

VISIBLE SPIRIT
THE ART OF
GIANLORENZO BERNINI

VOL. II

IRVING LAVIN



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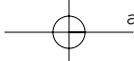
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XVII

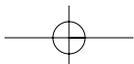
**Bernini and Antiquity — The Baroque Paradox
A Poetical View***

MY chief purpose in this paper is to bring together and consider under one heading two papers by earlier scholars on apparently quite different subjects that are fundamental to some of our current views on the relationship of Baroque art to antiquity. In a brief note entitled 'Rhetoric and Baroque Art', published in 1955, Giulio Carlo Argan for the first time offered what has since become perhaps the prevalent interpretation of Baroque art, based on the classical tradition of rhetoric.¹ The primary source book on the subject, Aristotle's treatise on rhetoric, became available in Italian translation in 1570. The wide influence of Argan's essay was very salubrious, suggesting as it did that Baroque style, often regarded as a decadent superabundance of ornament and conceit, could better be understood positively as a deliberate and sophisticated technique of persuasion. The second paper, published by Rudolf Wittkower in 1963, compared the use of ancient models by Poussin, the arch classicist of France, and Bernini, the outstanding representative of Italian Baroque exuberance.² With great perspicuity Wittkower showed from preparatory studies how classical sources

* The gist of this paper was first presented in a lecture at a meeting of the College Art Association of America in 1961.

¹ Giulio Carlo Argan, La 'rettorica' e l'arte barocca, in: *Rettorica e barocco. Atti del III congresso internazionale di studi umanistici*, Rome, 1955, pp. 9–14.

² Rudolf Wittkower, The Role of Classical Models in Bernini's and Poussin's Preparatory Work, in: *Studies in Western Art: Latin American Art and the Baroque Period in Europe. Acts of the Twentieth International Congress of the History of Art*. III, Princeton, 1963, pp. 41–50 (reprinted in *idem, Studies in the Italian Baroque*, London, 1975, pp. 103–114).



functioned in diametrically opposite ways in the development of their works. Poussin would typically start with a dynamic, 'Baroque' design, into which ancient models would then intervene to produce a restrained, classicizing final version; Bernini, on the other hand, would often start with a classical prototype, which he would then transform into a free and volatile 'Baroque' solution.

Invaluable as they are — and everything I shall say this evening proves my own indebtedness to them — the essays of Argan and Wittkower seem to me to beg two essential questions that are also interrelated. The rhetorical approach inevitably focuses on the form and mechanisms, rather than the substance and meaning of style; and emphasis on the extreme differences in response to ancient models overlooks what the opposing attitudes have in common, and hence misses the significance of the antique for that which is, after all, 'Baroque' about Baroque art.

I shall take up these issues in reverse order.

Any discussion of the relationship between Baroque art and the art of antiquity must inevitably confront the fundamental paradox that underlies Wittkower's comparison. The popular and I think nevertheless largely valid conception of the Baroque is that it is the period in art when exaggerated, dramatic emotions were expressed through violent and often apparently arbitrary formal contrasts — in short the farthest thing possible from the noble balance, reticence, and harmony we normally associate with classical art. While this description applies to a great deal of Baroque art, north as well as south of the Alps, it does not apply to all. In Poussin's famous *Et in Arcadia Ego*, we find neither overly dramatic gestures and emotions, nor violent formal contrasts (Fig. 1). Yet, Poussin must be included in any general definition of Baroque art, not merely because he lived in the seventeenth century, but because he does in fact make use of many 'Baroque' formal and expressive devices. Perhaps most important, I should say, is precisely his sense of drama — he very subtly yet very definitely concentrates our attention upon a dramatic focus, which he fills with a poignant mood that is deeply moving. As we continue to study the picture, our eye is caught and held as if bewitched at the open space at the very center of the composition where the poised hands of the shepherds decipher the melancholy inscription. Bernini's *Ecstasy of St. Teresa* could hardly be more different in other respects (Fig. 2). Yet here, too, everything is focused on a dominant central void; everything contributes to charge the space between the figures with an almost painful sense of expectancy.

We have invented the brashly self-contradictory term 'Baroque Classicism' to cope with this kind of situation, which is not only paradoxical but remarkably persistent.

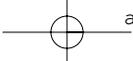
Though perhaps to a somewhat lesser degree, the same dichotomy can be found in the Baroque art of Italy, as well. The fantastical and tumultuous architecture of Borromini, as witness the façade of this little church in Rome, S. Carlo alle Quattro Fontane (Fig. 3), is the absolute antithesis of the clear, simple, at times even austere grandeur of Bernini's architecture. One would hardly believe that a Baroque building could have inspired the following statement, 'No other Italian structure of the post-Renaissance period shows an equally deep affinity with Greece.' Yet it was written by Wittkower himself, about Bernini's colonnade in front of St. Peter's (Fig. 4).³

We can carry this dilemma yet a step further. Bernini's colossal figure of St. Longinus in St. Peter's (Fig. 5), captured at the height of a dramatic moment, with thundering drapery and ecstatic expression, is the very essence of what most people mean by Baroque, whether they like it or not. Considered in relation to the statement just quoted about the Hellenic character of Bernini's colonnade, one can understand why some critics have gone so far as to suggest that Bernini was a kind of artistic schizophrenic — classical in his architecture, Baroque in his sculpture.

The dichotomy runs still deeper. Compare the St. Longinus with another of Bernini's statues in St. Peter's, of the Countess Matilda of Tuscany, the great twelfth-century benefactress of the papacy, begun in 1633 (Fig. 6). Although contemporaneous in execution, the two works seem diametrically opposed. Matilda is a grand and noble matron, obviously inspired by some classical figure of Juno or Athena. She stands solid and stable, her drapery is fulsome and heavy, and her countenance displays a grave composure that is more classical in spirit, one might almost say, than antiquity itself.

In the case of Bernini our problem is compounded by what we know of his views on art, which is quite a good deal. The chief source is the journal kept of Bernini's visit to France on the invitation of Louis XIV. by Paul de

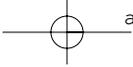
³ Rudolf Wittkower, *Art and Architecture in Italy. 1600 to 1750*, Harmondsworth, etc. 1980. p. 196.



1. Nicolas Poussin,
Et in Arcadia Ego,
Paris, Musée du Louvre,
photo Archives
photographiques MNLP
360/112c.



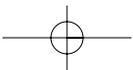
2. Bernini,
Ecstasy of St. Teresa,
Rome, S. Maria della
Vittoria,
photo Alinari 6193.

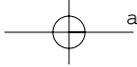


3. Borromini, Rome,
S. Carlo alle Quattro
Fontane,
photo Alinari 27898.

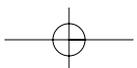


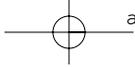
4. Bernini, Rome, St.
Peter's, photo
Anderson 24399.



