodcut as a compositional source for his *Still Life with Fruit on a Stone Ledge* of circa 1603 (fig. 2).⁴

Recent scholarship has underscored the significance of Gardano's *Mottetti del Frutto* from the standpoint of music history.⁵ The anthology was one of Gardano's earliest publications appearing in the same year as his first book of madrigals by Jacques Arcadelt, the famous *Primo Libro*.⁶ The two productions became the pillars of Gardano's catalogues of sacred and secular songs, respectively. Gardano was also a serious composer: the *Mottetti del Frutto* were selected in accordance with his desire to promote a new style of 'pervading or syntactic composition' that he had brought to Venice from France, together with an improved technique of printing music with a single impression per page.⁷

The *Mottetti del Frutto* attracted considerable attention, including the unwanted kind, as it happens. In a matter of months, Johannes Buglhat and a consortium of music printers in Ferrara responded with their own anthology under the astonishingly impious name, *Moteti de la Simia*.⁸ The joke was explicitly at Gardano's expense as his premises were located in the calle de la Simia (i.e. *scimmia*, 'monkey'). The *Simia* frontispiece, hastily commissioned for the occasion, crudely depicts a monkey feasting on fruit.⁹ It is not clear whether Gardano's rivals were accusing him of poaching from their repertory or satirizing his lack of originality as a composer. As an ambitious new face in a lucrative business, Gardano was bound to excite resentment. In a sense, he left himself vulnerable to mockery by the excessively jocose tone of his dedication (to Marchese Francesco Palavicino).¹⁰ He would have the last word, however. In the second volume of the *Mottetti del Frutto a 6* (Venice, 1539), he inserted a new woodcut on the titles of three of the six part books.¹¹ In this rare print a monkey, standing amidst some half-eaten fruits, is attacked by

CANTVS.

PRIMVS LIBER CVM QVINQVE
VOCIBVS.



MOTTETTI DEL FRUTTO.



Gardano's symbols of a lion and a bear.¹² Instead of embarrassing Gardano, the invidious Ferrarese enhanced his reputation.

The *Frutto* woodblock remained in the Gardano workshop, evidently highly prized. It was only pressed into service when the three books of the *Mottetti del Frutto*, for four, five and six voices, were reprinted in 1549.¹³ At Antonio Gardano's death in 1569, his firm had grown to be, alongside the older press of Girolamo Scotto, one of the two most productive music publishers in Venice – and therefore Europe. The house continued under his sons Alessandro and Angelo, who likewise refrained from inserting the *Frutto* woodcut in any other of the family's hundreds of publications. The single, prestigious, exception was the *Novus Thesaurus Musicus* of 1568, a specially commissioned anthology of sacred and imperial motets, in five volumes, dedicated to Ferdinand II, Archduke of Austria.¹⁴

Thus it was that a masterful fruitpiece was widely circulated in church and palace contexts – wherever the sacred music of Jacques Arcadelt and Nicolas Gombet was admired – fully fifty years before still lifes became a genre of painting. The *Frutto* frontispiece exemplifies the robust naturalism of Venetian prints of the early sixteenth century, when Titian and other important painters made drawings for woodcuts.¹⁵ The subject is a simple ledge of stone filled to overflowing with peaches, grapes, a melon, ripe pomegranate and other fruits. Some branches, including a palm, bend over the inviting treats.¹⁶ The arrangement is *estremamente libera* – extremely free – as was pointed out by the print's first commentator, Eugenio Battisti, in 1962: 'and certainly more modern than the Flemish and Dutch still lifes of the late sixteenth century'.¹⁷ The picture is 'modern' in that its vitality, sensuality and naturalness are the very qualities Caravaggio and Annibale Carracci would take from the Venetian painters as the foundations of seventeenth-century style.

