

VISIBLE SPIRIT  
THE ART OF  
GIANLORENZO BERNINI

VOL. II

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## Contents

XXVII	Bernini and Antiquity — The Baroque Paradox: A Poetical View	645
XVIII	Bernini's Portraits of No-Body	681
XIX	The <i>Roma Alessandrina</i> of Richard Krautheimer	748
XX	'Impresa quasi impossibile': The Making of Bernini's Bust of Francesco I d'Este	757
XXI	Bernini's Bust of the Medusa: An Awful Pun	789
XXII	Bernini's Bust of the Savior and the Problem of the Homeless in Seventeenth-Century Rome	849
XXIII	Bernini's Image of the Ideal Christian Monarch	917
XXIV	Bernini's Bumbling Barberini Bees	955
XXV	Bernini-Bozzetti: One More, One Less. A Berninesque Sculptor in Mid-Eighteenth Century France	1018
XXVI	Bernini's Death: Visions of Redemption	1046
XXVII	The Rome of Alexander VII: Bernini and the Reverse of the Medal	1087
XXVIII	The Young Bernini	1127

XXIX	'Bozzetto Style': The Renaissance Sculptor's Handiwork	1174
XXX	The Regal Gift: Bernini and his Portraits of Royal Subjects	1234
XXXI	<i>Urbanitas urbana</i> : The Pope, the Artist, and the Genius of the Place	1267
XXXII	The Baldacchino. Borromini vs Bernini: Did Borromini Forget Himself?	1336
	Bibliography	1385
	Index	1397

## XXX

## The Regal Gift Bernini and his Portraits of Royal Subjects\*

It happened that, coveting a famous horse, which he admired as a youth and which he rode expertly, the owner sent it to him from Sicily as a gift; he responded by sending back gifts of greater value than would have been the price of the horse. The manager who cared for it said to him, 'it would have served you better to buy it'; he replied, smiling, 'I certainly understood that I accepted a regal gift, and hence I wanted to show it more worthy of a king not to be outdone in liberality.'

Niccolò Valori, *Life of Lorenzo the Magnificent*<sup>1</sup>

**T**HIS paper is intended to define a singular episode in the long and well-studied history of the role played by that singular personage we call 'artist' in the social, economic and cultural development of Europe. The development consists in the emergence of the work of art and the artist,

\*This essay is a revised version of a paper presented at a Corso di Alta Cultura titled "Forme e Valori del Gratuito" held at the fondazione Cini in Venice in September 2002, under the direction of Carlo Ossola; it is offered here as a token of admiration and affection for him, as well as for Vittore Branca.

<sup>1</sup> Era Lorenzo e per natura e per consuetudine in modo disposto al beneficiare, che quel solo reputava bene che negli amici e ne' parenti spendesse. Quindi, essendo pur giovanetto, meritò non solo il cognome di Magnifico ma di Magnanimo ancora; ed in ciò fu d'animo più presto regio che civile. Accadde che, desiderando un cavallo molto nominato, de' quali da giovane fu vago ed in maneggiarli esperto, gli fu di Sicilia dal padrone mandato a donare; a cui esso rimandò doni di maggior valore che non sarebbe suto il prezzo del cavallo. E dicendoli il maestro che l'aveva in custodia: 'più utile ti era il comperarlo'; gli rispose, sorridendo: 'Io certo ho saputo accettare uno dono regio, ed appresso ho voluto mostrare esser cosa più degna di re non si lassare vincere di liberalità'. (Valori 1992, 27 f., cited by Walter 2003, 239.)

both defined and appreciated as such, from the conditions of artisanship and relative anonymity they occupied in the middle ages, to the autonomy and prestige they enjoy today. The story has often been told, except in the aspect I want to consider here, that is, the mode of compensation, or rather exchange, in the form of gifts, or rather 'regali,' to use the Italian term that better conveys the sense that seems to me more appropriate in the present context. The regalo, in fact, precisely because of this significance, has played a crucial role in the development of our modern way of thinking about the meaning of culture in our society. My paper focuses in particular on the forms (jewels-sculpture), and the values (monetary-prestige) of the gifts exchanged between Bernini and his royal patrons.

I take as my point of departure a work that Bernini undertook to execute in the spring of 1651 when he agreed — with some reluctance — to sculpt the portrait of Duke Francesco I d'Este, scion of one of the oldest and most glorious, but now much reduced families of Italy (Fig. 1). The capital of the duchy had in 1598 been moved to the small, provincial town of Modena, when the traditional, Ferrara, devolved to the papacy at the death without heir of Francesco's uncle. Bernini's portrait formed part of a vast, concerted program of construction and art patronage at the highest possible level, which Francesco undertook in an effort to restore the prestige and importance of his house.<sup>2</sup> The likeness, by the most illustrious and sought-after artist of the day, at the service of the pope himself, was to be based on two painted profile portraits by Justus Sustermans (now lost), who served intermittently as court painter for the Duke. There was never a thought of Bernini going to Modena or of the Duke going to Rome, a circumstance that necessitated frequent exchanges of letters between the Duke, his agents in Rome, and the artist. The correspondence is preserved virtually complete in the ducal archive at Modena, so that the bust of Francesco takes its place alongside Bernini's other secular ruler portraits, the lost bust of Charles I of England, and the bust and equestrian portraits of Louis XIV, among the artist's best documented works. The documentation concerning the bust of Charles I has been extensively investigated, and the portraits of the French king have been the subject of monographic studies.<sup>3</sup> The rich vein of information about the bust of Francesco has also been mined by generations of scholars, but the records have been cited only in part and in scattered pub-

<sup>2</sup> Francesco's enterprise has been studied most effectively by Southorn 1988, and Jarrard 2003.

<sup>3</sup> See n. 6 below.

lications. When, after completing an essay on Bernini's image of the ideal Christian monarch, I learned that the young Modenese scholar Giorgia Mancini had been exploring the ducal correspondence systematically, I invited her to prepare as an Appendix a complete transcript of the documents pertinent to Bernini's portrait, along with a summary of their contents. Many of the documents are new, including the remarkable record of the process of packing and shipping the sculpture, in which Bernini took particular personal interest. This archival material, to which I added what could be gleaned from other contemporary sources, as well as early visual records of the sculpture, was included as an appendix to the aforementioned essay, in a separate volume published in Italian; the documents frequently cited in the footnotes here refer to that appendix.<sup>4</sup>

\* \* \*

I want to single out and consider from the wealth of documentary information now available concerning the bust of Francesco d'Este two points that seem to me especially important respecting the actual fabrication of the work, one procedural, the other sociological. Procedure in this case refers to the particular difficulty, repeatedly emphasized by Bernini himself, of creating a portrait without seeing the sitter. The task of making a sculptured bust of a living person from painted prototypes was, so far as I know, unprecedented (posthumous portraits for tombs and monuments were another matter).<sup>5</sup> Bernini inaugurated this new mode of creating portrait sculpture with his bust of Charles I (1635–36; destroyed; Fig. 2), followed by that of Charles's wife Henrietta Maria (1638; never executed), both based on three views of the subjects painted by Van Dyck (Figs. 3–6), and that of Cardinal Richelieu (1640–1), based on a triple portrait by Philippe de Champagne (Figs. 7, 8), and culminating in 1650–51 with the bust of Francesco I.<sup>6</sup> The new procedure, however noteworthy in professional

<sup>4</sup> Lavin 1999 (1997); see Lavin 1998; for the shipping records, Docs. 35–7, 41, 44–5, 47–59, 61, 63–4. This essay was developed from the first chapter, subtitled 'Impresa quasi impossibile,' of Lavin 1998. The contribution by Marder 1999 is based on the material in that volume.

<sup>5</sup> For which see Montagu 1985, I, 171.