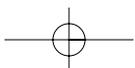


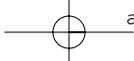
5. Bernini, *St. Longinus*, Rome, St. Peter's,
photo Anderson 20588.





6. Bernini, *Countess Matilda of Tuscany*, Rome, St. Peter's,
photo Anderson 20572.



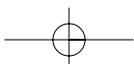


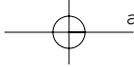
Chantelou, whom Louis had designated as the renowned artist's chaperon.⁴ Chantelou kept a day-by-day record, from which we glimpse Bernini's ideas and character with a freshness and intimacy unparalleled before the nineteenth century. The remarkable fact is that while the Journal itself is thus a profoundly Baroque sort of document, and the brilliant, extroverted artist emerges as a profoundly Baroque sort of personality, the things he says about art betray an analogous kind of duality. On the one hand he speaks of the difficulty of rendering the subtle color gradations of the skin in white marble — a possibility only a sculptor of the seventeenth century would articulate. On the other hand, he advises the young student to copy the masterpieces of antiquity even before nature. On the one hand, he does not wish the king to 'pose' for his portrait, but sketches him in action in order to capture a characteristic, momentary expression. On the other hand, he was deeply impressed, even disturbed by the reserved, cerebral paintings of Poussin, whose works he says he wishes he had not seen because they make him realize how little he knows about art.

Under the circumstances one can readily comprehend that commentators have resorted to some rather peculiar arguments in order to explain these contradictory aspects of Bernini's art and thought. His classicizing sculptures represent a sort of capitulation to the conservative currents of the day. His emphatic admiration for antiquity was simply part of the intellectual furniture of classicistic art theory inherited from the sixteenth century. His admiration of Poussin was merely an attempt to cull favor at the French court. All of which imputes to Bernini a degree of superficiality, even of hypocrisy that is utterly belied by the divinely proud and self-assured individual we know from Chantelou's journal. One need only point out, for example, that Poussin was just about all he praised in France; almost everything else he saw he criticized so openly and severely that Chantelou had to ask him in private if he wouldn't be a bit more tactful — he was hurting everyone's feelings.

No, I believe we must accept the fact that Bernini's response to antiquity was both genuine and deep-seated. We must reconcile ourselves to the likelihood that the contradiction we feel between two opposing principles is at some level anachronistic; and if we are ever really to understand Baroque

⁴ M. de Chantelou, *Journal du voyage du Cavalier Bernin en France*. Ed. Ludovic Lalanne, Paris 1885. An English translation by M. Corbett, with excellent notes by G. Bauer, is now available, Paul Fréart de Chantelou, *Diary of the Cavaliere Bernini's Visit to France*. Ed. Anthony Blunt, Princeton, 1985.





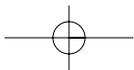
art in general, and Bernini in particular, we must find the common denominator.

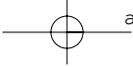
Possibly the clearest insight I know into the significance of classical art for Bernini, at least during the early part of his career, is provided by his epoch-making group of Apollo and Daphne (Fig. 7). The relationship of the figure of Apollo to the Apollo Belvedere (Fig. 8) is one of the most direct and obvious quotations from another work of art, classical or otherwise, in the whole of Bernini's oeuvre. The model has been greatly altered, to be sure, but the reference is so explicit that one can scarcely imagine the group's initial derivation from quite a different prototype. This is a work by the obscure Florentine sculptor, Battista Lorenzi, whose relationship to Bernini's Apollo and Daphne has not, I think, received the attention it deserves (Fig. 9). The sculpture, which represents Alpheus and Arethusa, was executed sometime before 1584 for the garden of a villa at Florence.⁵ The similarities are too close for coincidence, and we are driven to the conclusion that one of the most revolutionary works of Bernini's youth apparently originated in an almost paradigmatic work of late Mannerist sculpture.

While some may find this realization rather disillusioning, it does help us to grasp one of the important services the classical model performed. For among the many differences of the Apollo and Daphne from the earlier group, perhaps the most critical is the return to a dominant viewpoint — a distinctive novelty of Bernini's early work, as Wittkower emphasized in another context.⁶ One of the earlier sculptor's chief concerns was to provide the spectator with something to look at from various points of view. Bernini's chief concern was to present to the spectator a dramatic momentary situation. We know from documents that he took care to have the group placed against a wall, so that it could be seen only from one side. By thus concentrating and focusing the action of the figures Bernini trans-

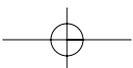
⁵ Preston Remington, Alpheus and Arethusa. A Marble Group by Battista Lorenzi, in: *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, XXXV, 1940, pp. 61–65. References to Florentine sculpture are frequent in Bernini's early work.

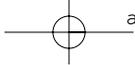
⁶ Rudolf Wittkower, *Le Bernin et le baroque romain*, in: *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, XI, 1934, pp. 327–341. Wittkower's analysis retains its essential validity despite recent studies that have emphasized the care with which Bernini also calculated subordinate views. Joy Kenseth, Bernini's Borghese Sculptures: Another View, in: *The Art Bulletin*, LXIII, 1981, pp. 191–210; Rudolf Kuhn, Die Dreiansichtigkeit der Skulpturen des Gianlorenzo Bernini und des Ignaz Günther, in: *Festschrift für Wilhelm Messerer zum 60. Geburtstag*, Cologne, 1980, pp. 231–249.



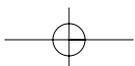


7. Bernini, *Apollo and Daphne*, Rome, Galleria Borghese, photo Anderson 1919.



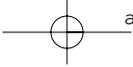


8. *Apollo Belvedere*, Rome, Musei Vaticani,
photo Alinari 6501.

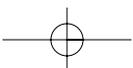




9. Battista Lorenzi, *Alpheus and Arethusa*, New York, Metropolitan Museum, Neg. No. 120512.



10. Bernini, *David*, Rome, Galleria Borghese,
photo Anderson 1922.





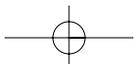
formed the whole course of European sculpture. It would be foolish to maintain that Bernini would not have returned to the dominant viewpoint without the Apollo Belvedere, but there can be no doubt that the ancient statue provided him with unimpeachable precedent for his break with Mannerist tradition.