The earliest Italian still life paintings were comparatively restrained as compositions. During the 1590s, Ambrogio Figino and Fede Galizia began to paint isolated plates of fruit, centred against a neutral background. Neither of these Milanese artists was a reformer. Their primary influence was the ingenious Giuseppe Arcimboldo, by far the most famous artist in Milan. At some point during the 1580s, Arcimboldo painted an independent still life: a bowl of garden vegetables, which, when inverted, becomes a caricature portrait of a gardener.¹⁸ Figino and Galizia's still lifes also show the influence of that sixteenth-century speciality, the emblem book. Caravaggio arrived in Rome in 1592, following his apprenticeship in Milan during the 1580s, so he was well aware of

these developments. On the other hand, the *Basket of Fruit* (Fig. 5) he painted for Cardinal Federico Borromeo, while resident in Cardinal Del Monte's palace, was distinctly different from his contemporaries' early efforts – for its sharper observation of nature, to be sure, but no less for its classical antecedents, as we might expect of a painting exchanged between two prelates of antiquarian tastes.¹⁹ Caravaggio conceived the *Basket of Fruit* as a kind of competition with the *xenia*, or fruit basket still lifes, frequently found in ancient Roman wall paintings and mosaics, and praised by the classical writers Vitruvius and Philostratus.²⁰ A nearer precedent, as Charles Sterling first observed more than fifty years ago, was the superb basket of luscious fruits composed in wood intarsia in the *studiolo* of Federico del Montefeltro in Urbino.²¹ In all probability, Caravaggio never saw it in person, as there is no evidence he was ever in that ducal city – but his protector, Cardinal Del Monte, was raised at that humanist court.

Caravaggio's first commission from Cardinal Del Monte was for a concert – known today as the *Musicians*.²² He had not previously painted any musical subjects: under Del Monte's tutelage he specialized in them. During his six years' residence in the Palazzo Madama, from 1595 to 1601, Caravaggio made five paintings featuring musical instruments and printed scores, presumably from Del Monte's collection.²³ Two of these paintings remained in Del Monte's palace until his death in 1627: the *Musicians* and a *Lute Player*.²⁴ Two others belonged to his friend and neighbor, the Marchese Vincenzo Giustiniani: the *Omnia Vincit Amor* and a *Lute Player*.²⁵ Both Lute Players sing madrigals from part books that are easily legible, including several found in Gardano's edition of Arcadelt's *Primo Libro a quattro voci*.²⁶ The *Musicians* canvas has suffered extensive losses across its surface, rendering it impossible to know if the open page was originally recognizable, as seems likely. The *Omnia Vincit Amor* in Berlin displays some fragmentary notes that may one day be recognized by cognoscenti of Renaissance music.²⁷ Only one of Caravaggio's musical pictures, a *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* for Olimpia Aldobrandini, the pope's niece, includes a motet, as befits its sacred subject.²⁸ The music Caravaggio paints invariably dates back to the first half of the early sixteenth century, not by his contemporaries.

Caravaggio's music is familiar terrain thanks to the explorations of many scholars.²⁹ It has been re-visited here to demonstrate some of the routes that might have led him to the *Frutto* woodcut. As a still life specialist, it is unlikely he forgot it, once he had seen it. In all events, the woodcut was manifestly on Caravaggio's mind, if not open on his table, when, in about 1603, he conceived his second known still life, the ex-Barberini *Still Life with Fruit on a Stone Ledge*.³⁰

He evidently used the *Frutto* woodcut as a kind of template for his own, much larger, and entirely re-drawn still life. The first step was simple: he corrected the print's reversal of its design so that the space and shadows in his painting would unfold from left to right. He elected to retain the good-looking melon on a bed of leaves, the arcing branches and the chiseled ledge without legs, but then proceeded to insert his own motifs into the Venetian's original criss-cross scheme. In both the woodcut and canvas, the compositional keystone is a melon angled towards a corner of the ledge. Its foreshortened perspective leads our eye into depth. Caravaggio connected its line to a tubular squash that snakes up the opposite side of the picture –in the *Frutto* woodcut a flowery sprig serves the same purpose. This decisive line is crossed in its middle by an opposing diagonal that descends along the branches (grape for Caravaggio, palm for the *Frutto*) from the same side as the ledge's corner. For clarity's sake, Caravaggio suppressed one of the branches in the woodcut, giving more space to the light that rakes across the background.

