

# (Mis)appropriating Caravaggio in Michiel Heyns's *A Sportful Malice*

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## Summary

Caravaggio's painting, *David with the Head of Goliath* (ca. 1609) is the central iconic intertext in Michiel Heyns's novel, *A Sportful Malice: A Comedy of Revenge*, which was awarded the 2015 Herman Charles Bosman Prize. The article demonstrates how Caravaggio's depiction of the young David looking at the severed head of Goliath at the end of his outstretched arm is transposed in *A Sportful Malice* into a secular subject, and the symbolic import of the painting into a comic mode in a very funny work of fiction that might possibly suggest comparable degrees of artistic self-reflection. The article examines the implications of the painting as a complex self-portrait by Caravaggio, and the disdain and compassion, and repulsion and identification, in the relationship between the youthful beheader and his victim, as a metaphor for gay cruising, and for the ironically amused tone of Heyns's protagonist, Michael, and his camp sensibility. "Camp" is theorised with reference to Susan Sontag's pioneering "Notes on Camp" in which she defines camp as an aesthetic experience of the world, disengaged, anti-serious, frivolous and extravagant, as well as to subsequent theorists who emphasise its rootedness in queer/gay identity and its politics, and as referring to strategies of queer parody. In his comic novel, Heyns parodically updates debates about artistic representation from traditional figurative art to present-day conceptual and performance art, as well as the narcissistic self-portraiture of Facebook. *A Sportful Malice* presents a complex (self)portrait of its camp protagonist in a camp narrative that performatively and self-reflexively holds camp itself up to critical scrutiny.

## Opsomming

Caravaggio se skildery, *Dawid met die Hoof van Goliath* (ca. 1609), is die sentrale ikoniese interteks in Michiel Heyns se roman, *A Sportful Malice: A Comedy of Revenge*, bekroon met die 2015 Herman Charles Bosman Prys. Hierdie artikel ondersoek hoe Caravaggio se voortstelling van die jong Dawid met die kop van die onthoofde Goliath in sy uitgestrekte arm in *A Sportful Malice* komies verplaas word na 'n sekulêre konteks, en die simboliek van die skildery omgesit word in 'n baie snaakse roman wat moontlik 'n vergelykbare mate van selfvoorstelling deur die skrywer suggereer. Die artikel kyk na die implikasies van die skildery as 'n komplekse selfportret van Caravaggio, en na die minagting en meegevoel, en afgryse en identifisering, in die verhouding tussen die jeugdige oorwinnaar en sy slagoffer as 'n metafoor vir *gay cruising* sowel as vir die ironies geamuseerde instelling van Heyns se hoofkarakter, Michael, met sy kamp-sensibiliteit. "Kamp"

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word teoreties benader vanuit die perspektief van Susan Sontag se baanbrekende artikel, “Notes on Camp”, waarin sy kamp omskryf as ’n estetiese lewensuitkyk, onbetrokke, nie-ernstig, ligsinnig en oordrewe, en ook met betrekking tot latere teoretici wat die oorsprong van kamp in queer/gay-identiteit en -politiek beklemtoon en dit in terme van queer parodiestrategieë definieer. In sy komiese roman parodieer Heyns die debat rondom uitbeeldingswyse van tradisionele figuratiewe kuns tot hedendaagse konseptuele en vertoningskuns, asook die narcistiese selfvoorstellings op Facebook. *A Sportful Malice* bied ’n komplekse (self)portret van die kamp hoofkarakter in ’n kampvertelling wat selfrefleksief die aard van kamp krities betrag.

## Introduction: Caravaggio

Before travelling to Italy to do research for a monograph on “Tuscan Appropriations in Modernist Fiction”, Michael Marcucci, the epistolary narrator and protagonist of Michiel Heyns’s novel, *A Sportful Malice: A Comedy of Revenge* (2014), writes that he had visited a Caravaggio exhibition at the National Gallery in London. He seems to be referring to the exhibition, *Caravaggio: The Final Years*, that was held at the National Gallery from 23 February to 22 May 2005, but is fictionally brought forward here to 2013. In an e-mail to his partner, J., in Johannesburg, Michael describes the impact that the Caravaggio canvases had on him: “What a dark imagination; or rather, what radiantly lit darkness. And of course, what erotically charged darkness. What is it about decapitation that turned him on, do you think?” (Heyns 2014: 8). (The National Gallery show included Caravaggio’s paintings *Judith and Holofernes*, *Salome with the Head of John the Baptist*, *Salome Receives the Head of John the Baptist*, and *David with the Head of Goliath*.) When Michael is later challenged by the elderly English painter, Sophronia, to name his favourite artist, he answers: “On balance, probably Caravaggio” (128), and elaborates in response to her condescending question about his ability as a South African to appreciate the Caravaggio exhibition: “Okay, if you want something a bit more detailed, I thought it was a fascinating blend of sensuality, cruelty and piety; and I do mean a blend: the sensuality is pious, the piety is sensual, and both are cruel, in their different ways” (130). Michael’s ironic retort neatly sums up the general critical consensus about Caravaggio’s naturalistic depiction of religious subjects within a strong overall design in his paintings – what John Gash describes as his “finely balanced integration of naturalism, subject-matter and style” (2003: 26).

The highlight of the National Gallery Caravaggio exhibition was *David with the Head of Goliath* (c1609), which was reproduced on the front cover of its catalogue. A section of this painting – the figure of David – also features on the front cover of the Jonathan Ball edition of *A Sportful Malice*, while the head of Goliath appears on the back cover. *David with the Head of Goliath* is the central iconic intertext in Heyns’s novel. The narrative keeps returning to the figure of “Caravaggio’s fierce little boy, looking with

disdain at the perplexed head of his victim" (Heyns 2014: 69-70), which Michael first saw in London and then encounters again in reproduction in his room at the Il David hotel in Florence. He contrasts Caravaggio's David to the others he sees in Il Bargello in Florence: Donatello's "effete David, he with the spring bonnet and the round belly, pouting languidly" (39-40), and Verocchio's "cheeky boy, but more wholesome than Donatello's, looking out with the innocent smile of a boy's pride in an achievement beyond his years, even his Goliath looking almost serene under the gracefully tilted foot of his young vanquisher" (40).