<sup>6</sup> For summary accounts of these works see Wittkower 1981, 207 f., 224, 246 f., 254 ff., and recently Avery 1997, 225–50. Documentary studies: on the busts of Charles I and Henrietta Maria see Lightbown 1981; on that of Richelieu, Laurain-Portemer 1981,

terms, was not an end in itself, but served a new purpose. It was equally remarkable that three powerful heads of state should enter into a veritable competition to have themselves portrayed, sight unseen, by an artist far away. The phenomenon constitutes an important development in European cultural history since it signaled the emergence of the artist as the modern, international 'culture hero' who surpassed all his predecessors in virtuosistic conception and technical bravura, equivalent in both form and substance to the emergence of the 'absolute monarch,' the modern international political hero whose personal image Bernini created in these very works.

To a degree, at least, this epochal conjunction of politics and art must have been evident to all concerned: to Bernini, since, as we shall see, he had a very clear vision of the ideal Christian monarch his portraits were intended to convey; to his biographers, Filippo Baldinucci and Domenico Bernini, the artist's son, considering the terms in which they introduced their accounts of these works: 'Divulgavasi in tanto sempre più la fama di questo artefice, ed il nome di lui ogni dì più chiaro ne diveniva: onde non fu gran fatto che i maggiori potentati d'Europa incominciassero a gareggiare, per così dire, fra di loro per chi sue opere aver potesse,'<sup>7</sup> 'Ma' volando sempre più grande per l'Italia la fama del Bernino, e divenendo ogni dì più chiaro il suo nome per il Mondo, trasse ancora a se i Maggiori Potentati dell'Europa, quali parve, che insieme allora gareggiassero per chì sue Opere haver potesse';<sup>8</sup> and to the noble patrons themselves, considering the assiduity with which they cultivated the artist, the enormous sums they paid, and the ecstatic receptions that greeted the results. Never before and never again, as far as I know, was there such a conjunction of great heads of state vying to have themselves represented by a great artist of the age. As an inevitable consequence, since Bernini's primary service and overwhelming occupation was with the popes in Rome, the artist was faced with a great challenge — which he somewhat ruefully described as 'quasi impossibile' — that of creating portraits of people whom he had never seen.

Bernini encapsulated the nature of this challenge in an elegant note he wrote to Duke Francesco as he was preparing to ship the finished sculpture.

177–235; on the bust of Louis XIV, Wittkower 1951, Gould 1982, 35, 41–5, 80–7, and Tratz 1988, 466–78; on the equestrian, Wittkower 1961, supplemented by Berger 1985, 50–63.

<sup>7</sup> Baldinucci 1948, 88.

<sup>8</sup> Bernini 1713, 64.

Far che un marmo bianco pigli la somiglianza di una persona, che sia colore, spirito, e vita, ancorche sia lì presente, che si possa imitare in tutte le sue parti, e proportioni, è cosa difficiliss.ma Creder poi di poter farlo somigliare con haver sol davanti una Pittura, senza vedere, ne haver mai visto il Naturale, è quasi impossibile, e chi a tale impresa si mette più temerario che valente si potrebbe chiamare.

Hanno potuto tanto però verso di me i comandamenti dell'Altezza del sig.r Card.l suo fratello, che mi hanno fatto scordar di queste verità; però se io non ho saputo far quello, che è quasi impossibile, spero V.ra Alt.za mi scuserà, e gradirà almeno quell'Amore, che forse l'Opera medesima le rappresenterà . . . (20 October 1651).<sup>9</sup>

Seemingly a casual flourish of self-indulgence and flattery, the letter is in fact a veritable three-sentence treatise — lament might be a better word — on portraiture in marble as Bernini conceived that art. The challenge for him lay in infusing the likeness of the subject with three essential qualities, color, spirit and life, to each of which he attached particular meaning and importance. Difficult in any case, the task was virtually impossible when the subject was before the sculptor only in the form of paintings. The full meaning of Bernini's conceit becomes evident when one considers the implications of his three critical points of reference.

Where Bernini most acutely felt the challenge of these paintings was in the domain of color — the first of the three desiderata Bernini defined. The confrontation with Van Dyck's image evidently gave rise to Bernini's famous disclaimer that the whiteness of marble made it virtually impossible to achieve a convincing likeness in that medium. The earliest record of the dictum is the anecdote in the diary of Nicholas Stone, a British sculptor who visited Bernini's studio in Rome, for October 22, 1638: 'How can itt than possible be that a marble picture can resemble the nature when itt is all one coulour, where to the contrary a man has on coulour in his face, another in his haire, a third in his lips;, and his eyes yett different from all the rest? Therefore sayed (the Causalier Bernine) I conclude that itt is the impossible thinge in the world to make a picture in stone naturally to resemble any person.' In the succeeding passage Stone reports Bernini's oath not to make

<sup>9</sup> Doc. 43.

such portraits, even if by the hand of Raphael (clearly a recognition of the beauty of Van Dyck's painting).<sup>10</sup>

While it is wholly characteristic that Bernini should be preoccupied by the representation of color in marble sculpture, the dilemma is inherent in the medium, and color is in fact only one of the qualities to which Bernini refers when in his letter to the Duke he calls the feat he accomplished in the bust 'quasi impossibile.'<sup>11</sup> The unique problem here lay not so much in the

<sup>10</sup> '... after this he began to tell us here was an English gent: who wooed him a long time to make his effiges in marble, and after a great deale of intreaty and the promise of a large some of money he did gett of doing a picture after the life or a painting; so he began to imboast his physyognymy, and being finisht and ready to begin in marble, itt fell out that his patrone the Pope came to here of itt who sent Cardinall Barberine to forbid him; the gentleman was to come the next morning to sett, in the meane time he defaced the modell in diuers places, when the gentleman came he began to excuse himselfe that thaire had binn a mischaunce to the modell and y<sup>t</sup> he had no mind to goe forward with itt; so I (sayth he) I return'd him his earnest, and desired him to pardon me; then was the gent. uery much moued that he should haue such dealing, being he had come so often and had sett diuers times already; and for my part (sayth the Caelier) I could not belye itt being commanded to the contrary; for the Pope would haue no other picture sent into England from his hand but his Mai<sup>ty</sup>; then he askt the young man if he understood Italian well. Then he began to tell y<sup>t</sup> the Pope sent for him since the doing of the former head, and would haue him doe another picture in marble after a painting for some other prince. I told the Pope (says he) that if thaire were best picture done by the hand of Raphyell yett he would nett undertake to doe itt, for (sayes he) I told his Hollinesse that itt was impossible that a picture in marble could haue the resemblance of a liuing man; then he askt againe if he understood Italian well; he answerd the Caelier, perfectly well. Then sayth he, 'I told his Holinesse that if he went into the next rome and whyted all his face ouer and his eyes, if possible were, and come forth againe nott being a whit leaner nor lesse beard, only the chaunging of his coulour, no man would know you; for doe not wee see y<sup>t</sup> when a man is affrighted thare comes a pallness on the sudden? Presently wee say he likes nott the same man. How can itt than possible be that a marble picture can resemble the nature when itt is all one coulour, where to the contrary a man has on coulour in his face, another in his haire, a third in his lipps, and his eyes yett different from all the rest? Tharefore sayd (the Caelier Bernine) I conclude that itt is the impossible thinge in the world to make a picture in stone naturally to resemble any person.' (Stone 1919, 170–1.)

The story is also told by Vertue: 'The Cavalier told this Author. that it was imposible to make a bust in Marble. truly like. & to demonstrate it he orderd a person to come in. and afterwards, haveing flower'd his face all over white. ask'd Stone if ever he had seen that face before. he answered no. by which he ment to demonstrate. that the colour of the face. hair. beard. eyes. lipps. &c. are the greatest part of likenes. (Vertue 1929–30, 19 f.)