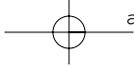
What we have said of the *Apollo and Daphne* can be said of virtually all the major revolutionary works of Bernini's youth. Bernini's *David* seems to have started from the great figure of Polyphemus hurling a rock at Acis painted by Annibale Carracci, another of Bernini's favorite artists, on a vault of the Palazzo Farnese in Rome 20 years before (Figs. 10, 11). This time one recognizes the interposition of two ancient works in the genesis of different aspects of Bernini's sculpture. The complex torsion of Carracci's figure, moving forward toward the spectator while turning backward toward the fleeing enemy, is simplified, frontalized and brought into sharp psychological focus — thanks to the Borghese gladiator and the group of Menelaus holding the body of Patroclus; we know that Bernini greatly admired both these famous works (Figs. 12, 13).⁷

Clearly, it is hard to agree with those who conceive that Bernini's explicit admiration for antiquity was incompatible with his own direction. On the contrary, in view of the consistency with which the young Bernini adopted classical models, one might even propose the somewhat startling thesis that the beginning of Baroque sculpture was actually accompanied by a classical revival, of almost the proportions and significance of the Early Renaissance itself. Bernini's relation to antiquity in his early work has all the earmarks of a passionate rediscovery. In each case, upon a contemporary, or near contemporary, starting point he superimposed some ancient reference which helped to clarify, concentrate and intensify what can only be described as a new quality of heroic pathos and drama. This is the quality, after all, that underlies the seemingly contradictory extremes of the relationship between the Baroque and antiquity, linking Poussin to Bernini, Borromini to Bernini, the St. Longinus to the Matilda of Tuscany.

Bernini was far from alone in this respect. There is ample evidence that a renewed interest in antiquity was an essential aspect of the profound

⁷ On these works, with references to Bernini's enthusiasm for them, see Francis Haskell/Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique. The Lure of Classical Sculpture 1500–1900*, New Haven and London, 1981, pp. 221–224, 291–296. See also my essay, Bernini and the Art of Social Satire, in: Irving Lavin (Ed.), *Drawings by Gian Lorenzo Bernini from the Museum der bildenden Künste*, Leipzig and Princeton, 1981, p. 40.



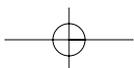


changes that were being wrought in other art forms during the early seventeenth century in Rome, notably in the theater — in drama, in music, and above all in the combination of the two, opera. Here at last we begin to reach the heart of the matter I wish to consider here, and I shall focus initially on these parallel phenomena, which I think may have some bearing upon Bernini's development.

As far as drama is concerned, it is too little known that among the major forces in the development of Baroque theater were the Jesuits.⁸ From its inception the Society had fostered a great tradition of stage productions as part of its program of education and indoctrination. The plays were put on in the Jesuit colleges, under the direction of the teacher of rhetoric, for the benefit of the students, who were the actors; the students were often the sons of powerful noblemen and the practice helped to perfect their Latin and their oratorical prowess, while the lofty subject matter served to inculcate them with spiritual truth. By the early seventeenth century in Rome these productions became quite elaborate and were among the city's stellar attractions, serving to advance the twin causes of religious faith and the Jesuit order. Perhaps the leading figure in the Jesuit theater during the first quarter of the century was one Bernardino Stefonio, who was teacher of humanities and rhetoric in Rome for more than a decade before 1618, when he became tutor to the Duke of Modena.⁹ Stefonio wrote a number of dramas whose success is witnessed by the several editions and performances they were given. Chief among them were two tragedies, one called *Crispus*, first performed at the Collegio Romano in 1597, the other *Flavia*, performed for the Jubilee year 1600. Both plays recount the stories of Christian martyrdoms under Roman emperors, but they incorporate important elements of plots and language from the tragedies of Seneca.

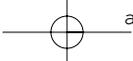
⁸ For a recent survey, see William H. McCabe, *An Introduction to the Jesuit Theater*, St. Louis, 1983. For Rome, see Gualtiero Gnerghi, *Il teatro gesuitico nei suoi primordi a Roma*, Rome 1907, and the valuable but unpublished work by V. R. Yanitelli, *The Jesuit Theatre in Italy*, Ph.D. Diss. Fordham Univ., 1945. See also a series of essays by various authors on the theaters of the Collegio and Seminario Romano, in *The Ohio State University Theatre Collection Bulletin*, No. 16, 1969.

⁹ Stefonio's work has been the subject of two excellent essays by Marc Fumaroli, *Le Crispus et la Favia du P. Bernardino Stefonia S. J. Contribution à l'histoire du théâtre au Collegio Romano (1597–1628)*, in: Jean Jacquot/Elie Konigson. *Les fêtes de la Renaissance*. III, Paris, 1975, pp. 505–524, and *Théâtre, humanisme et contre-réforme à Rome (1597–1642): l'œuvre du P. Bernardino Stefonio et son influence*, in: *Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé*, XXXIII, 1974, pp. 397–411.





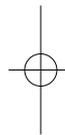
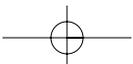
11. Annibale Carracci,
Polyphemus, Rome,
Palazzo Farnese,
photo Gabinetto
Fotografico
Nazionale,
Roma 37163.

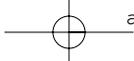


13. *Menelaus and Patroclus*, Florence, Loggia dei Lanzi,
photo Alinari 2482.



12. *Borghese Gladiator*, Paris, Musée du Louvre,
photo Alinari 22625.





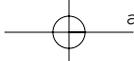
Stefonio's plays thus combine the Counter-Reformatory recourse to the pristine Christian values of the early church, with a number of basic reforms intended to arouse an immediate emotional response in the audience by emulating the simplicity and directness of ancient tragedy.

Another important innovation in Stefonio's plays, especially compared with the academic productions of ancient plays they were intended to emulate, was the introduction of singing and dancing at various points in the action, in intermezzos between the acts, and especially through a chorus whose choreography, charged with high symbolism, was recorded in engraved diagrams (Fig. 14).

A second great innovation in Rome at this period took place only a short distance away but at the opposite end of the social and theatrical scale, as it were, under the aegis of the arch rival of the Jesuits, the Congregation of the Oratorio founded by St. Phillip Neri.¹⁰ The saint had insisted from the outset on the necessity and appropriateness of singing popular spiritual songs in the vernacular to musical accompaniment, as part of the regular devotions of the order. The practice was also a conscious emulation of the communal worship of the primitive church, and the order's very name, Congregation of the Oratory, derives from this distinctive practise of musical prayer. The Oratory's tradition underwent a profound transformation, however, and a new era in the development of the Baroque theater opened, with an event held in the Jubilee year of 1600, at the same time as the Jesuit production of Bernardino Stefonio's *Flavia*. The event, no doubt partly intended as a response to the Jesuit theatrical success, was the performance at the Oratory of what really amounted to a new art form — a religious drama set entirely to music with the parts sung by a combination of choral and solo voices. The *Rappresentazione di Anima e di Corpo* marked a critical turning point in the development of a movement that had begun in Florence in the 80s of the sixteenth century, with the Florentine Camerata, familiar to every musicologist. Under the patronage of a certain nobleman, Giovanni Bardi, a group of amateurs held informal meetings for the purpose of studying and recreating the music and drama of the ancients. In so

¹⁰ The paragraphs that follow concerning the Oratory and the *Rappresentazione di Anima e di Corpo*, and Bernini's sculptures of the Damned and Blessed Souls, are taken from a forthcoming essay by the writer, 'Bernini's Portraits of No-Body', which provides full documentation.