*David with the Head of Goliath* is a fine example of Caravaggio's blend of realistic detail, dramatic gesture and poetic chiaroscuro. The National Gallery catalogue states that at the time it "was the most dramatic and moving representation of the story of David ever painted" (The National Gallery 2005: 137). Caravaggio's depiction of the young David looking at the severed head of Goliath at the end of his outstretched arm epitomises what John Gash explains as "the period's preference for multiple meanings in works of art" (2003: 20-21). The relationship between David and Goliath is, both literally and figuratively, one of detachment and dependence; the youth, David, gazes at the head of the slain giant with a combination of disdain and compassion, of repulsion and identification. Caravaggio's melancholy painting has generally been interpreted as symbolising the triumph of virtue over evil, or, with David in the Augustinian tradition seen as prefiguring Christ, a "contemplative, grieving and infinitely compassionate consciousness [mourning] doomed humanity, which is seen to be beyond redemption" (The National Gallery 2005: 138).

The symbolic meaning of the painting becomes more complex with the knowledge that in the head of Goliath Caravaggio has painted his own self-portrait – a fact that was established as early as 1650 and has found broad agreement among modern commentators.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the painting has

1. "Caravaggio's involvement in the drama of his pictures can be further charted, in a very literal sense, through the self-portraits which he incorporated in some of them. Although it is possible to see too many of these in his *oeuvre*, it is generally agreed that the figure of King Hirtacus of Ethiopia in the background of *The Martyrdom of St Matthew* (Plate 26), extremely close to the portrait drawing of Caravaggio by Ottavio Leoni (Fig 10), and the severed head of Goliath in *David with the Head of Goliath* (Plate 75), on the basis of a statement by Manilli in his 1650 guide to the Villa Borghese, are genuine self-portraits. The right-hand figure of *The Taking of Christ* (Plate 37) is also one, as suggested by Longhi. We could interpret these facts in a neutral sense and deduce that Caravaggio merely used himself as a model because it was convenient. But to do so is to ignore the peculiar and distinctly haunting psychology of these figures [...] Even if Caravaggio was just striking an attitude, his ability to imagine himself into the dramatic situations which he painted was a remarkable one and enabled him to embellish their significance by introducing nuances of characteri-

also been interpreted biographically as the self-portrait of a man under sentence of death (as Caravaggio was at the time). Added to this is the general belief (although disputed in the National Gallery catalogue) that in David Caravaggio had portrayed “il suo Caravaggino”, his “boy” or “servant”, Cecco, who was later to become famous in his own right as the caravaggist painter Cecco del Caravaggio (see Gash 2003: 125; The National Gallery 2005: 137). The painting can therefore be seen to represent the ambivalent relationship of bondage and emancipation between apprentice and master. Another widely held opinion that the figure of David is also a self-portrait – of the young Caravaggio – contributes still further ambiguities and ironies to the meaning of the painting (see The National Gallery 2005: 137). In this double self-portrait in which Caravaggio depicts himself as both youthful beheader and aged victim, youth regards age – and vice versa – with a profound and moving awareness of self and other, creation and destruction, in a complex optic of self-regarding which is ultimately controlled by the perspective of the aged painter.

*A Sportful Malice* transposes the religious subject of *David with the Head of Goliath* into a decidedly more secular one, and the symbolic import of the painting into a comic mode, in a very funny work of fiction that might possibly suggest similar degrees of artistic self-reflection – between Michiel Heyns, the implied author of a number of novels with gay protagonists, his gay narrator-protagonist Michael Marcucci, the mannerist painter *Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio* (to give him his full name), and the “M (for Malvolio)” with which Michael signs off his narrative at the end.<sup>2</sup>

## Caravaggio and Cruising

The homoerotic appeal of Caravaggio’s David, the ambivalent relationship between agent and object, and the self-reflexive gaze in the painting have a counterpart in the motif of gay cruising, which is presented in Heyns’s novel as sexual pursuit turned ugly. Not only does the act of cruising precipitate the main events in the novel in Florence, but Michael also theorises cruising in terms of its essential ambiguity. While they are both admiring “the lustrous bronze figure of Verocchio’s strangely beguiling David” (Heyns 2014: 40) in Il Bargello, Michael accidentally jostles a tall, blond young

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zation which are possible and convincing, though by no means obligatory, responses to the religious iconography” (Gash 2003: 14-15).

2. In her review of *A Sportful Malice*, Beverley Roos-Miller says: “Though not autobiographical, this novel is perhaps closest to [Heyns’s] own life and heart. A friend told him that ‘this is the book you’ve been wanting to write’, and it’s also the one he’s most enjoyed writing, he says. It shows; there is a tart playfulness to its frankness” (2014: n.p.)

man (whom he takes to be Dutch), and “flustered amusement instantaneously transmute[s] into an exchange of sexual intelligence, subtle yet unmistakable”. They loiter in front of display cases, each conscious of the other’s lingering presence behind him, and after surreptitious mutual physical appraisal and exchange of backward glances they embark on an elaborate ritual of simultaneously leading on and being led, in what Michael describes as a “discreetly predatory game” (41). As he explains: “The point of cruising is not to force a reluctant prey into a compromising position, but to make him *want* to place himself there” (42-43). Making their way out in the direction of the Piazza della Signoria and pausing, predictably, before the replica of Michaelangelo’s iconic David, they both pursue and encourage pursuit to the middle of the Ponte Vecchio – where the young man suddenly disappears, leaving Michael humiliated and angry. Smarting from the rejection, he says: “he had deliberately led me on, and then abandoned me, no doubt glorying in his power to disappoint. We have all known (have we not?) such people who get more pleasure from frustrating the expectations of others than from satisfying their own; it’s a particularly decadent form of sadism – or possibly masochism” (44).