<sup>11</sup> Cardinal Rinaldo had used the phrase 'quasi impossibile' in the same context, doubtless repeating what he had heard from Bernini, in a letter to the Duke of August 17, 1650 (Doc. 14). See also Bernini's comments to Nicholas Stone in 1638, cited in n. 10 above.

material as in extrapolating a likeness from only painted models, never having seen 'the natural,' as Bernini says. After the experience of Charles I he had sworn never again to hazard such a task.<sup>12</sup> In the case of Francesco d'Este the problem was compounded by the fact that Bernini actually had before him in working the portrait only two profile views; delivery of the frontal view he urgently requested was delayed, and in the end he had to make do with the side views and simple measurements of the Duke's height and shoulder width.<sup>13</sup> Of course, he was obviously proud of what he did accomplish, and his protestations of difficulty were certainly intended to augment the appreciation of the result. Yet the sense of inadequacy, even failure, evident in Bernini's complaint is certainly also genuine — indeed, pathetic, considering that portraiture was, after all, a specialty of his, to say the least. His aptitude for creating likenesses was the basis of his phenomenal reputation as a child prodigy, and contributed largely to the international renown he enjoyed throughout his career.<sup>14</sup> The source of Bernini's ruefulness about an artistic genre for which he himself was responsible lay rather in the other qualities mentioned in his letter to Francesco: 'spirit' and 'life.' And his frustration in these respects was a fatal by-product of the way he understood the art of portraiture.

Remarkable insights respecting this last point arise almost incidentally from the Duke's original indecision whether to commission the work from Bernini or his great rival, especially in the domain of portraiture, Alessandro Algardi (Fig. 9). The documents recording the negotiations also provide an extraordinary opportunity to compare and contrast the *modi operandi* of these two giants of Italian Baroque sculpture. The Duke's brother, Cardinal Rinaldo, writing from Rome on July 16, 1650, reported: 'Il Cav.re Algardi scultore si fa pagare i ritratti di marmo intendendo di busto, ò mezza figura

<sup>12</sup> Bernini's oath was reported by Stone (n. 10 above) and is also mentioned in the correspondence concerning the bust of Francesco, Docs. 10, 38.

In the end, Bernini was reluctant to do portraits at all, and cited Michelangelo as precedent: 'Il a répété le difficulté qu'il y a à faire un portrait de marbre . . . Il a dit que Michel-Ange n'en avait jamais voulu faire. . . . Il a dit ensuite à ces Messieurs la peine où il était toutes les fois qu'il était obligé de faire un portrait; qu'il y avait déjà du temps qu'il avait résolu dans son esprit de n'en plus faire, mais que le Roi lui ayant fait l'honneur de lui demander le sien, il n'avait pas pu refuser un si grand prince . . .' Chantelou 1885, 94 (August 12); cf. Chantelou 1885, 111 (August 21).

<sup>13</sup> The frontal view is mentioned in Docs. 10, 11, 12, 14, 16, 17, 20, 69, 73; the shoulder measurements in Docs. 20, 21.

<sup>14</sup> On the early portraiture of Bernini, see Lavin 1968.

centocinquanta scudi l'uno, oltre il marmo, che scegli dà, ò scegli paga. ne daria uno compito per tutto il mese pross.o d'Agosto quando dovesse farlo, e potrà cavar, e formar il tutto dalla Pittura, e lo perfezionarà in presenza di chi dovrà sodisfarli, per farlo poi più esattam.te in marmo. Hà due altre persone sotto di sé di condiz.e inferiore nel mestiere da' quali s haverebbe l'opra per la metà del sud.o prezzo e forse meno.<sup>15</sup> In modest, businesslike fashion, in a simple, straightforward reply, Algardi offered a fixed time schedule and a fixed price of 150 scudi. He even offered to have the work executed by his assistants, at half the cost or less. Not so Bernini, who refused to commit himself on either time or compensation, emphasizing the great difficulty in executing portraits under such circumstances.<sup>16</sup> To offer less than the best, and treat the D'Este Duke as if he were bargain hunting would have been beneath both their dignities. Ironically, in his reply of July 22, the Duke suggested a 'gift' of 100 doubloons to Bernini (worth 200 scudi), while expressing his 'indifference' as to whether Bernini or Algardi made his portrait.<sup>17</sup> In the end, because he wished himself to be seen in a class with the leading monarchs of his time, Francesco was happy to pay Bernini 3000 scudi for what he might have obtained from Algardi for 150 scudi and the price of the marble! We shall consider the significance of Bernini's attitude presently. The important point here concerns the nature of the difficulty of executing a portrait from painted prototypes alone, which seems to have presented no extraordinary obstacle to Algardi,<sup>18</sup> but which Bernini found intimidating to the point of defeat.

The real reason for which he considered the task quasi impossible — which is to say paradoxical and self-contradictory — and for which he could never be fully satisfied with the result, lay elsewhere than in the matter of achieving likeness in the traditional and normal sense of that term. The problem arose inevitably from the fundamental principles of what might be called Bernini's 'psycho-philosophy' of portraiture, and his method of creating portraits, as these may be gathered from his letters, his various statements reported by his biographers, and especially from the detailed account that has come down to us of his work on the bust of a

<sup>15</sup> Doc. 5. On this episode, see also the discussion by Montagu 1985, I, 157–62.

<sup>16</sup> On time and compensation, see p. 1246 and n. 32 below. On the difficulty, Docs. 10, 14, 20, 38, 42, 43. On 'difficoltà' as a norm of artistic achievement in the Renaissance, see Summers 1981, 177–85.

<sup>17</sup> Doc. 6.

<sup>18</sup> On this point, see also Tratz 1988, 466.

monarch, the last in the concatenated series of Bernini's secular ruler portraits to whom he did have ready and frequent access, Louis XIV (Fig. 10).<sup>19</sup> Chantelou records that the king 'sat' for the artist on no less than seventeen occasions, five for drawing the subject and twelve for working the marble.<sup>20</sup> From this wealth of direct testimony concerning the artist's working methods — which is itself unprecedented in the history of art — it is clear, first of all, that the notion of likeness had for Bernini a very singular meaning.<sup>21</sup> Bernini did not conceive of the sitter as a 'sitter' at all. He insisted on 'sopping up' the character and personality of the subject by sketching him endlessly in action — moving, working, playing tennis, conversing<sup>22</sup> — because

<sup>19</sup> Bernini's earlier portraits of 'royal heroes' (for which concept, see Lavin 1999) were specifically recalled in one of the poems on the bust of Louis (Chantelou 1885, 100, August 16).

<sup>20</sup> See Chantelou 1985, 38 n. 116.

<sup>21</sup> For what follows, Wittkower's splendid study (1951) remains an inspiration.

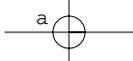
<sup>22</sup> See the descriptions cited in the next note. Bernini himself described the purpose of the sketches: *Le Cavalier . . . a besoin à présent de voir le Roi pour le particulier du visage de Sa Majesté, n'ayant jusques ici travaillé qu'au général; durant quoi il n'a même presque pas regardé ses dessins, qu'aussi ne les avait-il faits que pour s'imprimer plus particulièrement l'image du Roi dans l'esprit et faire qu'elle y demeurât insuppata et rinvenuta, pour se servir de ses propres termes; qu'autrement, s'il avait travaillé d'après ses dessins, au lieu d'un original il ne ferait qu'une copie; que même, s'il lui fallait copier le buste lorsqu'il l'aura achevé, il ne lui serait pas possible de le faire tout semblable; que la noblesse de l'idée n'y serait plus à cause de la servitude de l'imitation . . .* (Chantelou 1885, 75, July 30). The point Bernini makes here about not repeating himself even in deliberate copies of the same bust was based on no less than three instances in which replacements were required by imperfections in the marble: Scipione Borghese, Urban VIII, Innocent X (see Johnston *et al.* 1986, 76; Wittkower 1981, 221 f.). In each case, the second versions show subtle but significant changes. No doubt because of the time limitations, to provide for just such an eventuality, as Domenico Bernini reports, Bernini at the outset ordered two blocks to be prepared for the bust of Louis. The time factor is mentioned in a letter of June 5 by Matteo de' Rossi (Mirot 1904, 207) and on June 11 by Chantelou (1885, 30). On the two blocks of marble, see Chantelou 1885, 40 f., June 30, and Bernini 1713, 135.