The correspondences are so striking, especially when we consider the rarity of still lifes at this time, that we may assume that Caravaggio expected them to be noticed -- in fact, he must have counted on it.³¹ All of Caravaggio's Roman patrons were members of Cardinal Del Monte's cultivated circle, and would have known the *Mottetti del Frutto*. The exercise was the same as in the *Basket of Fruit* for Cardinal Borromeo: Caravaggio took an esteemed old model, and then surpassed it.

* This article is dedicated to Sir Denis Mahon on his 97th birthday (November 8, 2008). I wish to thank Dr. Kathryn Bosi, Music Librarian, I Tatti, and Prof. Mary S. Lewis, for their assistance.

¹ 65 x 105 mm, woodcut, frontispiece to *Cantus* part book in *Primus liber cum quinque vocibus, mottetti del frutto*, [Venice, Gardane, 1538], British Museum. See E. Battisti, 'Dal comico al genere', in *L'Antirinasimento, con una appendice di manoscritti inediti*, Milano, [1962], p. 304; Lionello Puppi, in *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE*, CX [1968], p.360; E. Battisti, 'Meditando sull'inutile', in *La natura morta in Italia*, ed. F. Zeri, Milano [1989], I, fig. 12 ('Mottetti del frutto a Quattro, Venezia, 1539'); B. Meijer, 'Sull'origine e mutamenti dei generi', in *La Pittura in Italia Il Seicento*, Milano [1989], II, pp.593, 603, note 67, fig.889 ('Ai frutti ai fiori [sic], frontespizio di libro di mottetti, 1539, Bologna, Biblioteca del Conservatorio'); F. T. Camiz, 'Per prima cosa guarda la lira, per vedere se è dipinta correttamente: quadri a soggetto musicale all'epoca di Caravaggio', in *La Natura Morta al Tempo di Caravaggio*, Rome [1995], p. 75. The literature has consistently dated the *Mottetti del Frutto* to 1539, overlooking the first volume of 1538.

² For complete descriptions of these and other Gardano editions, 1538-1569, see Mary S. Lewis, *Antonio Gardano, Venetian Music Printer 1538-1569. Vol. 1, 1538-1549*. New York, [1988], pp. 173-77, 225-30, 242-46.

³ *Primus liber cum quinque vocibus, mottetti del frutto*. [Venice, Gardane, 1538]. 5 part books (*cantus, bassus, tenor, altus, quintus*). An original in British Museum, London (GB Lbm), K.3.d.2. Motets by Jacquet of Mantua (7), Dominique Phinot (7), Nicolas Gombert (7), Johannes Lupi (6), Antonio Gardane (2). RISM B/I, 1538-4.

⁴ 85 x 135 cm, canvas, on loan to the Denver Art Museum from a private collection. The painting corresponds to the '*Diversi frutti porti sopra un Tavolino di Pietra in una Canestra mano di Michel Angelo da Caravaggio*' in the collection of Cardinal Antonio Barberini, Palazzo ai Giubbonari, Rome, in 1671. See J.T. Spike, *Caravaggio*, New York [2001], CD-ROM Catalogue no. 35, for inventory and bibliography. The attribution is accepted by Denis Mahon; see also, M. Gregori, *Caravaggio*, Milan [1994], p.16 (c. 1601); E. Capon, ed., *Caravaggio & His World: Darkness & Light*, Sydney and Melbourne, 2003-2004, pp. 12-13, 20, 92-93, 227, J. Varriano, *Caravaggio: The Art of Realism*, University Park, Pa., [2006], pp.69-70, fig.57. The *Still Life with Fruit on a Stone Ledge* was the object of an

international symposium organized at the College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va., November 9-10, 2006, of which the *Acts* are forthcoming.