The next stage of what Michael refers to as his “Tuscan Inappropriations” (46) is when the following morning in the Uffizi he, by chance, again encounters the young “Dutch Spurner” (49) who, like him, happens to be admiring Mercury’s muscular legs in Botticelli’s *Primavera*, and who also “has the true cruiser’s eye for any new blip on the radar” (48). He describes what ensues as “one of the more piquant games of hide and seek” (50) through the galleries of the Uffizi with the paintings providing an ironic backdrop to their cruising: “I give you this mixture of art appreciation and cruising”, he writes to J., “because that is – is it not? – the strange dissociation of sensibility attendant upon cruising: normal life continuing, but through an erotically tinted filter, one’s awareness of the ‘normal’ heightened if anything by the excitement of the chase. Pheromenes, I suppose” (49). Michael follows his prey into the men’s lavatory where he makes his sexual intentions unambiguous, and then into a cubicle where he proceeds to undress him. Michael’s subsequent act of revenge for having been spurned the previous day is cruel: he sweeps up the young man’s shorts and briefs, leaving him bare-arsed and stranded in the lavatory, and saunters out of the Uffizi, pausing before the Caravaggios on the way, bearing his “own modest offering to the vindictive spirit of Caravaggio” (53). About his own vindictiveness, he admits ironically: “How we have shrunk! We no longer behead those who spurn us, we just steal their underpants”. He discovers from the young man’s guidebook, which he had mistakenly picked up instead of his own, that his Dutchman is, in fact, “a Boerseun from back home” (54), Wouter Duvenage, a student from Pretoria who is on his first visit to Europe. Michael’s sacrifice of lust to revenge leaves him feeling slightly melancholy, however, and when Wouter tracks him down to his

hotel that night, the contrast between his sophistication and the young Afrikaner's naivete, conflicted sexuality and susceptibility to all the "paintings and kaalgat statues" (63) in Italy is manifest in their exchanges once Wouter's anger has abated. Their encounter also causes Michael to recall his own initiation into cruising when he was picked up at the age of sixteen by the sad figure of Meneer De Beer, who became his benefactor after the death of his father.

Notwithstanding this pause for reflection, Michael's "true cruiser's eye" remains undimmed, and the next morning in the bus on the way to the hilltop town of Gianocini, where he has rented a house, he erotically anatomises a beautiful young Italian fellow traveller, Paolo Pontini, confessing: "[...] my aesthetic sense, stimulated by the glories of Florence, seems to have fused inextricably with my libido; or perhaps the latter has appropriated the former" (78). And when he sees Paolo again in the local bar together with his American girlfriend, the young Italian registers Michael's admiring gaze with "just the slightest glance in [his] direction betraying the self-consciousness [...] of the preening young animal. He knew he was being admired, and didn't mind" (108-109). If the young man is displaying himself, Michael thinks, he is "not averse to being a spectator" (109). The briefly exchanged glances are a prelude to more studied contemplation, at least by Michael, who concludes: "I think I can read glances by now, and in Paolo's backward glance I read at least some curiosity, which is after all the father of imaginings" (109). Hoping to bed the young Italian (who turns out to be the local greengrocer), Michael first exercises his gay guile by feigning the same indifference to him that he believes Paolo is pretending towards him: "It's all a matter of controlling the signals you send out", he says (151). And when he later meets Paolo socially, he is convinced that the young man is more aware of him than he is letting on. Michael's covert flirting with the heterosexual Paolo afterwards reaches the stage where the young man seems to be responding to his more blatant teasing game with equally suggestive remarks: "Like all teasing, it promised without promising and withheld without withholding; it gave pleasure through promising further pleasure and tormented through not granting it" (202). Once again in Heyns's narrative the predatory agent scrutinises his object at arm's length, although he is unaware of just how closely he himself is under scrutiny.

### **Beheading by Irony**

The figure of Caravaggio's youthful David disdainfully gazing at the head of the aged Goliath, and being himself observed in the act of observing, also serves as a metaphor for the ageism of gay culture that Michael typifies. He is conscious of having reached "the relative maturity of thirty-two" (7), and of having now to expect diminishing "explorations of a less professional

kind". His former tutor, Hugh, whom he has visited in Cambridge, and with whom he had had a "youthful dalliance" (36) seven years earlier, is now sixty; according to Michael, the difference between then and now is, for himself, "the difference between the fumbings of youth and the certainties of adulthood", and for Hugh, "the difference between the last fling and the onset of the renunciations of old age". Michael's partner, J., represents, he says, "the golden mean of thirty-seven". Michael's antipathy towards those who are well past the "golden mean" is evident in his description of two fellow passengers on the Ryanair flight from Stansted to Pisa. He is annoyed by the nonchalance with which an Old Man jumps the queue at the boarding gate (he has "the unironed look of a long-time bachelor", 5). His "slovenly shabbiness", Michael says, is of a piece with his disregard for others; the "old fraud" (9) then unconcernedly joins the priority boarding group, standing there "in all the dignity of his entitlement, serene, unperturbed and imperturbable". The female version of the Old Man, an elderly English woman, who also happens to be staying at the Il David hotel in Florence, shows all "the brutality of English class assumptions" (33), and Michael concludes that she "might be reduced to flying budget airlines and bedding down in one-star establishments, but she would not adjust her distinctions and discriminations one whit; indeed, she might be driven to assert them all the more pointedly the less they could be trusted to speak for themselves".

Michael carries out his narrative beheading with consummate irony in his email accounts of his adventures in Tuscany to J. as he holds up various victims for contemplation. When he discussed his research on Tuscan appropriations in the literary works of E.M. Forster and Henry James with Hugh in Cambridge, Hugh warned him that he was "in danger of overestimating a proper English ironical distance" (36) and cautioned him: "'Don't try to be more Catholic than the Pope: leave ironical distance to the English, we have a patent on it'". Heyns's reader recognises in Michael's accounts the ironically amused tone with which Peter Jacobs, the gay protagonist of his earlier novel, *Lost Ground* (2011), describes his return to his home town in the Karoo after having lived for twenty-two years in Britain, where he had learnt to "wrap everything in irony" (Heyns 2011: 235).

In *A Sportful Malice* Michael's default mode of ironical distance provides for an extremely amusing narrative. He shares with J. Wouter's confidences about his "meisie" back in Pretoria, the pretty Martie: "She is also a *together chick* and *basically very deep*. They share a faith in Jesus but not yet a bed – Martie is still praying for guidance, and, truth to tell, I suspect Wouter has not pushed her or the Lord much on the matter" (83). Michael describes the Uffizi in Florence as "a masterpiece of marketing" (47): "here are these thousands of people who wouldn't spend a dime going to an art gallery in their home town, paying a hefty entrance fee and queuing up for hours to see a collection of paintings that leave them bored witless, judging by the

perfunctory quality of their attention once they're inside". The Tuscan hilltop town of Gianocini distinguishes itself by "not having anything that could engage or stimulate the imagination of the culture-tripper: no picturesque ruins, no resident saint, no birthplace of some great artist, no sublime fresco in some obscure chapel, not even a local culinary specialty or unpretentiously excellent wine [...] It doesn't even have any picturesque squalor" (88). Nor does he spare his own academic research from ironic send-up when he begins to realise that "the Tuscany of the literary imagination is a construct conditioned by other literary and pictorial accounts" (146) and that "[w]e see only what we have been trained to see by images previously mediated through literature and art". This, he concludes, "is not going to look good as the crowning insight of my researches, so I'm toning this observation down – well, essentially obfuscating it by invoking Levinas and radical alterity, always good for faking sound and fury signifying nothing".