Given Bernini's repeated emphasis on the limitations of marble portraiture, especially with respect to color, it will be seen that more than flattery lay behind Bernini's remarks in the famous exchange between the artist and the King on one such occasion, reported by Chantelou: '. . . il a dessiné d'après le Roi, sans que S. M. ait été assujettie de demeurer en une place. Le Cavalier prenait son temps au mieux qu'il pouvait; aussi disait-il de temps à autre, quand le Roi le regardait: *'Sto rubando.'* Une foi le Roi lui repartit, et en italien même: *Sì, ma è per restituire.* Il répliqua lors à Sa Majesté: *Però per restituire meno del rubato.'* (1885, 40, June 28.)

one is never more like oneself than at those moments;<sup>23</sup> he preferred to represent the subject as he started or finished speaking (the exquisitely subtle psychological discrimination is paradoxical, since it focuses not on the rhetorical act *par excellence*, speaking, but on its two inevitable, ineffable, and inherently unselfconscious phases).<sup>24</sup> Algardi felt able to satisfy his patron (and himself) by preparing the sculpture from the painted models, and finishing it in the presence and to the satisfaction of whoever was responsible for the work. Such a procedure could never have satisfied Bernini, since only from the living model could he observe and reproduce, not only the subject's features but also, and especially, his characteristic expression and movement — in a word, his spirit and life. A corollary of this definition and mode of creating a likeness was the equally unorthodox way Bernini put the final touches on the bust of Louis. To the amazement

<sup>23</sup> Diceva egli che nel ritrarre alcuno al naturale consisteva il tutto in saper conoscere quella qualità, che ciascheduno ha di proprio, e che non ha la natura dato ad altri che a lui, ma che bisognava pigliare qualche particolarità non brutta, ma bella. A quest'effetto tenne un costume dal comune modo assai diverso, e fu: che nel ritrarre alcuno non voleva ch'egli stesse fermo, ma ch'e' si si movesse, e ch'e' parlasse, perché, in tal lmodo, diceva egli, ch'e' vedeva tutto il suo bello e lo contrafaceva com'egli era: asserendo, che nello starsi al naturale immobilmente fermo, egli non è mai tanto simile a se stesso, quanto egli è nel moto, in cui quelle qualità consistono, che sono tutte sue e non d'altri e che danno la somiglianza al ritratto; ma l'intero conoscer ciò (dico io) non è giuoco da fanciulli. (Balducci 1948, 144.) Tenne un costume il Cavaliere, ben dal commune modo assai diverso, nel ritrarre altrui ò nel Marmo, ò nel disegno: Non voleva che il figurato stasse fermo, mà ch'ei colla sua solita naturalezza si movesse, e parlasse, perche in tal modo, diceva, ch'ei vedeva tutto il suo bello, e'l contrafaceva, com'egli era, asserendo, che nello starsi al naturale immobilmente fermo, egli non è mai tanto simile a se stesso, quanto è nel moto, in cui consistono tutte quelle qualità, che sono sue, e non di altri, e che danno la somiglianza al Ritratto. (Bernini 1713, 133 f.)

<sup>24</sup> 'Le Cavalier, continuant de travailler à la bouche, a dit que, pour réussir dans un portrait, il faut prendre un acte et tâcher à le bien représenter; que la plus beau temps qu'on puisse choisir pour la bouche est quand on vient de parler ou qu'on va prendre la parole; qu'il cherche à attraper ce moment.' (Chantelou 1885, 133, September 4.) On the notion of the 'speaking likeness,' see important paper by Harris 1992. There are, however, some difficulties with Harris's argument, which is based on the open-mouthed expression of certain self-portraits of Simon Vouet. The portraits are not reliably dated, and the question has been raised whether Vouet might have manifested one of the common symptoms of diseased adenoids (Ficacci 1998, 94); it may be relevant that certain of the portraits also show a scarred and swollen right cheek (most are collected in Thuillier *et al.*, 1990, but see also Picart 1990, 22 and 25). In any case, all the instances Harris cites by Vouet and others are informal portraits of 'middle-class' individuals. It remains a fact that the first formal portrait of a person of first rank shown with open lips, is Bernini's bust of Gregory XV in Ottawa, 1621 (Lavin 1988, 91, 1989, 37; Johnston *et al.*, eds., 1986, 74).



of those who witnessed the process, he deliberately discarded the preparatory studies and models he had so laboriously produced, and completed the work not from memory but directly from the living model, in the presence of the king in person — otherwise, he said, he would be copying himself, not Louis XIV.<sup>25</sup>

The central point, however, central also in Bernini's list of the three essential qualities he sought in his portraits, lay beyond even the creation of a 'living' likeness. The point is already evident in another, complementary peculiarity of Bernini's portrait-working procedure: at the very outset, even before working on the likeness, he sketched in clay the 'action' he intended to give the bust;<sup>26</sup> he began, that is, with a concept, which he continued to develop in the model, while studying the details of the king's features in life drawings. And this 'idea' of the subject is what preoccupied him when he

<sup>25</sup> See the passages in Chantelou cited in n.22 above and nn. 26, 27 below. The procedure is described by the biographers: 'Per fare il ritratto della maestà del re di Francia, egli ne fece prima alquanti modelli; nel metter poi mano all'opera, alla presenza del re tutti se gli tolse d'attorno e a quel monarca che ammirando quel fatto, gli domandò la cagione del non volersi valere delle sue fatiche, rispose che i modelli gli erano serviti per introdurre nella fantasia le fattezze di chi egli dovea ritrarre, ma quando già le aveva concepite e dovea dar fuori il parto, non gli erano più necessari, anzi dannosi al suo fine, che era di darlo fuori non simile a' modelli, ma al vero.' (Baldinucci 1948, 144); 'In oltre fù suo costantissimo proposito in somiglianti materie, far prima molti disegni, e molti della figura, ch'egli dovea rappresentare, mà quando poi nel Marmo metteva mano all'opera, tutti se li toglieva d'attorno, come se a nulla gli servissero: E richiesto dal Rè, che prese maraviglia di questo fatto con domandargliene la cagione, del non volersi valere delle sue istesse fatiche, rispose, che i Modelli gli erano serviti per introdurre nella fantasia le fattezze di ch'egli dovea ritrarre, mà quando già le haveva concepite, e dovea dar fuori il parto, non gli erano più necessari, anzi dannosi al suo fine, che era di darlo fuori, non simile alli Modelli, mà al Vero.' (Bernini 1713, 134)

See also the report of Bernini's enemy in Paris, Charles Perrault: *Il travailla d'abord sur le marbre, et ne fit point de modèle de terre, comme les autres sculpteurs ont accoutumé de faire, il se contenta de dessiner en pastel deux ou trois profils du visage du Roi, non point, à ce qu'il disoit, pour les copier dans son buste, mais seulement pour rafraîchir son idée de temps en temps, ajoutant qu'il n'avoit garde de copier son pastel, parce qu'alors son buste n'auroit été qu'une copie, qui de sa nature est toujours moindre que son original.* (Perrault 1909, 61 f.)