The standard work on the Oratorio is Howard E. Smither, *A History of the Oratorio*. 3 vols. Chapel Hill, 1977–1987.

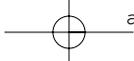


doing, they took the first basic steps in the creation of Baroque opera. Among the better-known participants were the theoretician Vincenzo Galilei, father of the astronomer, the poet Ottavio Rinuccini, who later wrote the libretto for Monteverdi's *Lament of Ariadne*, and Emilio de' Cavalieri, who was instrumental in introducing the movement to Rome.

De' Cavalieri (1550–1602) composed the music for the *Rappresentazione di Anima e di Corpo*, while the text was written by a member of the Oratory, Agostino Manni (1548–1618). The *Rappresentazione* was an extraordinary and seminal production from many points of view. It marked a turning point in the development and transferral from Florence to Rome of the new technique of melodic recitation, or the use of song in a dramatic enactment — melodrama, in other words — intended to recapture what was thought to be the essential principle of ancient theatrical art. All this was stated explicitly in the preface to the original edition of the text and score of the *Rappresentazione*, as was the intention to move the audience by expressing through the melodic dialogue the strongly contrasting emotions of the characters: 'singular and novel compositions of music, made similar to that style with which, it is said, the ancient Greeks and Romans in their scenes and theaters used to move the spectators to various affections'; 'played and sung "all'antica," as it is said'; 'affective music'; 'able to revive that ancient usage so felicitously'; 'this style is also suited to move to devotion'; 'this kind of music revived by him [Cavalieri] will move to various affections, like pity and joy, weeping and laughter, and others like them'; the singer should 'express well the words so that they may be understood and accompany them with gestures and movements, not only of the hands but also of steps, which are very effective aids to move the affection'; [Cavalieri] 'would praise to change instruments according to the affect of the singer'; 'passing from one affection to its contrary, as from mournful to happy, from ferocious to gentle and the like, is greatly moving.'¹¹

The text of the play, which must certainly have been conceived with musical enactment in mind, was no less innovative. The subject was a religious allegory which combined two forms of late medieval popular devotion that had been revived in the latter part of the sixteenth century: the *Lauda spirituale*, or song of praise on a religious theme, which might

¹¹ Translated from the dedication and preface to 'Rappresentazione di anima, et di corpo'. *Nuouamente posta in musica dal Sig. Emilio del Cavaliere per recitar cantando*, Rome, 1600 (facsimile ed., Westmead, England, 1967).

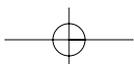


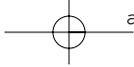
include elements of narrative and dialogue but was not a proper enactment; and the *Sacra Rappresentazione*, or religious play in verse, based normally on a Biblical story, with parts often sung to musical accompaniment. The three-act work, something between a recitation and a play, includes, besides Body and Soul, allegorical characters such as Time, Understanding, Good Counsel, Mammon, and Worldly Life. The plot consists entirely in the exchange of arguments for good and evil, presented alternately in a kind of contrapuntal symmetry, until Virtue triumphs in the end. The only events, properly speaking, occur in the third act when Hell and Heaven alternately open and close, and their denizens — Damned and Blessed Souls — intone their respective laments and exaltations.

The impact of the jubilee production of the *Rappresentazione di Anima e di Corpo* was immediate and extraordinary. A contemporary biographer of Manni described the representation as ‘the first in Rome in the new recitative style, which then became frequent and universally applauded’.¹² The response of cultivated Roman society may be judged from the vivid recollections of an eyewitness, recorded after the death of Emilio de’ Cavalieri in 1602. I want to quote the report *in extenso* because it is quite moving in itself and illustrates not only the thematic but also the expressive context of our subject.

‘I, Giovanni Vittorio Rossi, found myself one day in the home of Signor Cavaliere Giulio Cesare Bottifango, not only a fine gentleman but also one of rare qualities — excellent secretary, most knowledgeable poet and musician. Having begun to discuss music that moves the emotions (*musica che move gli affetti*), he told me resolutely that he had never heard anything more affecting (*più affettuosa*), or that had moved him more than the Representation of the Soul put to music by the late Signor Emilio de’ Cavalieri, and performed the Holy Year 1600 in the oratory of the Assumption, in the house of the Reverend Fathers of the Oratorio at the Chiesa Nuova. He was present that day when it was performed three times without satisfying the demand, and he said in particular that hearing the part of Time, he felt come over him a great fear and terror: and at the part when the Body, performed by the same person as Time, in doubt whether to follow God or the World, resolved to follow God, his eyes poured forth a great abundance of tears and he felt arise in his heart a great repentance

¹² Cf. D. Alaleona, Su Emilio de’ Cavalieri, la Rappresentazione di Anima e di Corpo e alcune sue composizioni inedite, in: *La nuova musica*, X, 1905, p. 18.



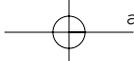


and pain for his sins. Nor did this happen only then, but thereafter whenever he sang it he was so excited to devotion that he wanted to take communion, and he erupted in a river to tears. He also gave extreme praise to the part of the Soul, divinely performed by that castrato; he said the music was also an inestimable artifice that expressed the emotions of pain and tenderness with certain false sixths tending toward sevenths, which ravished the spirit. In sum, he concluded, one could not do anything more beautiful or more perfect in that genre, and, so I might see for myself the truth of what he said, he took me to the harpsichord and sang several pieces from the representation, in particular that part of the Body which had so moved him. It pleased me so much that I asked him to share it with me, and he most courteously copied it himself. I learned it by heart, and often went to his house to hear him sing it himself.¹³

It must be said, in sum, that the Jesuit and Oratorian productions for the jubilee of 1600 represented two new, alternative and complementary approaches to combining words and music in a specifically Christian dramatic performance inspired by a renewed emulation of antiquity. The high-culture academic exercises of the Jesuits focused primarily on the classical drama and scenic splendor, introducing music, singing and dance as ancillary ingredients of a moving effect. The Oratorians took the more popular path of vernacular dramatic text, all of it sung to musical accompaniment, but with relatively little emphasis on staging and scenography. Each of these approaches had a long and fruitful legacy. The Oratorians subsequently suppressed the theatrical aspect altogether, focusing instead on the music-drama itself in the development of the Oratorio form for which the Order is famous. The Jesuits tended to suppress the musical in favor of the theatrical aspects of the drama, and spectacular productions of Jesuit school plays in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries became legendary.

There was one particular context, however, in which a clear and specific effort was made to combine the two approaches and create a fully developed music-drama, with elaborate staging, all roles played by actor-singers to orchestral accompaniment, a corps de ballet performing dances that were an integral part of the event, and a plot that recounted the inspiring spiritual victories of the early church martyrs. These first great religious operas were created in the second quarter of the seventeenth century under the patron-

¹³ Cf. Marcello Fagiolo/Maria Luisa Madonna (Eds.), *Roma sancta. La città delle basiliche*, Rome 1985, p. 196.