⁵ See, for example, M. S. Lewis, ed., Introduction to *The Gardane Motet Anthologies. The Sixteenth-Century Motet 13*, ed. Richard Sherr, New York & London [1993]; A. Johnstone, 'High' clefs in composition and performance,' in *Early Music*, 34, 1, [February 2006], pp. 29-53; M. S. Lewis, "Gardano's Mottetti del Frutto of 1538-39 and the Promotion of a New Style," in *Recevez ce mien Petit Labeur: Studies in Renaissance Music in Honour of Ignace Bossuyt*, Leuven University Press, [2008], pp. 131-48.

⁶ Gardano published his first book of Arcadelt's madrigals in 1538. That edition is now lost. See T. Bridges, 'The Printing of Arcadelt's First Book of Madrigals,' PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 1982, pp. 71-72.

⁷ Antonio Gardano (1509-1569), composer and publisher, was born into an Italian family living in the south of France. After an apprenticeship, possibly with Jacques Moderne in Lyons, he moved to Venice, began to publish music books using improved criteria and technology. Born Antoine Gardane, he italianized his name in 1557.

⁸ RISM 1539⁷ *Moteti de la Simia (Liber primus vocum quinque)* (Ferrara: J. de Buglhat, H. de Campis, A. Hucher, February 1539). Motets were almost invariably liturgical texts set to music; they were often performed during the Mass. Cf. A. M. Cummings, 'Toward an Interpretation of the Sixteenth-Century Motet', in *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 34, No. 1, [Spring, 1981], pp. 43- 59. Although Renaissance music books were mainly titled for their contents, a special tradition for motets was initiated at the beginning of the sixteenth century, when Ottaviano Petrucci published some anthologies with a Christian allegorical title, *Motetti de la corona*. Jacques Moderne of Lyons, a major influence on Gardano, later named two anthologies, *Motteti del Fiore*: the *Primus liber* and the *Secundus liber*, both for four voices, in 1532. It was into this tradition that Gardano submitted his *Mottetti del Frutto*, so rudely mocked by Buglhat. The common thread of these motet anthology titles is the use of a common noun ('crown', 'flower', 'fruit') which, in the singular, is a Christian or Marian symbol. Still lifes were then called 'paintings of 'fiori' and 'frutti', that is, always using the plural. In the spring of 1506 Isabella d'Este read that she would soon be sent a 'quadro pieno de fructi' made by Antonio da Crevalcore, an artist 'quite unique in this skill but, so we think here [in Bologna], he takes much longer than nature does'. Cf. E. Gombrich in *The Burlington Magazine*, CIII [1961], p. 176.

⁹ See J. A. Bernstein, *Print Culture and Music in Sixteenth-century Venice*, New York [2001], p.50-51, fig. 2.13, for illustrations of these woodcuts.

¹⁰ The opening words evoke the deceptions of poetry, which seems an inapposite theme for a volume of sacred song: '*La Poesia con le sue bugie, potrebbe farmi credere per vero, fino al volar degli homini.*' See note 2 above.

¹¹ See note 2 above.

¹² See note 9.

¹³ I am grateful to Kathryn Bosi for the information that the Gardano woodblocks passed in the seventeenth century to Bartolomeo Magni, who printed them as decorative fillers in a book of 'ariose vaghezze' by Carlo Milanuzzi (Venice, 1622).

¹⁴ M. S. Lewis, 'The Printed Music Book in Context: Observations on Some Sixteenth-Century Editions', in *Notes*, Second Series, 46, no. 4 (Jun., 1990), pp. 899-918, p. 907-908, M. S. Lewis, *Antonio Gardano, op.cit.* (note 2), *Volume 3: 1560—1569*, 5. cat. 411

¹⁵ The sole attempt to identify the woodcut's inventor was made by Lionello Puppi in these pages in 1968 (THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE, CX, [1968], p.360). Puppi expanded upon Battisti's comment and compared illustrations of the woodcut (fig. 51) and a detail of fruits in the foreground of Dosso Dossi's *Costabili Polyptych*, painted with Garofalo in Ferrara in 1514 (fig. 50). He further noted that Dosso is credited with paintings, now lost, of 'fiori et fructi'.