<sup>26</sup> '... il a demandé de la terre afin de faire des ébauches de l'action qu'il pourrait donner au buste, en attendant qu'il travaillât à la ressemblance.' Chantelou 1885, 30, June 11. On the point see Wittkower 1951, 6. Giulio Mancini in the early seventeenth century made the fundamental distinction between the 'ritratto semplice,' that of pure imitation, and the 'ritratto dell'attion et affetto' (Mancini 1956–7, I, 115 f.; see the perspicacious note by Bauer in Chantelou 1985, 85 f., n. 154).

put aside the drawings to work on the marble. Bernini himself defined the point in the explanation he gave of the relationship between his way of working on a portrait and the meaning he wanted it to convey. The statement occurs in a passage where Bernini explains to Colbert the rapid progress he was presently making in carving the bust of Louis XIV: 'until now he had worked entirely from his imagination, looking only rarely at his drawings; he had searched chiefly within, he said, tapping his forehead, where there existed the idea of His Majesty; had he done otherwise his work would have been a copy instead of an original. This method of his was extremely difficult, and the King, in ordering a portrait, could not have asked anything harder; he was striving to make it less bad than the others that he had done; in this kind of head one must bring out the qualities of a hero as well as make a good likeness.'<sup>27</sup> Here it is clear that the ultimate difficulty lay in Bernini's ultimate goal, to realize his own idea of the monarch — his 'spirit' — by capturing the King's heroic qualities while recording Louis's likeness, as Bernini understood that notion. For Bernini a portrait was a preternatural thing, a composite counterfeit of an idea and of vitality itself. For this reason, above all, to carve a marble portrait of a living subject without seeing him in action was for Bernini not only difficult, but a challenge *in extremis*; and, after the bust of Francesco, he kept his vow never to do so again.

The second, 'sociological' point I want to consider concerns Bernini's attitude toward the D'Este commission. It is very clear that Bernini was not anxious to undertake the portrait, and there may have been other reasons than the difficulty of the task. Francesco I was, after all, not as important as Charles I or Richelieu. There may also have been a political factor. Francesco I was closely tied to France, most conspicuously in his capacity as commander of the French troops in Italy. Bernini had been intimately associated with Urban VIII Barberini, who had also been a partisan of France.

<sup>27</sup> 'M. Colbert Lui a témoigné être étonné combien l'ouvrage étoit avancé, et qu'il le trouvait si ressemblant qu'il ne jugeait pas qu'il fût besoin qu'il travaillât à Saint-Germain. Le Cavalier a reparti qu'il y avait toujours à faire à qui voulait faire bien; que jusqu'ici il avait presque toujours travaillé d'imagination, et qu'il n'avait regardé que rarement les dessins qu'il a; qu'il ne regardait principalement que là dedans, montrant son front, où il a dit qu'étoit l'idée de Sa Majesté; que autrement il n'aurait fait qu'une copie au lieu d'un original, mais que cela lui donnait une peine extrême et que le roi, lui demandant son portrait, ne pouvait pas lui commander rien de plus pénible: qu'il tâcherait que ce fût le moins mauvais de tous ceux qu'il aura faits; que, dans ces sortes de portraits, il faut, outre la ressemblance, y mettre ce qui doit être dans des têtes de héros.' (Chantelou 1885, 72 f., July 29.)

When Urban VIII was succeeded by Innocent X Pamphili, the arch-enemy of both the Barberini and the French, Bernini fell from favor and had only recently redeemed himself with his invention for Innocent's pet project for the fountain in the Piazza Navona, where the pope was building his new family palace. Perhaps Bernini felt it unwise to work too closely with the French faction. Even so, Bernini's dealings with his noble patron must have seemed even more remarkable then than they do today. He was so occupied with other projects, notably the Piazza Navona fountain that he had no time;<sup>28</sup> he was so busy that it was difficult to reach him;<sup>29</sup> he worked only for friends and important patrons; he had to be frequently coaxed and reminded, and sufficiently remunerated; he would never discuss time or money,<sup>30</sup> and specific terms only emerged indirectly, in relation to payments and honoraria he had received from other grand patrons: 3000 scudi from Innocent X for the Piazza Navona fountain,<sup>31</sup> a diamond ring worth 6000 scudi from Charles I for his bust of the king.<sup>32</sup>

All this reflects the attitude, and acumen, of the most successful and sought after image-maker of the day. But the attitude involved much more than finances. The social status of the artist was involved. In so many words, Bernini was said to 'act independent' (*opera da sé*), and I suspect this was precisely the point.<sup>33</sup> Bernini's attitude must indeed have seemed arrogant, especially for an artist; but for this very reason it signified that he belonged, and clearly thought of himself as belonging, in a long tradition reaching back to antiquity and including in his own time the likes of Velasquez and Rubens, of artists who sought to rise above the condition of servile artisan to the level of an aristocracy of the spirit, a meritocracy of the intellect and creativity. Nobility was not paid wages, and the proper, indeed only, form of recognition among the aristocracy was the gift. It is symptomatic in this context that throughout the correspondence the consideration for Bernini is exclusively referred to as a 'gift' (*regalo*), rather than as a payment or a

<sup>28</sup> Docs. 9, 25.

<sup>29</sup> Doc. 23.

<sup>30</sup> Doc. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Docs. 32, 40, 41, 68, 69.

<sup>32</sup> Doc. 20 and n. 35 below. Other sources put the value at 4000 scudi (Lightbown 1981, 447 ff., who also compares the costs of other works by Bernini, e.g., 1000 scudi for the portrait of Scipione Borghese).

<sup>33</sup> 'questo opera da sé, et vi vuole destrezza nel sollecitarlo' (Doc. 23).

fee.<sup>34</sup> The distinction is clear from the fact that for all three princely busts (Charles I, Richelieu, Francesco I) Bernini received, or was offered in the case of Francesco, gifts, whereas the messengers who delivered the sculptures were given 'tips.'<sup>35</sup> The phraseology was significant when Francesco's agent in Rome reported that Mazarin had 'regalato nobilissimamente.'<sup>36</sup> Francesco resorted to a delicate subterfuge in deference to this principle of social distinction, instructing his emissary to tell Bernini that the Duke had sent 3000 scudi in order to purchase a suitable gift, but that the artist might take the money, if he preferred.<sup>37</sup> Bernini opted for the cash, because he was

<sup>34</sup> See the documents cited in n. 31 above; also Doc. 37. On the significance of the gift as remuneration, see the section on 'Old and New Ways of Evaluating Works of Art' in Wittkower, R. and M., 1963, 22–5, and recently Warwick 1997, 632 f. The Wittkowers tended to see the gift in relation to the earlier, craft tradition of barter and payment in kind, rather than in the tradition of noble courtesy. The main difference is that in the former case the goods were generally of a practical nature, whereas in the latter they were conspicuously luxury items. The market for art in early seventeenth-century Rome, including barter and payment in kind has been admirably studied by Spear 1993 and 1997, 210–24. On the 'nobility of the artist's profession' and related factors, see the Wittkowers' chapter 'Between Famine and Fame,' 253–80.

<sup>35</sup> The gifts for the portraits are mentioned in a list of some of Bernini's notable remunerations, among the Bernini papers in the Bibliothèque National in Paris:

Alcune remunerazioni haute dal Cav.re Bernino

Per il ritratto del Rè Carlo 1.o d'Inghilterra un'diamante che portava in dito, di valore di sei mila scudi

Per il ritratto del Card.le Richelieu una gioia di quattro mila scudi

Per il ritratto del Duca Fran.co di Modena tre mila scudi in tanti Argenti B.N. ms ital 2084, fol. 126 r.

Domenico Bernini mentions the generous 'mancia' given to the assistants who accompanied to their destinations the busts of Charles I, '. . . si cavò dal dito un Diamante di sei mila scudi di valore, e consegnatelo a Bonifazio disse, . . . ; in oltre mandò al Cavaliere copiosi regali di preziosissimi panni, & a Bonifazio fè donare per mancia mille scudi,' and Richelieu 'Gradi quel Principe in modo tale il Ritratto che ne dimostrò il gradimento col dono di un Giojelo, che mandò al Cavaliere di trentatrè Diamanti, fra' quali ve n'erano sette di quattordici grani l'uno di peso. Al Balsimelli fè dare per mancia otto cento scudi.' (Bernini 1713, 65 f., 68.)

<sup>36</sup> Letter of February 22, 1642, in Frascchetti 1900, 112 n. 2: 'Per la Città si è saputo che il Cardinale di Richeliù ha donato un gioiello superbissimo al Cavalier Bernino, et che il Cardinal Mazarino l'ha regalato nobilissimamente per la statua che di sua mano ha fatto al primo: onde mille sono gli Encomij che si fanno sopra la Generosità di ambidue.'