Michael's prize ironic trophy is the figure of Cedric Gully, the ex-wrestler and night-club bouncer from the East End of London who is also a fellow passenger on the flight to Pisa ("Pisser", as he calls it), and who subsequently attaches himself to Michael. Cedric, "an extremely large man, an unprepossessing slab of brawn and bover" (6), is the antithesis of Michael's ideal of male beauty. Of his bullet-shaped head and massive body Michael says: "There was no suggestion of articulated joints, of sculpted shape, of a body functionally adapted to athletic movement; everything was fused like plasticine blobs squashed together by a large, inartistic child" (25-26). Belonging to the very opposite end of the spectrum to Michael's refined gay sensibility, Cedric's sensibilities are expressed on his abundantly tattooed torso. His huge right arm is "tattooed [...] with the image of an improbably endowed unclothed female getting intimate with, or being eaten by, a very large reptile" (11); the left one is covered with "an ornate trellis with a climbing rose" (141), and "intertwined with the horticulture" is the legend SHAT ON, the result of a cut-price attempt to alter the name of his ex-wife SHARON who had left him for a policeman (his "romantic history in a nutshell", Michael says). Over his left and right nipples are the words TIT and TAT (his "life's philosophy in a nutshell"); and, to crown all his body art, he has a dotted line tattooed across his shaven head with the instruction: *In case of emurgency* (sic) *open here*. ("for someone who doesn't like reading", Michael tells him, 'you've got an awful lot of writing on you"', 142). Cedric's self-expression extends to the slogans on the front and back of his T-shirts, including *This is my good side/And then there's my backside*, and *What part of FUCK OFF don't you understand?/That means you, Muppet*. And to complete the whole expressive ensemble, his luggage – purple in colour – bears a Union Jack with *Bonking for Britain* below it.

Cedric is assertively heterosexual, but homosocial by preference. He finds himself on the flight to Italy because he was dropped by his mate and fellow



night-club bouncer, Cyril, who was unable to join him on a planned trip to Ibiza, having broken his leg while kicking his wife Cindy, a lady mud-wrestler whom Cedric labels “the Brixton bobfoc” – “Body off *Baywatch*, Face off *Crimewatch*” (22). Michael is dismayed by the thought of someone like Cedric as a possible companion in Italy, “aggressive and needy in about equal measure, intent on having a good time but equipped, emotionally and intellectually, only to get wasted or bonk his mind out or pick up a spot of bovver, joylessly noisy and chronically aggrieved, pissing and puking and poofter-bashing, the usual train smash of emotional and cultural deprivation colliding with the incomprehensible or the unattainable” (30).

Cedric could easily have been a caricature, but Heyns has succeeded in creating in him a memorable comic figure with his mixture of belligerence, bigotry and ingenuousness. Although Michael tries to give him the slip, Cedric nevertheless tracks him down, first to Florence and then to Gianocini where he imposes himself on Michael's hospitality. As Michael reluctantly leads him home from the Gianocini bus stop in a parody of his earlier cruising in Florence – that “discreetly predatory game” (41) of “hide and seek” (50) – he tries to understand the uncharacteristic meekness of his social nemesis, whom he has hitherto thought of as “Grendel” (73), “the Cyclops” (90) or “Cedric the Saxon”, and who, disconcertingly, seems to have identified in Michael some similarity to himself:

There was something oddly meek about his following me, as well, of course, as something stubbornly defiant. I think he's been defeated by the sheer strangeness of Italy, by the impossibility of imposing his brand of aggression upon a society so blithely indifferent to it and to his truculent tattoos and obscene slogans. I suppose antisocial behaviour depends as much on a kind of social contract as does the most socialised conduct; and Cedric has blundered into a society that understands him as little as he understands it. Which must be why he's fastened onto me: I must strike him as at least a kindred species, however eccentric a specimen of it. I wish I could say that I shared this sense of kinship.

(p. 92)

Just as the controlling perspective in Caravaggio's *David with the Head of Goliath* is that of the mature artist who is responsible for the complex reciprocity between self as agent and self as object, so Heyns's narrative returns its ironic gaze to Michael himself in various ways. These include, almost as set pieces, comic exchanges between Cedric and Michael in which Michael's scholarly pursuits are viewed through the lens of Cedric's stolid logic, such as when during the flight to Pisa he questions Michael about “the point of reading, really, like *really*?” (16). Unlike football, which “gives pleasure to fuckin' millions” (17), he insists, reading is “sort of like wanking, innit? Getting off all on yer lonesome?” The notion, furthermore, of a reader's communication with a world that has to be imagined is beyond

his comprehension: “Ain’t it enough for a man to deal with just the things that do fuckin’ exist” (18). (Cedric, one has to concede, might just have a point.) Later, in Gianocini, when he again interrupts Michael’s reading of Henry James to interrogate him about his work, the realisation that he reads literary works in order to produce a book for scholars on writers whose works have been informed by the books that they in turn have read, leaves Cedric asking in disbelief: “‘So when does it stop?’ [...] ‘The readin’ of the writin’ about the reading’ and the writin’ about the readin’ of the writin’ about the reading’” (105). (Heyns’s joke about the academic publishing industry produces one of Cedric’s more memorable analogies when he compares literary scholars to “squealin’ and bonking” white mice endlessly producing more “bleedin’ bonking mice”.) Cedric’s logic triumphs again when Michael on a later occasion admonishes him about his language in company and asks him not to use words that he wouldn’t use in front of his mother: “‘Not use in front of me mother? Who d’ya fuckin’-well think *taught* me to speak? You never heard of mother tongue? An’ yer never heard me mother speak, did yer?’” (170).

## Camp

Michael’s propensity for turning the serious into the frivolous, and for artifice and exaggeration, draws attention to his camp sensibility, such as outlined by Susan Sontag in her pioneering 1964 essay, “Notes on ‘Camp’”. Sontag traces camp as far back as “the mannerist artists like Pontormo, Rosso and Caravaggio”, although she takes as its general starting point the late 17th and early 18th century because of that period’s “extraordinary feeling for artifice”, its “taste for the picturesque” and “elegant conventions for representing instant feeling and the total presence of character – the epigram and the rhymed couplet (in words), the flourish (in gesture and music)” (2015: Note 14). She proposes that “Camp is a certain mode of aestheticism” (Note 1); it is “a vision of the world in terms of style” (Note 8) – as she further elaborates: “Camp is the consistently aesthetic experience of the world. It incarnates a victory of ‘style’ over ‘content’, ‘aesthetics’ over ‘morality’, of irony over tragedy” (Note 38). There is more than an element of this, for instance, in Michael’s confession to J. that in Florence it was not morality that had made him resist any further curiosity about an obliging waiter who was apparently interested in exchanging more than photos with him: “I’m afraid it wasn’t so much virtue as aesthetic standards that stopped me from finding out” (Heyns 2014: 39).

