

# Illustration

**BARTOLOME MURILLO?**  
(SEVILLE, 1617 - SEVILLE, 1682)

## THE LOSS IMAGINED

Buenos Aires. The midday sun suffocated. In the heart of the city to enter the high-ceilinged old building was an incentive for my torrid skin. I ascended. Orlando Carnovale's office had a spacious sitting -room. I was taken by a painting at the end of the waiting room. A virgin and a child without any hint of the divine. An earthly image exempt of symbols which nevertheless represented the world of the gods.

- *What are you looking at?* -my friend disclosed me.

-*Baroque style, Caravaggio?*-I answered surprised by the strong statement I was emitting.

- *Why do you think?*

As I approached to see if I visualized any signature I cautiously slid- *the real theme to represent the divine, the dark background, and the expressions on the faces.*

-*I brought it from Russia long ago. I managed to have it restored.*

Each time I returned to the site the attraction of those features drove my gaze from an abyss lying within my soul center. That mysterious halo prevented me from keeping away. I flowed from its sight with an incomprehensible sorrow.

One afternoon Orlando with affection guessed in his voice, without prologue and concisely decided another destination for the work. - *It's yours.*

I excused myself gratefully. He insisted but I never moved the painting. A year later returning from a trip I found it in my office. Protected by a blue cloth I undressed it to contemplate it at length with the conviction that I should find a meaning to the loss I envisioned in it. A mirror of my soul. Then I decided to introduce myself into its mystery. To retrace oblivion deprived of any armor but the anonymous painter's brush.

I should go in pursuit of the memory. To that abode where reality is based on imagination and truth is a mere set of pins where the scaffolding of magic that retrieves the past to present is anchored. It was evident that the Baroque manifested itself in the painting, although on a lower step of the dramatic force imposed on the stroke by Michelangelo Merisi (1571-1610), nicknamed *Caravaggio* for his birthplace. This difference could place the work among his followers. But ... who of them?



*"Image of the Virgin and Child"*  
BARTOLOME MURILLO?

The list is vast. Giovanni Baglione, Giovanni Battista Caracciolo (Battistello), Hendrick van Somer, Leonella Spada, Mattia Pretti, Orazio Borgianni, Orazio Riminaldi, Simon Vouet, Tomasso Salini, Valentin de Boulogne, Bartolomeo Cavarozzi, Orazio Gentileschi and his daughter Artemisia, the only woman recognized as an artist in the XVII century. One of these, Jusepe de Ribera nicknamed *Spagnoletto*, introduced in Spain the *caravaggist* spirit, influencing Francisco Zurbarán and Bartolomé Murillo.

*Caravaggio's* style was evident. Revealed on the force with which he imposed his art from the guts. Pure transmission of his voluptuous and violent blood, the result of a personality latticed in brawls, escapes

and mistakes. Protected by church authorities he did not renounce to painting the divinities with the earthly consideration of the mortals. He never renounced in his *Madonnas* and saints to the decline of time and earthly circumstances, sufferings and anxieties that haunt mortals. The "*Death of the Virgin*" (1604) with her swollen abdomen and bare legs is the artist's most successful allegation in his vocation to make the gods descend to earth, especially if the model was a well-known prostitute.

Ponciano Cardenas appeared without knowing the reason.

- *What do you think Ponciano?* At the entrance of the room, leaning against a wall, stood the "*Image of the Virgin and Child*," Carnovale's name to the work we were trying to recover.

Almost without approaching, still ten feet away, Ponciano Cárdenas did not hesitate. - *Jorge, this is Baroque, Caravaggism.*

He examined it carefully. In silence. The repetitive scene of observing each stroke in the canvas became a ceremony. Along his skin ran the sensitivity the author must have experienced while working. Here silence is worth more than words. These are emotion frauds. Thus, memory lies in the senses. The silent rite lasted in a time lost in oblivion. Arrested in that image of a teacher envisioning the remains of the sensitivity of another that happened four hundred years ago. The ceremony of the deep spiritual recognition, lasted until Ponciano's verdict rose like a bird which charged up as he also left his squatting position in front of the painting.

*"It's an excellent work. The fabric is old linen. Badly restored. Do you see here?"* - He pointed at the child's left arm, the neckline on the Virgin's dress, other details.

- *The frame is made of wood. Why?* - I asked, breaking the silence.

- *The fabric is glued directly onto a good board and lacquered.*

- *I see that the faces are also cracked.*

- *The oil cracks. The painting has had a hazardous life. It has suffered several misfortunes. It is an admirable piece of work, aesthetically beautiful. Beyond its wanderings and concealments we should celebrate that it has survived to this day.* After sighing he added: - *By the way how did it get here?*

- *I still lack some details, Ponciano. I can find out.*

We turned off the lights in the room. An intense and bold searching flashlight helped to disclose the intimacy in the thread bare fabric, open, with fractures. And suddenly in the darkness of the color, on the right foot of the work, Bartolomé Murillo's signature in black outline. Visible with much effort as it was covered with lacquer. Identical to other signatures in the painter's works, later reviewed.