<sup>37</sup> The Duke conceived the plot when he discovered that the German silver credenza he had thought to acquire was exorbitant and not worth the price: Doc. 30. The 3000 scudi for Bernini are mentioned in Docs. 66, 77, 79. Cf. also Docs. 86, 87, 88.

'already sufficiently provided with jewels and silver'<sup>38</sup> People, including Bernini, were saying that the size of the consideration, being equal to the generosity of Innocent X for the Piazza Navona fountain, risked putting even the pope to shame.<sup>39</sup> In one instance Bernini himself uses the phrase 'mi fa pagare' in reference to the 3000 scudi he received — not as compensation for the bust, however, but as the mark of the 'more than regal' generosity of the House of Este.<sup>40</sup> It is important to understand that the idea and value of a 'princely' reward worked both ways: the report that he had outclassed the pope was certainly intended to flatter Francesco, who had himself remarked that by making Bernini happy he would affirm his own status as a patron: 'col far restar contento il Bernino penso di conservarmi il credito di stimar la virtù et i virtuosi.'<sup>41</sup> In sum, the transaction between Duke Francesco and Bernini was indeed a regal exchange. The complimentary equivalent to the Duke's gift worth 3000 scudi was a supreme image of himself as an ideal Christian monarch, to which Bernini added a compliment only the artist could provide — the credit Francesco's grand gesture of cultural largesse accrued to the inestimable prestige of 'reputation' that contemporary political theory required of the virtuous ruler.<sup>42</sup> For Bernini, moreover, the idea of a meritocracy also worked both ways, as when years later he told the young Louis XIV that he admired the king 'not because he was king of France and a great king, but because . . . [his] he had realized that [Louis's] spirit was even more exalted than his position.'<sup>43</sup> In this sense, it might be said that the very factors that made the bust of Francesco I an almost impossible undertaking, also made it the herald of a new epoch in the history of European culture.

Bernini was not exaggerating when he told the Duke that he already had plenty of silver and gems: the biographies, the documents concerning his work, and the inventory of his property, are filled with an abundance of pre-

<sup>38</sup> Doc. 69.

<sup>39</sup> Doc. 68.

<sup>40</sup> Doc. 76: 'tre mila scudi . . . mi fa pagare, non dico già per il suo ritratto da me in marmo scolpito, ma per lo genio della gran Casa Estense, la quale suol eccedere in più che reale generosità.'

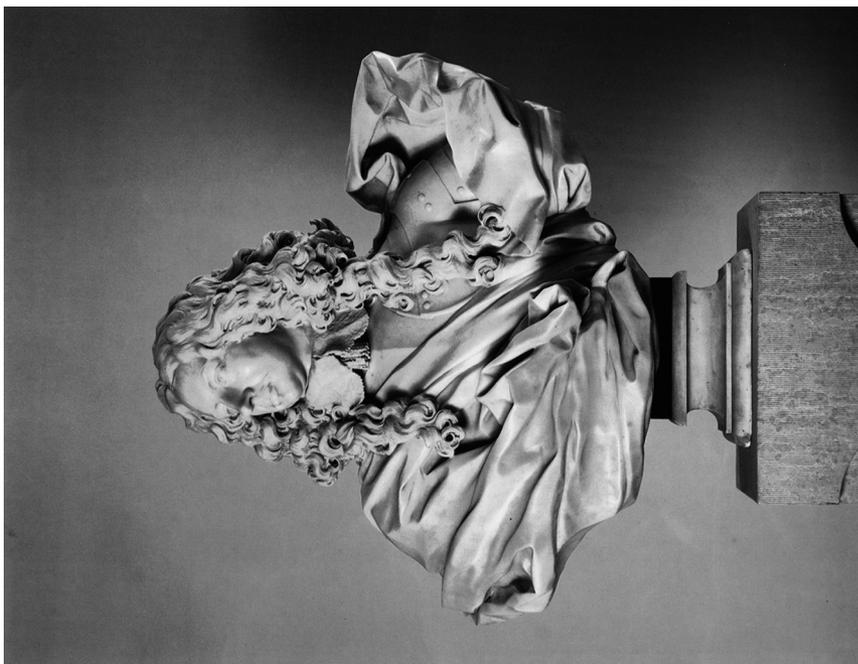
<sup>41</sup> Doc. 18; see also Doc. 85.

<sup>42</sup> On reputation see Lavin 1999.

<sup>43</sup> ' . . . il s'estimerait heureux de finir sa vie à son service, non pas pour ce qu'il était un roi de France et un grand roi, mais parce qu'il avait connu que son esprit était encore plus relevé que sa condition' (Chantelou 1885, 201, October 5; translation from Chantelou 1985, 254, with modifications).