According to Sontag the camp sensibility is disengaged and anti-serious, playful and extravagant. The narrative in *A Sportful Malice* abounds in examples of Michael’s camp amusement, such as his description of Botticelli’s painting of Judith returning triumphant with the head of

Holofernes in the Uffizi, “the heroine looking comfortably satisfied rather than victorious, as if after a successful morning’s shopping, complete with servant to carry home the gruesome groceries” (Heyns 2014: 48). Or his description of Wouter’s “very attractive way of forgetting to close his mouth all the way: it makes him look a bit dim in a gentle sort of way, like a Della Robbia Madonna, if you can imagine a very masculine Madonna” (64). Or his account of Cedric’s reaction when he faced him with the fact that he was “not really into *skirt*”: “He looked at me like a bull who’s realised that the little man in pink tights has designs upon his life” (94). The camp “spirit of extravagance” (Sontag 2015: Note 25) is also evident in Michael’s comment about Cedric’s liberal use of “an industrial strength deodorant”:

Why is it, do you think, that these testosterone-fuelled meat puppets find it necessary to fumigate themselves before venturing out? And of course, the manly method of applying the stuff, as we’ve both observed at gym, is by aerosol – roll-ons are for sissies with shaved underarms – huge bullet-shaped cans of stuff called Bolt or Blunt or Hard or Hung, which they aim in the very general direction of armpit and groin, and then set off like a gas attack, blasting another hole in the ozone layer, and leaving them smelling like a chemical toilet.

(p. 103)

Some of Michael’s camp observations reflect ironically on his relationship with J., as when he refers to Cedric’s apparent vulnerability after having been rejected by his mate Cyril, first by marrying Cindy and then by not joining him on holiday, and asks rhetorically: “what do we mere poofs know about the power of male bonding?” (110). Or when he describes his domestic situation with Cedric in Gianocini by means of a gay in-joke to J.: “Were it not for the toenails and the tattoos, we might be Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears” (142).

The relation between parody and self-parody in camp, Sontag says, is a delicate one, camp becoming wholly conscious “when one plays at being campy” (2015: Note 22) – as when Michael ends a letter to J. with regards to his Jewish mother: “I’m afraid she’s never going to reconcile herself to the fact that her son – her son, the doctor! – didn’t bring home a nice Jewish girl, or boy, for that matter. Give her my love, if you can do so with a straight face – ‘The goy sends his love’” (38). Michael is consciously campy when he responds to J.’s similarly testing the boundaries of their open relationship back in Johannesburg in the hospital sluice room with the “shaggy, morose-looking paediatrician”, Keith: “To be honest, and quite apart from my aesthetic reservations, I do find myself minding ever so slightly – but, well, how could I, in all constancy, *mind* that I mind? That’s what an open relationship is all about, isn’t it? I wish, though, that you hadn’t dwelt in such detail on his ‘surprisingly uninhibited vigour’ – I mean, what were you doing? Banging the bedpans together in your delirium?”

(46). Sontag makes the point that camp “involves a new, more complex relation to ‘the serious’” (2015: Note 41), and that it enables one to be “be serious about the frivolous, frivolous about the serious”. For example, as Michael begins to realise that during his absence he is being replaced in J.’s affections by Keith, he resorts instinctively to camp to buttress their failing relationship and signs off an email to him: “you’ll know also that I love you – none the less for some wandering by the wayside” (Heyns 2014: 197).

While acknowledging the importance of Sontag’s “Notes on Camp”, subsequent theorists have nevertheless taken issue with her approach. In his review of the volume *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*, edited by Fabio Cleto, Gregory Woods echoes Sontag herself when he says that “[t]heorisation of camp is a necessary evil” (2000: 214), but, he continues, “while there is always a risk of seeming to break a butterfly upon a wheel, even fragile things have to be subjected to the insensitive forces of scholarship”. He points out that a number of gay male writers have criticised Sontag for having “actually overstated camp’s breadth by understating the extent of its rootedness in homosexual culture” (213). In his Introduction, “Reclaiming the Discourse of Camp”, in *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*, for instance, Moe Meyer sets out the tenets of camp that inform the essays in the volume: in contrast to Sontag’s notion of camp as disengaged and apolitical, he insists that “Camp is political; Camp is solely a queer (and/or sometimes gay and lesbian) discourse; and Camp embodies a specifically queer cultural critique” (1994: 1). Meyer’s construction of camp is rooted in the queer concept of self, which in turn he bases on Judith Butler’s (1990) definition of gender as performative: camp, as he defines it, is “the total body of performative practices and strategies used to enact a queer identity, with enactment defined as the production of social visibility” (5). Camp is inseparable from a queer identity, he argues, and he offers a broad definition of camp – “Camp refers to strategies and tactics of queer parody” (9) – that combines social agency with postmodern parody, as theorised by Linda Hutcheon in *A Theory of Parody* (1985) in terms of its intertextual manipulation of the conventions of various art forms. Jack Babuscio similarly argues that the “term *camp* describes those elements in a person, situation, or activity which express, or are created by, a gay sensibility” (2004: 122). He goes on to identify four features as being basic to camp: “irony, aestheticism, theatricality, and humor”. In *A Sportful Malice* Michael’s camp sensibility is unambiguously rooted in his gay identity, while the parodic strategies of Heyns’s camp narrative self-reflexively focus on the very nature of camp itself.