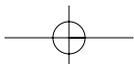
age of the family of Pope Urban VIII Barberini, who was Bernini's greatest patron.¹⁴ In a series of productions mainly in the Palazzo Barberini, newly brought to completion by Bernini himself, the musical as well as the purely theatrical possibilities of the earlier innovations were further developed. In fact, one might say without too much exaggeration that it was largely in the Palazzo Barberini that opera acquired the spectacular and scenographic character with which it is still associated. The Barberini productions are also of interest because they brought religion to the opera. Whereas previous musical dramas had used mythological themes, the operas sponsored by the papal family were mostly devoted to the lives of early saints and thus combined classical settings with an explicit Christian spiritual message.

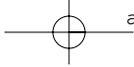
Throughout this development those involved were quite conscious of the revolution in progress, and there was much discussion of the *nuova musica*, and *musica rappresentativa*, or monody — meaning the setting of a single melodic line, carried by the voice, against an orchestral accompaniment. This, it was said, constituted a simple, direct means of representing dramatic situations and arousing the emotions quite impossible with the complex formal configurations of sixteenth-century polyphony. The whole discussion, I repeat, took place in terms of a new understanding of the relation between words and music in ancient tragedy. Hence it becomes understandable, for example, that one of the chief theoreticians of the new movement in Rome, Giovanni Battista Doni, to whom the term monody is due, should also have been one of the founders of the modern study of ancient music, especially Greek. He conceived of Greek tragedy, it seems hardly necessary to mention, very much like early Baroque opera. He even invented an instrument, the Lyra Barberina, with which he sought to reconcile the requirements of ancient and contemporary technique.¹⁵

Both the continuity between the Roman and earlier Florentine tradition, and the self-consciousness of it all, are illustrated by the fact that the first historical account we have of the origins of the melodrama is a letter about the Camerata Fiorentina written by Piero Bardi, the original patron's

¹⁴ For an overview of Barberini theater patronage, see *Enciclopedia dello spettacolo*, 11 vols. Rome 1975, I, cols. 1468–70, s. v. 'Barberini'. The standard work remains Alessandro Ademollo, *I teatri di Roma nel secolo decimosettimo*, Rome, 1888. The only comprehensive study of the Barberini theater is the unpublished dissertation by M. L. Pietrangeli Chanaz, *Il teatro barberiniano*, Univ. of Rome, 1968; see also Margaret K. Murata, *Operas for the Papal Court 1631–1668*, Ann Arbor, Mich., 1981.

¹⁵ On Doni, see *Enciclopedia . . .*, *op. cit.* (cf. n. 14), II. cols., 855 f.



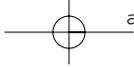


son, to Giovanni Battista Doni in 1634. Doni actually lived with the Barberini from 1623 till 1640.

In the theater too, therefore, we are faced with the curious paradox of an intimate link between the formation of early Baroque principles and a consciously renewed classicism. In as much as antiquity had always played a preeminent role in Renaissance artistic theory, however, the idea of a renewal is here particularly important. The difference may be illustrated with special relevance in our present context by certain aspects of the history of dramatic theory.

The key document for the understanding of the theory and practice of the theater in antiquity was the *Poetics* of Aristotle. Like the *Rhetoric*, the *Poetics* is devoted ultimately to the art of persuasion, but whereas the *Rhetoric* focuses primarily on discursive argument as the means toward that end, the *Poetics* is concerned with mimetic representation. The theater persuaded not through analysis and demonstration, but through eliciting an empathetic response in which the audience is transported out of its normal frame of reference into one of the author's own design. Hence it was that since the early years of the sixteenth century, after the first publication of Aristotle's *Poetics*, one of the crucial issues was the famous definition of the function of tragedy, Catharsis.¹⁶ The portion of Aristotle's treatise that supposedly explained the term was lost; hence the history of interpretations of Catharsis is a perfect index to successive conceptions of ancient drama. Generally speaking, two main views have prevailed. The first, which practically dominated sixteenth century thought on the subject, has been called the moral or didactic (sometimes liturgical or religious) interpretation: tragedy by demonstrating the effects of certain actions produces a moral purification of the passions. The second interpretation has been called pathological, or homeopathic, since it focuses not so much upon the ethical or didactic value of tragedy as upon its power to arouse our emotions. Catharsis is a kind of treatment, curing emotion by exciting it. The basis for this interpretation is Aristotle himself who, in a remarkable passage in the

¹⁶ Eugène Napoléon Tigerstedt, *Observations on the Reception of the Aristotelian Poetics in the Latin West*, in: *Studies in the Renaissance*, XV, 1968. pp. 7–24. For a recent survey of interpretations of Catharsis, see Stephen Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*. Chapel Hill, 1986, pp. 350–356; see also Franz Susemihl/Robert D. Hicks. *The Politics of Aristotle*, New York, 1976, pp. 641 ff. A vast resource on sixteenth-century interpretations is provided by Bernard Weinberg's *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols. Chicago, 1961, and his *Trattati di poetica e retorica del cinquecento*, 4 vols., Bari, 1970–1974.

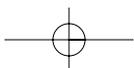


Politics, describes the effect of certain kinds of music upon those possessed of God, in a state of religious fervor, or *enthusiasmós*. The music serves as a physical stimulus that provides an outlet for the religious fervor, and the result is a 'harmless joy'. Similarly, the spectator who is brought face to face with grander suffering than his own, experiences an empathetic ecstasy, or lifting out of himself. In the glow of tragic excitement, feelings such as pity and fear become universal and are so transformed that the net result is a noble emotional satisfaction.

This sounds like a quite modern view of the matter, and much of the phraseology I have used is actually taken from S. H. Butcher's standard work: *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, London-New York, 1895. It is also easy to see, however, that by adopting such a view Aristotle could not only be reconciled with, but made into a prime witness for the direct appeal to the emotions that is the core of Baroque theater. Indeed, although adumbrated earlier, the pathological interpretation flourished in the seventeenth century and can be traced thenceforward down to our own times. To be precise, it seems first to reappear, complete with a reference to the passage on music and religious ecstasy from the *Politics*, in a treatise on tragedy published in 1621 by one Tarquinio Galluzzi — a Jesuit father who was rector of the Greek College in Rome from 1631 to 1644. Galluzzi, I might add, wrote another treatise, significantly entitled *The Revival of Ancient Tragedy*, specifically in defense of Father Stefonio's *Crispus*.¹⁷

Of particular interest in our context is a circumstance often overlooked or neglected in discussions of Catharsis. Aristotle's explanation of the concept occurs not in the *Poetics* but in the *Politics*, and does not concern tragedy as such, but music and its role in human society, especially the education of the young. Aristotle thus spoke directly to the Jesuit Baroque theatrical endeavor, on several levels at once, the primary aim of the exercise was pedagogical, serving to produce an effect on the moral character of the soul: the homeopathic view of Catharsis confirmed the emphasis on a direct appeal to the emotions; and the focus on music as the agent of Catharsis reinforced the effort to integrate music and words in the theater to create a dramatic whole. Definitely, the air in Rome was filled with such notions in the first half of the century. Interestingly enough, the passage in

¹⁷ See Ingram Bywater, Milton and the Aristotelian Definition of Tragedy, in: *Journal of Philology*, XXVII, 1901, pp. 267–275. On Galluzzi and his teacher, Stefonio, see Fumaroli, *op. cit.* (cf. n. 9).