¹⁶ I would like to thank Profs. Jules Janick and Harry Paris for independently confirming that the large lobed fruit is a melon, *Cucumis melo* L.

¹⁷ E. Battisti, 'Dal comico al genere', in *L'Antirinasimento, con una appendice di manoscritti inediti*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1962, p. 304, '*estremamente libera e certo più moderna di quelle del tardo Cinquecento fiammingo e olandese*'. Musicologists have always noted the exceptional interest of this woodcut. The following comment by Anton Schmid (*Ottaviano dei Petrucci da Fossombrone*, Wien [1845], pp. 141-142) is typical: '1538... *Primus liber cum quinque vocibus. Diesem Titel folgt eine niedliche Holzschnitt-Vignette, welche eine Gruppe von mancherlei Früchten vorstellt.*'

¹⁸ For the *Ortolano* in the Pinacoteca, Cremona, see E. Fumagalli in *La natura morta al tempo di Caravaggio*, Capitoline Museums, Rome [1995-1996], pp.92-93.

¹⁹ Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan. For illustrations and descriptions of the Caravaggio paintings cited in this article see Spike, *op.cit.* (note 4).

²⁰ Vitruvius, *De Architectura*, VI. 7,4; cf. Philostratus, *Imagines*, II.26 [ed. 1931, p. 123].

²¹ C. Sterling, *Still Life Painting*, New York, 2nd rev. ed., [1981], p. 60.

²² *The Musicians*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

²³ See F. T. Camiz, 'Music and Painting in Cardinal del Monte's Household', in *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, [1991], pp. 213-26. For Del Monte, see Z. Wążyński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria Del Monte 1549-1626*, Florence [1994].

²⁴ K. Christiansen, *A Caravaggio Rediscovered: The Lute Player*, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, [1990].

²⁵ *Omnia Vincit Amor*, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin; *Lute Player*, Hermitage, St Petersburg.

²⁶ Cf. H. Colin Slim, 'Musical Inscriptions in Paintings by Caravaggio and his Followers', in *Music and Context: Essays in Honor of John Milton Ward*, ed. A. Shapiro, Cambridge (Mass.), [1985], pp. 242-243; F. T. Camiz and A. Ziino, 'Aspetti musicali e committenza', in *Studi Musicali*, 12, [1983], pp. 67-90; F. T. Camiz, 'La Musica nei quadri di Caravaggio', in *Caravaggio: Nuove Riflessioni Quaderni di Palazzo Venezia*, 6, [1989], pp. 198-221; K. Christiansen, *A Caravaggio Rediscovered: The Lute Player*, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, [1990], pp.42-43, 90-91.

Despite its title, the *Primo Libro di Archadelt* (Venice; Gardano, 1539) includes madrigals by other early composers.

Of the six madrigals represented in Caravaggio's paintings of Lute Players, M S. Lewis, *Antonio Gardano, op.cit.*, (note 2), II, attributes only 'Chi potrà dir' to Arcadelt himself.

²⁷ H. Colin Slim, *op.cit.* (note 25), pp. 242-243.

²⁸ Doria-Pamphili collection, Rome. *Ibid.*, pp. 244-246. The motet, 'Quam pulchra es', by Noel Bauldeweyn, was first printed in Ottaviano Petrucci's *Motetti de la corona. Libro quarto* [Fossambrone, 1519]. See note 8 above.

²⁹ See note 25 above.

³⁰ See note 4 above.

³¹ See Varriano, *op.cit.*, and E. Capon, *op.cit.*, (note 4) for the iconography of Caravaggio's still life, which abounds with forbidden fruits and visual puns. Caravaggio would have appreciated the incongruity of introducing a volume of sacred lyrics with an image of sensual delights. See note 10 above.