### **Camp (Self)portraiture**

Michael, who is the subject of Heyns’s narrative just as Caravaggio-as-David and Caravaggio-as-Goliath constitute the composite and complex

subject of *David with the Head of Goliath*, is “dumbstruck, flabbergasted, gobsmacked, *mindfucked*” (97) to discover that his landlord in Gianocini is the Old Man from Stansted, Augustus Thorpe, a painter, and that the Englishwoman is his partner, Sophronia, also a painter. Michael later concludes that Augustus has cultivated senile vagueness as a persona, whereas Sophronia reminds him of “the Ancient Bitch with the Heart of Gold that constitutes the mainstay of the British film industry” (117) – except that “she’s bitch all the way through”. Through the agency of the “old codger” (99) and the “the old hag” (179) the narrative ironically brings the camp focaliser himself into focus. Having briefly seen Sophronia and Augustus together in Florence, Michael, who is himself an energetic stalker of attractive young men, begins to suspect melodramatically that he is being stalked by “the Weird Wrinklies” (113). When he is later invited back to their home, Casa Schifanoia, for a drink, his fears are reinforced by the “entrance hall-cum-chamber of horrors” (119) with its display of the skulls and skeletons of various animals and reptiles, and the living room with dolls’ heads suspended from the rafters and walls covered with Sophronia’s realistic paintings of rigidly posed, expressionless people in elaborate carnival costumes and surrounded by “miscellaneous objects such as cricket bats and obstetric forceps and laundry mangles” (121). The third sinister presence in Casa Schifanoia is the Great Dane, Thanatos (who, it must be noted, is at the opposite end of the canine spectrum to Michael’s dachshunds, Beatrice and Benedick, back in Johannesburg).<sup>3</sup> Michael is so unsettled that the orderly streets of Gianocini now seem to be “a site of malign conspiracy”, and the Old Man from Stansted now seems “not simply a harmless geriatric, but an agent of the dark powers” (100-101). Michael afterwards even begins to suspect that Cedric might also be “part of the wrinkly conspiracy” (196), serving as the hit man for Augustus and Sophronia who have followed him to Tuscany. His initial amused view of Cedric (“like King Kong, only without King Kong’s rugged charm”, 157) makes way for a “profoundly discombobulating” (196) double perspective: “Either he’s a gormless yob, or he’s a double agent pretending to be a gormless yob”. Things were so much simpler, he says, “when he was just Cedric the Saxon” (197).

The focus on Michael in the narrative design is intensified by means of a debate around art that is conducted in camp comic vein. At one end of the aesthetic spectrum, Sophronia with her bizarre realism and collection of skeletons speaks for traditional figurative art. She dismisses expressionist art as the “corrupt offspring of romanticism whoring with exhibitionism” (126);

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3. Dogs feature importantly in all of Heyns’s novels; they contribute to the plot, and are also fictional subjects in their own right (see, for example, the wire-haired mongrel, Kerneels, the black Labrador, Liquorice, and the Maltese Poodle, Cedric, in *Lost Ground*).

her aim, she says, is “[r]epresentation without expression”, and she abhors “expression without representation”. Such expressiveness, she says contemptuously, can only lead to performance art (“splashing paint on oneself and calling *oneself* a piece of art”) – which invites Michael’s rejoinder that all art has “an element of performance, display, even showing off about it” (127). At the other end of the aesthetic spectrum, contemporary performance art and conceptual art have as their champion Paolo’s girlfriend, Angela, who dismisses the work of the elderly pair as “fakes, bad copies of copies, no originality, no true creativity, just repetition, repetition, repetition, technique, technique, technique, with no more intellectual content than a Disney cartoon” (154). While Sophronia and Angela hold each other’s notion of art disdainfully at arm’s length, Paolo, who, as it also turns out, is the protégé of Augustus and Sophronia, is painfully caught “between his loyalty to his mentors and the siren call of new ideas” (155).

The burden of meaning that the figure of young David is made to bear in Heyns’s novel is lightened throughout by parody.<sup>4</sup> Angela’s proposed idea for Paolo to pose in the nude next to Michelangelo’s David in the Accademia (“‘Ain’t that the bloke we saw in Florence?’, Cedric says, ‘The one with the small prick?’”, 159), painted white to resemble marble, and carrying instead of a slingshot an AR-15 rifle over his shoulder to symbolise taking up arms against the role of giant corporations and the gun lobby in the killing of children worldwide, undergoes the same satirical treatment in the narrative as did Sophronia’s artworks. Angela’s explanation of her concept to juxtapose an *anti*-David, a living child-killer, with Michelangelo’s canonical child-hero, David – “‘We want to problematise, to interrogate the obtuseness of objects, the aestheticisation of violence, the apotheosis of the phallus’” (160) – is deflated by Cedric’s more down-to-earth question to Paolo: “‘[...] you gonna flash ‘em the old todger?’” (159). The artistic agenda of Heyns’s own camp fictional performance in *A Sportful Malice* lies somewhere between the jargon of Angela’s claim that her interest is “in the manipulation of semantic meaning by decontextualisation, in the dialectic of art and artifice, figure and image, self and other, asserting but also interrogating the objective dimension of reality” (161), Sophronia’s ridiculing this as “‘Meretricious sophistry [...] Real art doesn’t need a whole panoply of gobbledygook to justify itself’” (237), and Cedric’s response: “‘Fuck me’, [...] ‘You reckon anyone who clocks him standing there starkers is gonna be thinking about ... the objectionable whatsit of reality? Not being funny, but they’re gonna go, like, look at that cunt that’s dropped his clobber, what’s he on about?’” (161).

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4. According to Michael King, “there is no doubting Heyns’s masterful control of the variations in tone – always entertaining, steadily ironic, light-heartedly satirical, and very amusing” (2014)

The discussion of art in the narrative centres mainly around portraiture, with Michael as its main subject. Sophronia's decision to paint Cedric's portrait because of her fascination by his almost total lack of expressiveness (she has "seldom seen a face that is so void of signification", 184), raises the issues of looking and being looked at and the voluntarily and involuntarily returned gaze that not only inform the design of *David with the Head of Goliath* but also recall Michael's notion of cruising, especially when Sophronia describes herself as a responsible portraitist who tries "to render as precisely as possible the subject's projection of himself" (183). Michael is convinced that he is the victim of a dark plot against his life when he goes to Augustus's studio to use his computer to dispatch his missives to J. and sees a painting, painted by Augustus in the style of Caravaggio, of Saul flinging a spear at the young David (probably based on the Guercino painting). His description of the two figures in the painting combines with "true cruiser's eye" an analysis of its optic with homoeroticism:

The viewer's eye is captured, held, and led by the right arm, bare, powerful, each muscle and its tendon extended in sinuous action: the man has hurled a long spear, leaving the hand with its index finger pointed, the arm, finger and spear forming a dynamic field of force, directed upon, bearing down upon, the second figure, a young man whose right arm – also bare – is lifted as if to ward off the spear. He is in a picturesque state of undress, his tunic falling open to reveal a lean but muscular torso, the genitals lightly draped by the tactile cloth. His left arm cradles a small harp or lyre, and his face, catching the light from a window above him, is the most brightly lit object in the painting. Shockingly, the young man, in peril, surely, of his life, wears a strange little smile, almost of satisfaction, as if amused at his success in provoking the spear-thrower.