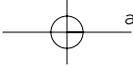
Galluzzi has been quoted in connection with John Milton's introduction to *Samson Agonistes*, which apparently introduced the pathological interpretation of Catharsis to England. Milton, it will be remembered, was in Rome in 1639, and had close contacts with the local literati. One of his letters records his attendance at a splendid performance, in the Palazzo Barberini.¹⁸

Several points thus seem quite clear: that the theater in Rome during the early seventeenth century was a leader in the creation of new and more powerful forms of dramatic presentation: that people were very conscious of this development and eminently aware of the theater's unique capacity to achieve, by means of its illusions, what Coleridge called the 'willing suspension of disbelief'. It seems certain, finally, that this attitude was regarded as a new rapprochement to the essential spirit of the ancient theater.

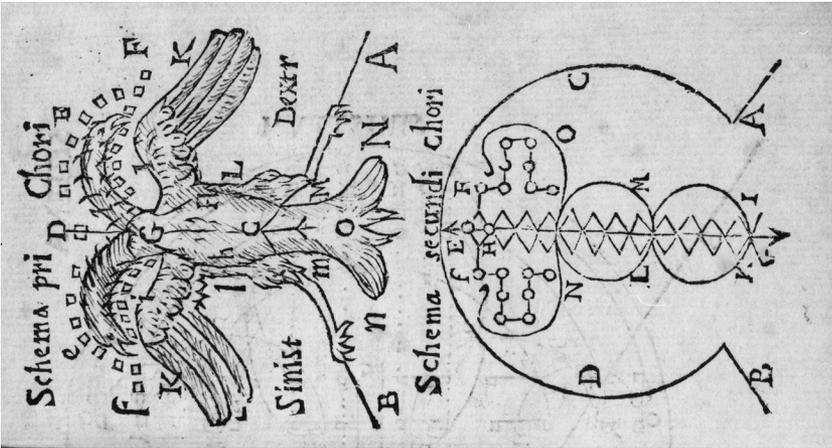
The question will naturally have arisen, what exactly has all this to do with Bernini? On one level at least, the answer is very simple. Bernini's own interest in the theater amounted to a real passion.¹⁹ From all accounts, and there are many, it is clear that he spent an inordinate amount of time throughout his long life writing, producing, staging and acting in plays. The decade of the '30s was certainly the most critical in this respect. During those years, in productions for the Barberini and on his own, he engineered such astonishing effects that he became an acknowledged master in the field. The sunrise he created for one of his plays, called the *Sea-Shore*, was famous throughout Europe. Louis XIII requested Bernini's recipe so that it could be repeated at Paris. In the midst of a production of Bernini's called *The Fair*, as a carnival chariot lit by torches was passing on stage, a fire seemed to break out. There ensued, naturally, a mad scramble for the exits, in which several members of the audience were wounded. While attention was thus diverted, the fire suddenly disappeared and the stage was transformed into a tranquil garden. In 1637 there had been a disastrous flood of the Tiber at Rome. The next year, Bernini staged a play called *The Inundation of the Tiber*. Boats were passing across the stage on real water, retained by embankments. Suddenly the levee breaks and the water spills out toward the audience, until it just reaches the edge of the stage, where in the nick of time a barrier is raised to stop it. The subject of the play was the

¹⁸ Bywater, as cited in the preceding note, and Gretchen Ludke Finney, Chorus in 'Samson Agonistes', in: *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, LVIII, 1943, pp. 649–664, esp. p. 658.

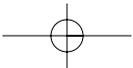
¹⁹ For what follows, see Irving Lavin, *Bernini and the Unity of the Visual Arts*, New York and London 1980, pp. 146 ff.

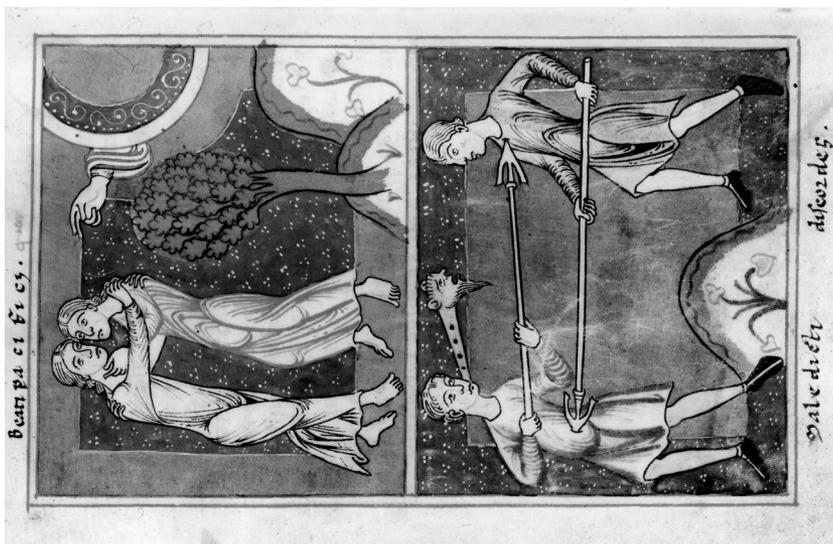
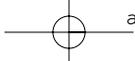