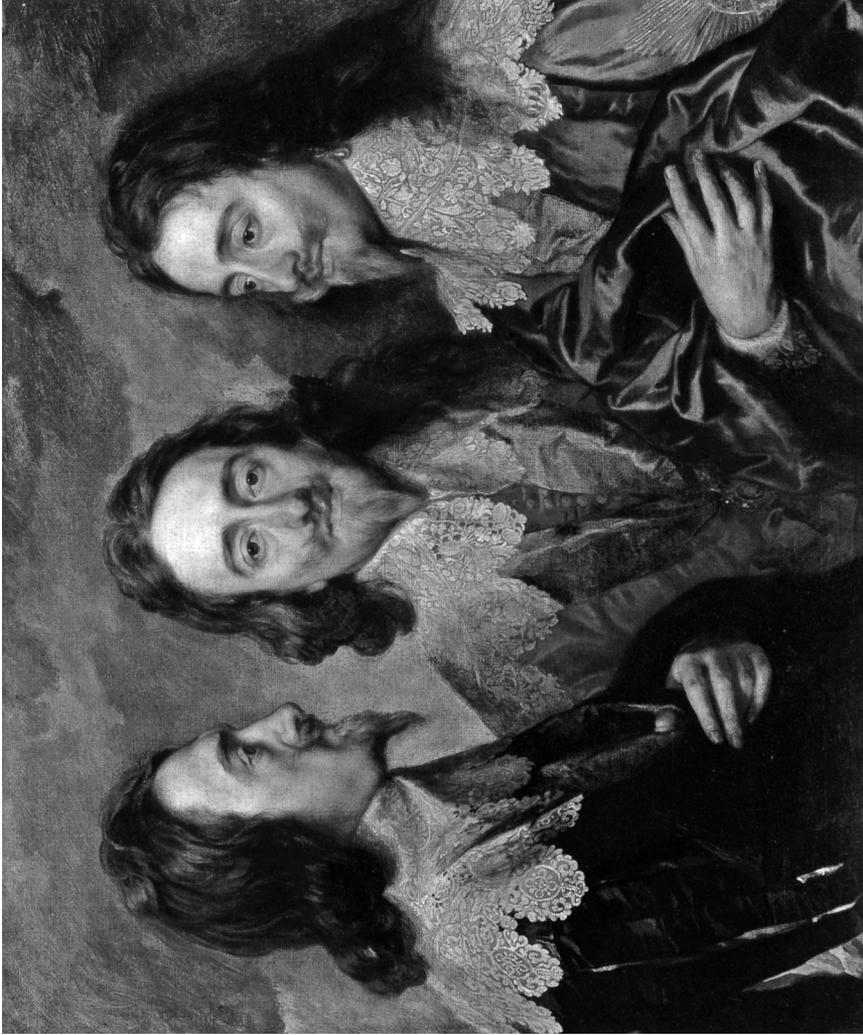


2. Thomas Adey (?), Charles I, after Bernini.  
Windsor Castle.

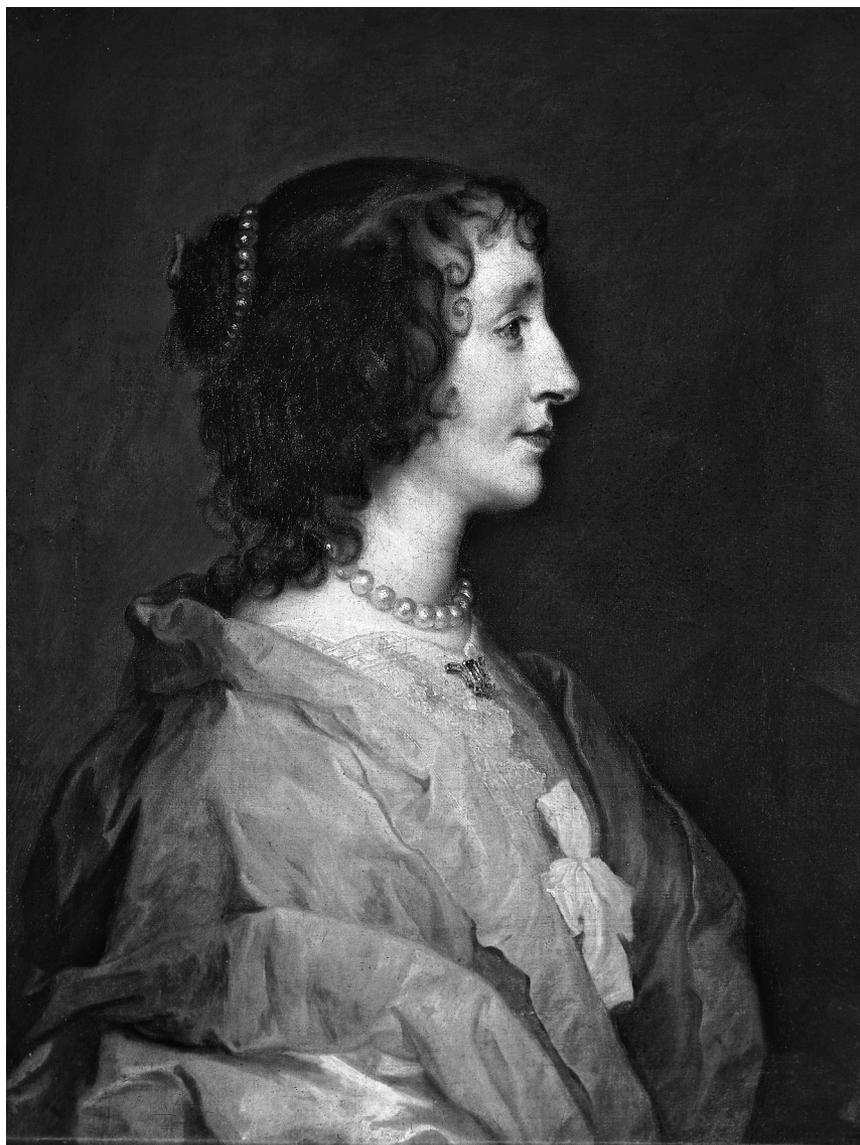


1. Bernini, Francesco I d'Este. Museo Estense, Modena.

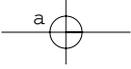
1250



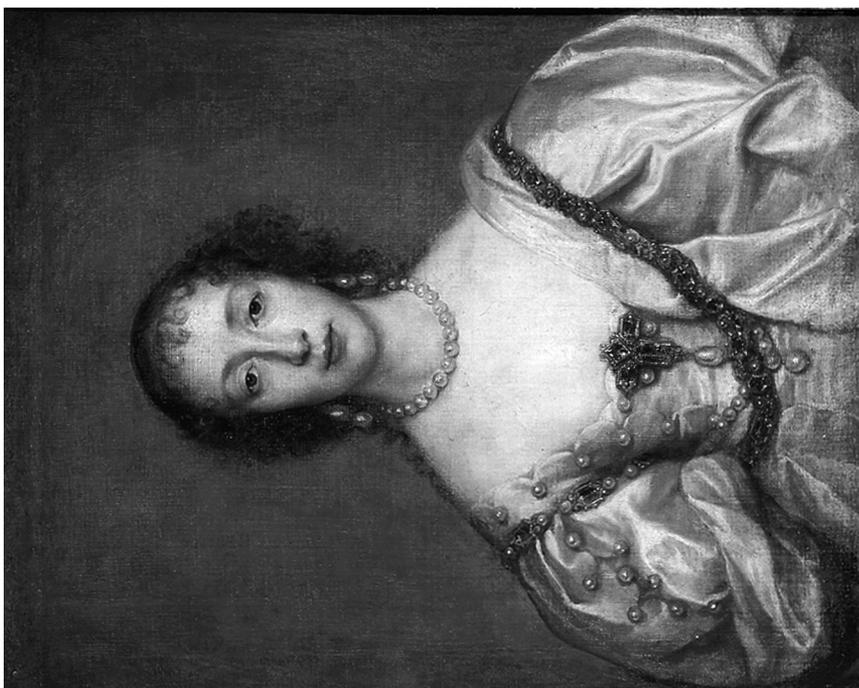
3. Van Dyck, triple  
portrait of Charles I.  
Windsor Castle.



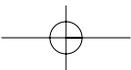
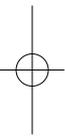
4. Van Dyck, Queen Henrietta Maria.  
Brooks Memorial Art Museum, Memphis, TN.