(pp. 135-136)

The face of the young David, Michael registers with shock, is his own. Shortly afterwards, when he and Cedric are invited to dinner at Casa Schifanoia, Michael encounters in Augustus's studio yet another painting, this time a replica of Caravaggio's painting of Abraham about to sacrifice Isaac that he saw in the Uffizi. Once again, Michael is discomfited to recognise his own face in that of "the terrified Isaac, cowering under his father's hand, the knife at his throat" (189) – especially since the angel that stayed Abraham's hand at the last minute and the ram that was substituted for Isaac have both been omitted from this painting, leaving Abraham with no other option but to cut his son's throat.

The narrative beheading of Michael is prepared for by Sophronia's pseudo-phrenological analysis of his head with its "much enlarged organ of approbateness" (185) which, when combined as in his case with "an abnormally enlarged organ of amateness" means that "the pursuit of approval also becomes the pursuit of others; and the conquest of others

becomes a precondition of self-approval” (185-186). Cedric expresses his assessment of Michael more plainly in reaction to Michael’s laughter when he confides to him that his wife had taken his dog – a little Maltese poodle – with her when she left: “You ain’t got no heart” (193). Later, when Cedric complains that he has not been included in Michael’s planned outing with Paolo, and repeats, “Yer ain’t got no feeling in yer, ‘ave yer?” (207), Michael responds in high camp mode: “don’t come on all sensitive on me, about us being mates all the way from Stansted. Listen, we poofs *invented* sensitivity. On us it looks good. But it doesn’t suit your style, so just leave it, will you” (208) – although he is nonplussed by Cedric’s demand that he also be treated as a “*hooman being*” (209). As Michael becomes more clearly foregrounded in the comic chiaroscuro of Heyns’s narrative, he retains his camp light-mindedness (which Sophronia says is one of his “principal failings”, 199), throughout, and takes great pleasure in writing to J. about Paolo’s apparently positive response to his flirting and their proposed excursion to Porto Ercole – which, Michael says, he proposes to make “a benchmark Tuscan appropriation. Skinny-dipping on a Tuscan beach with a Tuscan youth [...]” (211).

Michael’s textual beheading comes unexpectedly in the form of the penultimate email, which is addressed to “Dr Kaplan”, rather than “J”, and is written by Augustus, who recounts the background to the shadowy events in Gianocini as well as the outcome of the outing to the beach. Having intercepted Michael’s flash drive that he had left in the computer, Augustus explains how he is privy to all his emails to J. and he justifies his narrative “appropriation” (213) of Michael. The formal style of Augustus’s email to J. may belong, together with its sentiments, to an older generation, but it provides a counter to Michael’s camp tone and also a matching degree of ironic observation. Augustus’s comment that the internet reveals an uncomfortable similarity between the younger and older generations is simultaneously a metafictional observation about the electronic epistolary novel:

the young themselves would appear increasingly to conduct their lives in virtual reality rather than through the messy business of actual living: theirs are, in a precise sense, mediated lives. Impelled, apparently, by the need to record their every move in order to imbue it with a recognisable form of reality, believing themselves to have expanded their horizons, they have relinquished their cognitive powers to a slab of electronic circuitry, and reduced their ‘friends’ to receptors of electronic impulses. In short, through their participation in what they fondly imagine to be a form of activity (how bracingly energetic it sounds, surfing the Internet), they have made the passivity of the aged the universal human condition.

(p. 213)

The theme of self-portraiture is updated in the narrative by means of Augustus’s discourse on social media that “enable everybody to act the star



turn in his own production" (214). Each Facebook profile, he proposes, "is a self-portrait, and also a self-advertisement. But an advertisement is an offer; every member of Facebook is consumer and consumed alike, both producer and product. And no product has complete control over the forces ruling its consumption on the open market". Furthermore, he adds later about Facebook: "Never has mass narcissism been so successfully channelled and efficiently enabled. And never has the distinction between the imagined world and the everyday world been so effectively obscured" (227).<sup>5</sup>

Augustus's own self-portrait inevitably begins with *David with the Head of Goliath*. Venerating above all "the disreputable, disorderly but sublime Caravaggio – the street brawler, the braggart, the bugger, the master of chiaroscuro" (215), Augustus settled together with Sophronia in Italy after the war, where he specialised in painting modern interpretations, and not simply copies, of Italian Baroque masterpieces, later becoming "the pre-eminent living exponent of chiaroscuro in Italy" (225) – no less than "the artistic heir of the great Caravaggio" (225-226). (Even here Heyns's narrative cannot resist camp, when Augustus explains: "I was on one occasion prevailed upon to cast a Texan heiress as the Mona Lisa; I drew the line, however, at depicting her as Judith, with her late, perhaps unlamented, husband as Holofernes", 216). The young Marco Marcucci, "the fatherless son of a feckless mother" (218), became his apprentice, Cecco to his Caravaggio. The non-sexual affection that he felt for Marco was based on the youthful life force that the boy embodied, his exuberance and intensity, and the wicked sense of humour with which he inserted satirical details into the paintings commissioned by their patrons.

After a couple of years, however, Augustus began to resent his apprentice's "young immunity, his total self-sufficiency" (221), and when Marco suggested that Augustus paint his own Caravaggios, he understood only too well "the creative anguish that compelled Caravaggio to depict the dead face of Goliath as his own, and the strangely melancholy face of the triumphant young David as that of Cecco" (222). Augustus realised, however, that he could not simply reproduce *David with the Head of Goliath* but had to find "the profiles for the faces that he knew would be [his] and Marco's", and settled on the subject of Saul in impotent fury "flinging a spear at the youth who seemed to be mocking him with the soothing strains

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5. Heyns has spoken in interview about the self-editing and narcissism of Facebook: "I became fascinated with the narcissism of it, and in the whole idea of selfies; and with Facebook as a way of presenting yourself, representing yourself, and that fed into an interest in representation in general. I looked at the Caravaggio self-portraits and that connection between selfies and self-portraits, then art versus performance art. Performance art is a form of selfie, you put yourself out there" (Blaine 2014).