15. Bernini, *Anima Beata*, Rome, Palazzo di Spagna, photo Anderson 17848.



14. Diagram of dances, from B. Stefonio, *Crispus*, Naples, 1604.

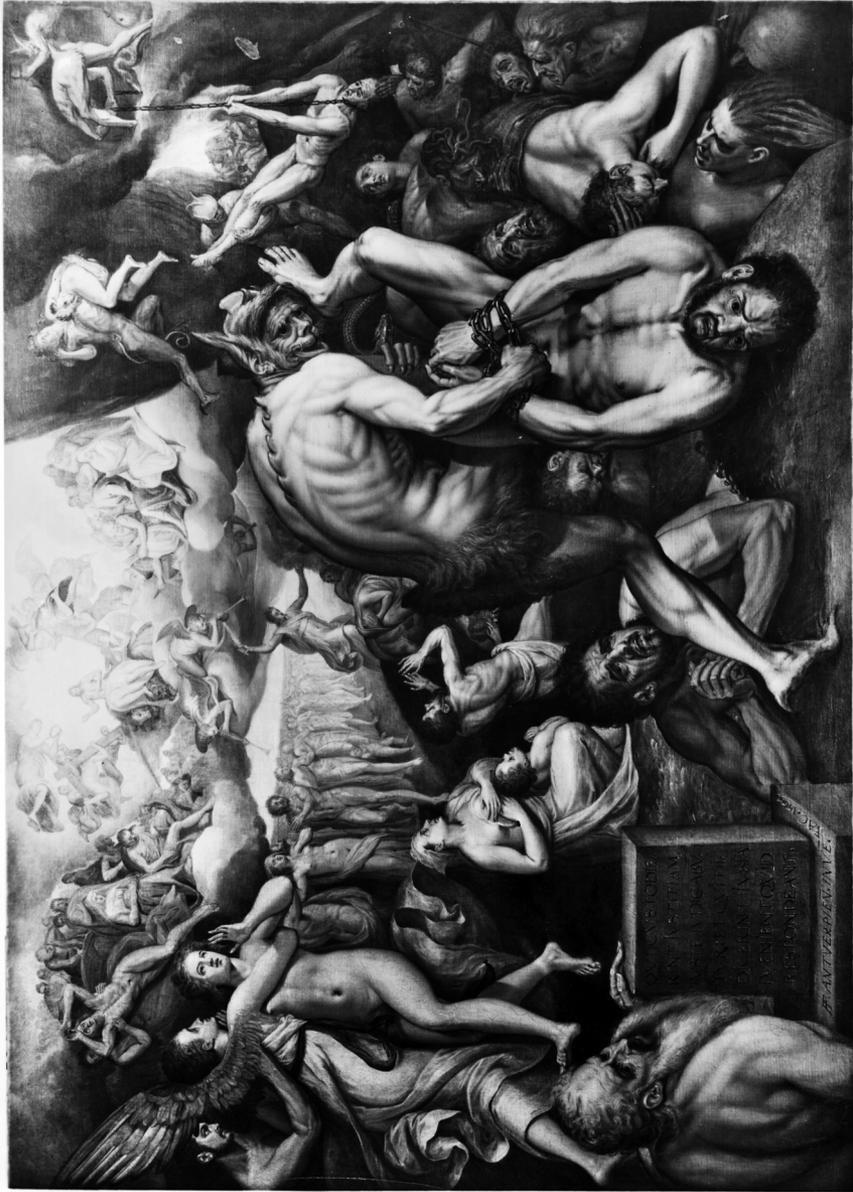




17. Hildegard of Bingen, "Beati" and "Maledicti", MS lat. 935, fol. 38v., Munich, Staatsbibliothek.



16. Bernini, *Anima Dannata*. Palazzo di Spagna, Rome
photo Anderson 17846.



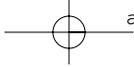
18. Frans Floris,
Last Judgment,
Vienna,
Kunsthistorisches
Museum,
photo A3835.



20. Alexander Mair, Damned Soul, engraving,
Munich, Staatliche Graphische Sammlung,
Inv. Nr. 95591. 6/7 82/10/3.



19. Alexander Mair, Blessed Soul, engraving,
Munich, Staatliche Graphische Sammlung,
Inv. Nr. 98591. 6/7 82/9/4.

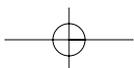


malefactions of two scoundrels who finally get their reward when their house collapses in the flood. In a comedy of 1637 called *Of Two Theaters* the audience saw an actor on stage reciting the prologue; behind him they saw the back side of another actor facing another audience, also reciting a prologue. At the end of the prologue a curtain came down between the two actors and the play began. At the end of the play the curtain went up, and the audience saw the other audience leaving the other theater in splendid coaches by the light of torches and of the moon shining through clouds.

In order to understand why Bernini became a legend in his day it is essential to grasp the sense in which his achievements in this domain were fundamentally new. Such tricks invariably depended on earlier theatrical techniques. Stage pyrotechnics had been highly developed for scenes of hell, and stage hydraulics for marine spectacles that often included real naval battles. The play-within-a-play had a long history, and is familiar to us from Shakespeare. Bernini used the old devices in such a way, however, that they acquired a powerful new dramatic force. Upon the illusion normally expected in the theater he superimposed another illusion that was unexpected and in which the audience was directly involved. The spectator, in an instant became an actor, aware of himself as an active, if involuntary participant in the 'happening'. It is clear that for Bernini the theater had a quite specific and unique significance: it was here and only here that such miracles became real experiences represented by real people, before a real audience.

One would scarcely find a better description of such an experience than 'cathartic' mimetic persuasion *par excellence*. Herein precisely lies the essence of the poetic view of Bernini's sometimes seemingly contradictory relationship to antiquity. His art of persuasion was to create a new reality, by which the spectator is inevitably and forever transformed. Moreover, it is symptomatic of the main point of this talk that contemporaries perceived such works by Bernini in a distinctly classical light. His comedies were compared favorably to those of Terence and Plautus. Giovanni Battista Doni in his *Treatise on Music for the Stage* even cites Bernini's comedy productions as exemplary of the use of masks in the ancient Greek theater.²⁰

²⁰ '... Erano così significanti, spiritosi, e fondati sul vero, che molti Virtuosi ne attribuivano alcuni a Plauto; altri a Terenzio, altri ad altri Autori, che il Cavaliere non lesse giammai. perché il tutto faceva a forza solo d'ingegno'. Domenico Bernini, *Vita del Cavalier Gio. Lorenzo Bernino*, Rome 1713, p. 54.



I will conclude by considering briefly two instances in which the homeopathic view of the Poetics as mimetic drama may be relevant to Bernini's art, if not specifically, then at least in spirit. The first is an early (1619) pair of sculptured busts, representing Damned and Blessed Souls (Figs. 15, 16), perhaps commissioned as part of the funeral monument of Monsignor Pedro de Foix Montoya, which included one of Bernini's most famous early portraits. The sculptures belong in the same eschatological domain as the *Rappresentazione di Anima et di Corpo* of Emilio de' Cavalieri and Agostino Manni. The climactic ending of that performance was the only part with a properly dramatic and scenographic aspect. There, moreover, for the first time as far as I can discover, the moral aspects of the human spirit, named Anima Dannata and Anima Beata, were imbued with personalities of their own and confronted each other directly as independent participants in a dramatic dialogue. Bernini's sculptures, which portray Damned and Blessed Souls in just such a dramatic confrontation, were part of the legacy of that famous theatrical production. I am not primarily concerned with the external relationship to the Oratorian *Rappresentazione*, however, but the analogous conceptual history that lies behind Bernini's works. The sculptures are also deeply rooted in medieval traditions revived by the Counter-Reformation; most especially, Damned and Blessed souls had long been conceived together, engaging in mortal combat or embracing in harmony (Fig. 17), and juxtaposed in scenes of the Last Judgment (Fig. 18) or the Four Last Things (Figs. 19, 20). By contrast, Bernini has isolated the participants from their contexts, concentrating and intensifying them into a powerful duet of independent and contrasting but also complementary actors on the infinite stage of human existence. In doing so he invoked and combined two ancient prototypes that served to personify the actors and express their roles, literally as well as metaphorically. He portrayed the souls in the classical form of the portrait bust, as though they were, or had been, real people (Fig. 21); and in juxtaposing the idealized female head with the wild and unruly male he recalled the ancient masks of