6. Van Dyck, Queen Henrietta Maria. Windsor Castle.



5. Van Dyck, Queen Henrietta Maria. Windsor Castle.





7. Bernini, Cardinal Richelieu. Musée du Louvre, Paris.



8. Philippe de  
Champaigne, triple  
portrait of Richelieu.  
National Gallery  
of Art, London.

THE REGAL GIFT

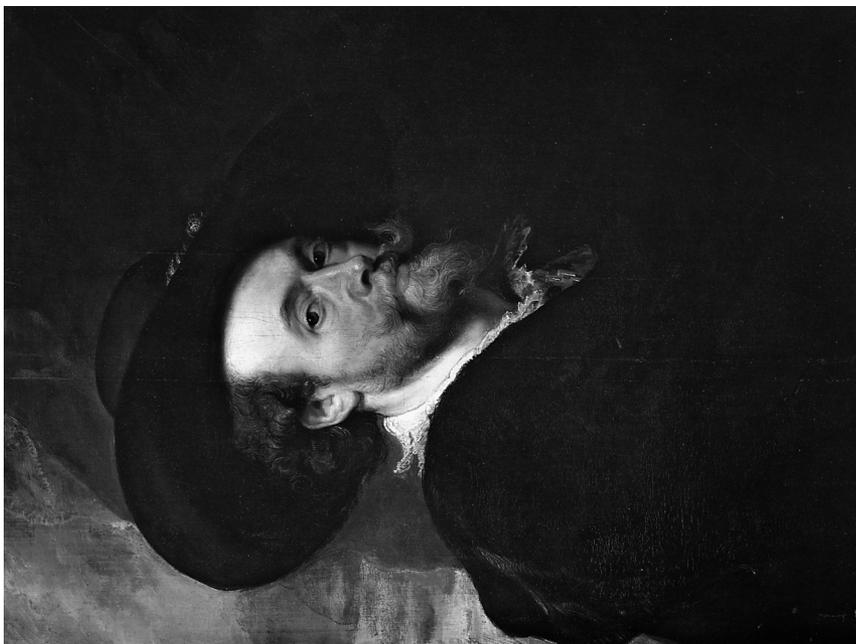
1255



10. Bernini, Louis XIV. Musée National du Château de Versailles.



9. Algardi, Urbano Mellini. S. Maria del Popolo, Rome.



12. Rubens, Self-Portrait. Windsor Castle.



11. Titian, Self-Portrait. Museo del Prado, Madrid.



13. Van Dyck, Self-Portrait.  
Collection of the Duke of  
Westminster, London.

14. Rembrandt, Self-Portrait.  
Musée du Louvre, Paris.



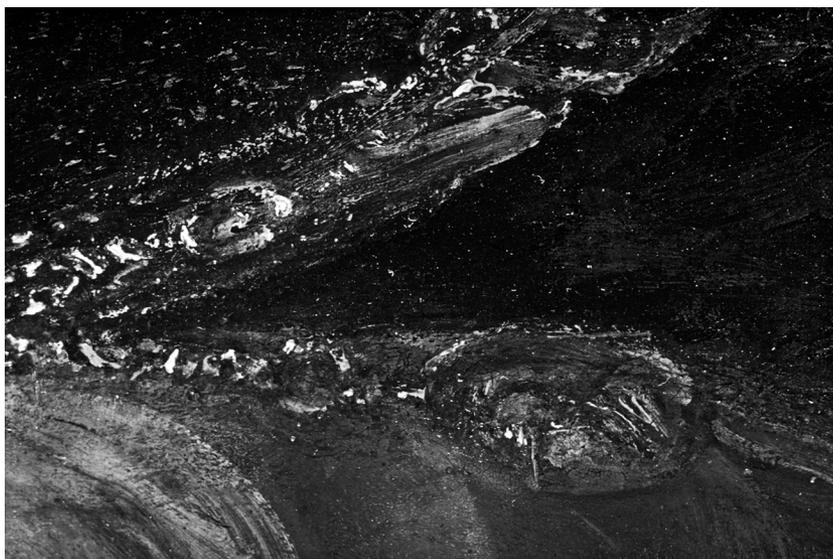
1258



15. Rembrandt, *Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer*.  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



17. Rembrandt, Self-Portrait. Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne.



16. Rembrandt, *Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer*, detail. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

1260



19. Bernini, Self-Portrait, drawing. Windsor Castle.



18. Bernini, Self-Portrait, drawing. Windsor Castle.

scious jewels.<sup>44</sup> It is significant that the gifts always took this luxurious symbolic form, never in kind, like the foodstuffs and other practical goods with which artisans had often been paid in earlier times. The gifts were truly 'regali' in the sense that they were equivalent in nature and in value to the favors the nobility commonly exchanged among themselves.

The phenomenon I have been describing had a long pre-history, stretching back to antiquity, when Apelles was given the exclusive privilege of portraying Alexander the Great, whose image, incidentally, was in fact an important influence on Bernini's conception of the ruler portrait; and when Parrhasius proudly proclaimed himself the 'prince of painters.' These classical precedents lay the foundation for the tradition that was formalized in the Renaissance, when the artist was elevated to the status of a true courtier — notably with Titian, who portrayed himself nobly wearing a golden chain emblematic of the knighthood bestowed upon him by the Emperor Charles V. (Fig. 11). Rubens received many such honors, and also portrayed himself with a chain in a portrait painted for Charles I (Fig. 12), as did Van Dyck when he received the award from Charles I (Fig. 13). In many cases a portrait medal of the patron is suspended from the chain, which thus signifies a bond of reciprocal admiration and mutual allegiance between the donor and the recipient. The symbolic value of this insignia was so important that Rembrandt, who never received the honor, nevertheless often depicted himself sporting a golden chain (Fig. 14); and he gave the tradition a profoundly intellectual turn in his picture of Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer, in which the philosopher wears a golden chain with a medal that may represent either or both the helmeted Alexander the Great, Aristotle's devoted pupil, or Athena, the goddess of Wisdom (Figs. 15, 16).<sup>45</sup> The chain and medal play separate parts in Rembrandt's grimacing, late self-portrait with a mahlstick and wearing a medal (Fig. 17): in an ironic and macabre self-mockery of the painter of the crass reality of old age, he gleefully assumes the role of Zeuxis, who was said to have died laughing while painting a wrinkled, droll old woman, who in turn is portrayed at the left in the role of Zeuxis himself, grinning and wearing a golden chain. Bernini's inventory lists a golden chain with a royal portrait medal of the King of Spain, as well as a famous jewel with a portrait of Louis XIV sur-

<sup>44</sup> Borsi *et al.*, 1981.

<sup>45</sup> The tradition of the golden chain in art has been discussed particularly with respect to Rembrandt by Held 1969, 32–41, Deutsch-Carroll 1984, Perry Chapman 1990, esp. 50–4.

rounded by diamonds (valued at 3000 scudi by Bandinucci, 8000 by Domenico Bernini, both of whom emphasize the 'regality' of the episode).<sup>46</sup>

Bernini belongs squarely in this tradition, and he may have inherited his attitude from Guido Reni, who was notorious in exerting his preference for the dignity of gifts to the ignominy of prices.<sup>47</sup> But I believe his case is unique in that he brings the tradition to a climax and also marks a new departure. I know of no previous portrait-image-maker so universally and assiduously sought after with such reverential awe at such exalted levels of society at such extravagant values. And no one afterward, until perhaps the photographer Karsh. But Bernini is also unique in that he wore his laurels lightly. Indeed, he did not wear them at all. The fact is that we have very few securely identified self-portraits by Bernini and those we do have are at the very opposite end of the hierarchical scale represented by his distinguished predecessors (Figs. 18, 19). He never shows himself wearing any kind of ornament; he never includes the arms or even the rhetorical flourish of parted lips.<sup>48</sup> In fact, he never shows himself in formal portrait guise,

<sup>46</sup> Borsi *et al.*, 1981, 113, 115, 116. Baldinucci 1947, 112, Domenico 1713, 118.

<sup>47</sup> 'In the dealings concerning his work (Guido) always used intermediaries or members of his household, who showed they could make arrangements that were favorable to him. Only with difficulty could he bring himself to transact an agreement in person, abhorring the mention of price in a profession in which, he said, it should be obligatory to negotiate on the basis of an honorarium or gift . . . Following the example of Xeuxis who, judging that his works could not be adequately rewarded, gave the Alcmena to the Agrigentines and the Pan to Achelao, it was Guido's practice at times not to put a price on the works he painted for great personages and men of substantial means, but rather to give the paintings to them. In this way he received much more for them than was the custom, or than he himself would have asked.' (Malvasia 1980, 114, 115.) 'Ne' trattati de' lavori si servì sempre di mezzani e dimestici, che mostrassero ottenergli per favore, difficilmente riducendosi a trattar in persona propria d'accordo; abborrendo il nome di prezzo in questa professione, che diceva doversi negoziare con titolo di onorario e di regalo . . . Ad esempio di Zeusi che reputando l'opre sue non poter pagarsi a bastanza, donò l'Alcmena a gli Agrigentini, il Pane ad Archelao, praticò il non voler chieder prezzo talora dei suoi quadri con Grandi e persone comode piuttosto donarli loro ricevendone per tal via assai più di ciò ch'era in uso, ed avrebbe egli medesimo chiesto' (Malvasia 1841, II, 47). Noted by Warwick 1997, 632, Spear 1997, 212. That Bernini knew and greatly admired Guido, including his views on pricing is evident from the many references to him and his pictures in Chantelou's diary, and in his own work (see Chantelou 1985, index; Nava Cellini 1967, Hibbard 1976, Schlegel 1985).

<sup>48</sup> The many paintings and drawings thought to be portraits or self-portraits of Bernini have been conveniently gathered and well-illustrated in recent exhibition catalogues: Coliva and Schütze, eds., 1998, Weston-Lewis, ed., 1998; Bernardini and Fagiolo dell'Arco, eds., 1999.

but in relatively small, unpretentious images which, were it not for the intimate feeling and direct address to the spectator, would be difficult to recognize as self-portraits at all. He never signed his self-portraits; in fact, he never signed any of his work. No artist of comparable stature was more modest and reserved with respect to his own view of himself. Here we have the crux of the paradox that I believe places Bernini at the climax of one era and the initiation of another: the most exalted artist of his time presents himself simply as a man like any other, only charged with volcanic power and a penetrating, portentous gaze bespeaking a profound human awareness.

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