of his lute". His challenge, he says, was to trace in David's face the ambiguous "sensuality and the sensitivity, the deference and the defiance" which he had read every day in Marco's face. "Caravaggio", Augustus says, "had rent the veil between the virtual world of his art and the vivid figures of his daily existence; I needed only to follow him". While painting Saul and David, Augustus says, he was both creating and discovering, on his part, "the attraction that is hatred and the hatred that is attraction", and on Marco's part, "the seduction that is rejection and the rejection that is seduction" (223) – the spear being "the line of force connecting the two figures". The painting captured "the power dynamic" between apprentice and master so precisely in "the sly taunting of David, the murderous fury of Saul", that it proved to be the end of their relationship. Recognising how he was seen by his master, Marco stole the painting and fled to Naples (Caravaggio too had fled there), where he attempted to sell it to a dealer as an original Caravaggio – for which Augustus was afterwards imprisoned for three years for art fraud. His desire for vengeance on Marco was afterwards sublimated into his subsequent Caravaggesque painting of Abraham about to sacrifice Isaac – without the divine intervention.

Discovering by chance Michael's Facebook page ("a happy hunting ground for stalkers", 227) some forty years later, Augustus realised that the absconded Marco "had fathered a son in his own image" (228) in Johannesburg, named Michael Marcucci. Avidly following Michael's every move as a voyeur or stalker, which, Augustus says, is what the medium both "requires and creates" (229), he became part of its "transaction between performer and audience" with a photograph of himself as a much younger and more handsome man, and responded later to Michael's appeal for a house to rent in Tuscany. Motivated initially by a desire to take revenge on Marco through his son as much as by the possibility of recapturing the joy of his company, Augustus, with Sophronia's connivance, embarked on his 'surreptitious shadowing' of Michael (his version of the "discreetly predatory game" (41) of "hide and seek" (50) that is cruising), first contriving to bump into him in front of the painting of *David with the Head of Goliath* at the National Gallery, then at Stansted, and later in Florence. Augustus's motive shifted, however, from vengeance for Marco's betrayal to disapproval of Michael's flirtatiousness, as well as distaste for the way he shared salacious accounts of his sexual encounters with J. in their open relationship, recruiting him "as vicarious participant, an accomplice to his own cuckolding" (229). Augustus resolved that Michael should be punished for his own "temperamental defects" (233) rather than the sins of his father – for his heedlessness, "based on his supreme confidence in his own power to charm", and for his "essential callousness" (234) as revealed in his correspondence to J. "with its worldly-wise cynicism, its easy contempt, its facile judgements, laying bare the author's own confidence in his own authority and invulnerability, his power to attract without taking responsibility for that

power, his indifference to the feelings of others". As Augustus articulates the less amusing and unattractive side of Michael's camp sensibility, a more complex portrait of him begins to emerge.

To deal with Michael's arrogance, contempt for both Sophronia and himself, prurient designs on Paolo, and even his callous treatment of Cedric, Augustus devises a scheme that not only has "the perfection of a work of art" (235), but also exploits the dynamics of gay cruising. Michael, stripped and expecting to be rubbed with suntan oil by a seemingly compliant Paolo, is abandoned as Paolo (accompanied by Thanatos) speeds off with all his belongings in the motor boat, leaving him stark naked, "with no clothes, no money, no Facebook, and very little Italian" (241) on a deserted Tuscan beach. To add insult to injury, Michael's growing desperation and visible detumescence are filmed by the departing Paolo as "an 'awesome' piece of performance art" (242), which he proposes to title "*Phallus Fallu*".

"Camp", Susan Sontag says, "proposes a comic vision of the world. If tragedy is an experience of hyperinvolvement, comedy is an experience of underinvolvement, of detachment" (2015: Note 44). Heyns's narrative remains true to the spirit of camp to the end: humour is its strategy just as it is that of its protagonist. It is Cedric who, when he hears what has transpired, breaks Paolo's nose with "a classic bouncer's head-butt" (243), and wearing a T-shirt proclaiming *What You See is What You Get*, rushes off into the Tuscan sunset to rescue Michael, declaring: "I reckon he was a right real cunt [...] but I can make allowances". Michael's final email to J., in whose life he has now been supplanted by Keith, is written from a little hotel in Porto Ercole (where Caravaggio himself had ended up stranded and died in 1610). He acknowledges the "*epistolary exhibitionism*" (245) that J. accuses him of, but suggests that his lengthy missives to his partner had to do with more than just camp exhibitionism: "Affection, perhaps? *Love*, dare I suggest?" For all the camp frivolousness of its formulation, there is no gainsaying the wry self-knowledge in Michael's mature portrait of himself and J.:

Read in a certain ironic light, I would have thought my account was more of a catalogue of failed attempts than of conquests. Which, to concentrate now on your condition, is more than can be said of your account, mercifully brief as it is, of your 'whirlwind' romance with Keith. He saw you and pursued you and on the seventh day he fucked you, and you saw that it was good. Not exactly faithful Penelope, to borrow your allusion, and nothing very romantic about it, yet nothing shameful, either. It's where we are, at our age and in our subculture. And it is what we accepted as the risk inherent in an open relationship [...] And I gather that your mother is pleased with her new son-in-law, the doctor.

(pp. 245-246)

Michael's narrative ends with an account of Cedric rubbing lotion all over his naked body to soothe his terrible sunburn (– but "I'm not touching yer todger", 253), and confiding to him that he was giving up bouncing, despite feeling guilty about dumping Cyril, and staying on in Italy to help his new Italian friend, Giuseppe, on the family farm. The bemused Michael wonders if this might just be Cedric's "coming-out speech" (252), but Cedric puts it simply as "a man must have a mate, don't he?" In the tradition of comedy ending with happy pairings, Michael concludes: "So Cyril will be okay and Cindy will be okay and Cedric will, I hope, be okay and Giuseppe will be okay and all manner of things will be okay, and no doubt you and Keith will be okay, and Beatrice and Benedick will be okay, and Augustus and Sophronia will probably be okay, and Paolo and Angela will certainly be okay – leaving me roasted to a turn but with me todger untouched" (253). At least he has the prospect of a visit from Wouter. It is by identifying himself not with Shakespeare's Prospero but with the buffoon Malvolio, "the most notorious geck and gull that e'er invention played on", that in this *Comedy of Revenge* Heyns's gay literary scholar signs off his camp version of Caravaggio's melancholy double self-portrait.

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**Caravaggio, David with the Head of Goliath (c.1609)**

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