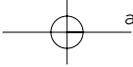
'Insomma io loderei che dopo le tragedie e rappresentazioni gravi si recitasse una di queste farse, la cui favola non fosse lunga; ma ingegnosa e nuova d'invenzione, e abbondante di sali arguti e faceti, e recitata con viva ed espressiva azione, con maschere artificiosamente formate sul modello di un'affettata fisionomia, come erano quelle degli antichi Greci, e come le ha usate il Cavaliere Bernino in Roma nelle commedie che egli ha fatto rappresentare così al vivo dai giovani dell'Accademia del disegno, le quali s'accostavano assai a quelle commedie de' greci che propriamente si dicevano antiche'. Giovanni Battista Doni, *Trattato della musica scenica*, cited from Angelo Solerti, *Le origini del melodramma*, Turin, 1903, p. 197.



21. So-called "Dying Alexander the Great", Florence, Uffizi, photo Brogi 3223.

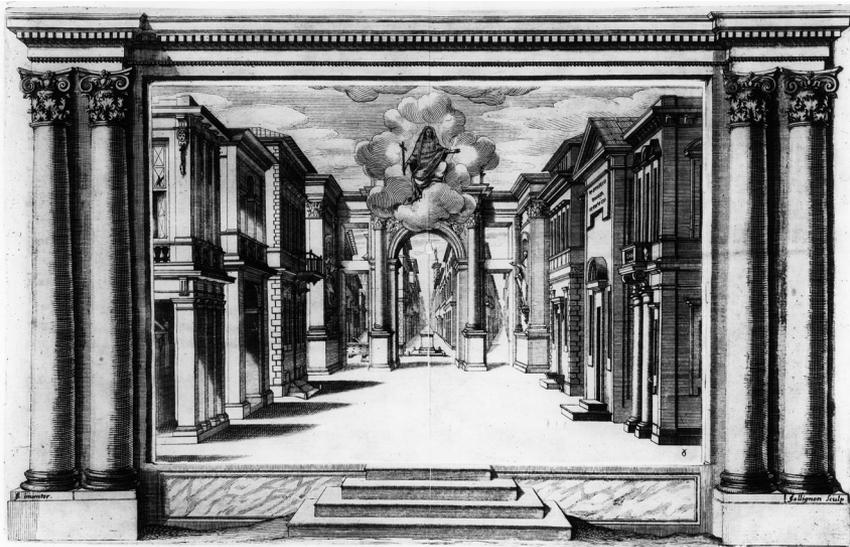
22. Theater masks, mosaic, Rome, Museo Capitolino, photo Anderson 1745.

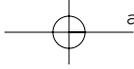




25. Bernini, Rome,
S. Andrea al Quirinale,
photo postcard.

26. Stage set of the opera
S. Alessio, 1634
(from *Il S. Alessio . . .*,
Rome 1634, pl. 6).



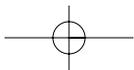


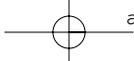
Tragedy and Comedy (Fig. 22), as if restoring to them the deeper meaning of the term *persona*, by which they were known in antiquity.

The second instance illustrates the specifically scenographic tradition of the Jesuits and it is in fact the one great architectural commission Bernini received from the Order, the oval church of Sant' Andrea al Quirinale, begun in 1658; the building was part of the Jesuits' novitiate, where students prepared for admission to the Order (Fig. 23). It is noteworthy that the basic conception of the building as a central plan structure preceded by a vestibule and a convex wall that both embraces the space in front and channels attention toward the entrance, reflects an earlier antiquarian reconstruction of a famous classical monument, the Temple of Virtue and Honor in Rome (Fig. 24).²¹ In this case the reference to the classical model is more than purely formal: the Temple of Virtue and Honor was an illustrious instance of the incorporation of moral content into architectural design — the structure being conceived in two parts so that the devotee had to pass through the sanctuary of Virtue to reach that of Honor. The architectural realization of such a moral progression was singularly appropriate for the church of an institution devoted to embodying essentially the same kind of progression in Christian form. Inside Sant' Andrea, the steady march of alternating piers and arches and the sweeping lines of the horizontal entablature draw the eye in a rushing movement toward the apse (Fig. 25). The altar, flooded with light from a large lantern above, is framed by columns supporting a pediment. The pediment in turn is crowned by a gleaming white figure of St. Andrew swooshing into the heavens on a cloud. The general effect is very like that of an engraving of a stage set used in a 1634 Barberini production of the opera *S. Alessio*, which Bernini must certainly have seen (Fig. 26).²² The rhythmic sequence of buildings engulfs the worshipper and leads him toward an arched screen, also crowned by an allegorical figure riding on a cloud, and with a vista opening behind. The patron of the opera, incidentally, was Cardinal Francesco Barberini, who had been a pupil in the Collegio Romano during the most active years of Bernardino Stefonio as a teacher and producer of plays.

²¹ Giacomo Lauro, *Antiquae urbis splendor*, Rome, 1612–1641, Pl. 30. This comparison has been made before, though not in the moral sense suggested here; see most recently, D. del Pesco, *Una fonte per gli architetti del barocco romano; L'antiquae urbis splendor di Giacomo Lauro*, in: *Studi di storia dell'arte in memoria di Mario Rotili*, Naples, 1984, pp. 424 ff.

²² In older literature the sets of this production were erroneously attributed to Bernini himself, cf. Lavin, *op. cit.* (cf. n. 19), pp. 147f., n. 7.





Finally, I want to retreat. I want to retreat from what I fear may be indefensible positions on two fronts in my dramatically poetic view of Bernini and antiquity. First, it must be emphasized that there is probably no single element in Bernini's work that owes its origin exclusively to the theater. Every detail, every technique, every device can be shown to have roots in the prior traditions of the permanent visual arts. What Bernini's art has in common with the theater is nothing more and nothing less than its role as the medium in which miracles really do take place.

I also want to retreat by emphasizing that there is not the slightest evidence that Bernini adhered to the pathological interpretation of Catharsis, or even that he read Aristotle. I rather doubt it, in fact, since he was not of a very scholarly turn of mind. Nor can it be proved specifically that he shared the views of those of his contemporaries who, in creating Baroque drama, Baroque music and Baroque opera, found nurture in a fresh and enthusiastic approach to antiquity. Wouldn't it be the nicest paradox of all, however, if the most Baroque element of all in Bernini's style — its so-called theatricalism — was also conceived in terms of a return to classical precedent?