To go through the work of Bartolomé Murillo (Seville 1617-1682) with his Immaculates and children, with his saints, forces us to break through the dark-

ness of the past and enter the "tenebrism" imposed by the school with the force of an irrevocable seal. We are informed of Murillo's identity by the semicircular arched eyebrows, the small and tight lips with a cleft in the lower lip, the pointed hands, and his character's serene features integrated in his paintings to a gentle environment. Characters less hazardous and voluptuous than those of Caravaggism, accepting the earthly condition, establishing their nature above terrestrial suffering. Therein, lies the fundamental difference between Caravaggio's baroque and his follower. The accentuated force in the folds of the forehead, the vehemence in posture, the imperious tilt of the bodies is diluted in the latter. Harmony and serenity in Murillo, passion and rapture in Caravaggio. Calmness and loss that makes them different. As in their lives. The follower seems to go beyond the teacher's time. At the time of serene reflection, appeased, contemplative of a life that is accepted and venerated with a peaceful death. All this imprinting technique and scenarios, Murillo's characteristics with his "poetic realism", reflected the work we had. Had we found the follower of the school who made this picture? Would it really be Bartolomé Murillo?

I called my friend Orlando, who had protected the work during the last half century. I explained what we had researched.

- *Orlando, you should go to the backroom of your memory. What you remember and ignore has to be amazing. You told me that the picture traveled from Munich to St. Petersburg (then Leningrad) at the end of Second World War in 1945 taken by a Russian soldier. At the end there will be some unknown pieces of the history. It is always the case. Only the "self" preserves continuity. The view of history is always fragmentary, even in the present. We only see fragments. As lights. Among them, in the darkness, there are only assumptions, enigmas. The mystery is inherent to all times, even to those elapsing today. From what time and place have you notion of the work?*

- *It goes back to 1945 in Munich, as I told you...*

- *Before you continue, Orlando. It should have arrived to Germany from Spain. It is an assumption given the undoubted Spanish origin of the painting. In "Alte Pinakothek" in Munich there are other paintings by Murillo. Among them "The Toilette" and "Little girl selling fruit."*

Orlando resurrected his memories with a loud and exuberant voice. He was determined to shred the undiscoverable. - *We go back to Russia to find light in the work, but twenty years have elapsed, it was already 1965. I was studying medicine in Leningrad. A flu epidemic forced us students to go from house to house vaccinating the population. Next to the house Fedor Dostoyevsky had occupied in Canal Griboedova I enter into a dwelling, more precisely into the kitchen. I am surprised, as it happened to you in my office, with the painting hanging in a small frame, marred with soot. The faces seemed willing to emerge from the*

loss through the layer of dust. I inquired about it. The woman in her fifties told me that at the end of the war a Russian soldier had brought it from Munich and given it to her. For the past 20 years it had been on that place (*Etukartinuprivösmoyparen is Germanii*). Not finding her husband and son I returned to vaccinate them three days later. As if it had not happened before I was again surprised by the picture. I watched it at length. It ensnared me. "Take it, it's a gift" I felt the woman's voice behind me. I left with the roll. I had it washed and I put it away. So I brought it when I left for Buenos Aires in 1975.

-Why do you think the woman got rid of the painting?

Orlando looked at me enthralled still parked in the memories. - *I don't know.*

-*We must conjecture. Spain, Munich, Leningrad, Buenos Aires, are the flashes where we envision the work. Among them we must move supposing, but in the spirit of what a human being is. I guess the soldier left it to the woman as an offering of affection. They were young, he came from the war.*

-Why did she get rid of it?

*She had to close a story that was still effective with the work. It was meant to finish with a loss. It happens that finally one starts shedding things that remain connected with the affections. At first they are treasured to make oblivion less painful. At the end, when it is irrevocable, they become a hindrance to its end. Let's continue...*

I see that Orlando takes on a new momentum. He raises his arms. Then he talks - *From Spain to Munich and then to Leningrad. Repeated loss of space. Detachment. Permanent frenzy.*

*-I feel that the people who were carrying the canvas obeyed an unknown order that of a stake to a definite place still unknown. You are one among them, Orlando. We are now in Buenos Aires in 1975, you had just arrived.*

*-I restored it. The fabric was placed over wood and then lacquered. It remained there until it surprised you in my office. Your enthralment at the sight of the work took me to the decision that it belonged to you. You are going to seek the final site.*

The morning sun had risen, now its light flooded the room through a side window. It dissolved on the canvas penetrating the "tenebrism" I saw, in the mystery of the emotions that flowed through Bartolomé Murillo when he beheld his work completed. And in the anonymous who participated in its wandering trips. I feel the same sensitivity pursuing along the centuries, away from all human reason. Vibrating in strings that are often ignored by those who resist the reality of spirit.

*-Orlando, I think Seville, where Bartolomé was born has to be its place.*

*-Are you sure?*

*-Almost, but that's another story.*

We were now suppressing laughter, the spice of life, which surged from our entrails.

**Jorge C. Trainini**

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