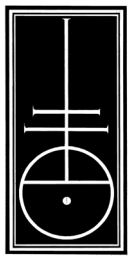
Visible Spirit

The Art of Gianlorenzo Bernini

Vol. I

Irving Lavin



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II

Bernini and the Theater

THERE was one art form in which the use of a variety of media and the effect of unity were, as we tend to assume, inherent — that is, the theater.[1] For anyone wishing to understand Bernini's artistic personality as a whole, his activity in the theater presents one of the most beguiling problems. From all accounts, and there are many, it is clear that he spent much time and energy throughout his life producing, writing and acting in plays, designing sets and inventing ingenious scenic effects. Beginning in the early 1630s, during Carnival season, he would either stage something for one of his patrons or, more regularly, put on a comedy of his own.[2] John Evelyn was awed during his visit to Rome in 1644, when he learned and noted in his diary that shortly before his arrival Bernini had given a "Publique Opera . . . where in he painted the seanes, cut the Statues, invented the Engines, composed the Musique, writ the Comedy & built the Theater all himselfe."[3] These efforts were extremely successful and — to judge from the

[1] What follows is a somewhat revised and enlarged version of a review of D'Onofrio, *Fontana*, in *The Art Bulletin,* LXVI, 1964, 568–72.

[2] In a letter of 1634 Fulvio Testi speaks as if Bernini had been giving comedies for some time ("conforme al solito degli altri anni"; Fraschetta, *Bernini,* 261, n. 3). The earliest notice we have of a play by him is in February 1633 (*ibid.,* 261, n. 1); Domenico Bernini states (47f., 53) that his father began writing plays during an illness that occurred when he was approaching the age of thirty-seven, i.e., in 1635.

3. *Diary,* ed. E. S. de Beer, 6 vols., Oxford, 1955, II, 261; repeated by Evelyn in the preface to his translation of Fréart's *Idea of the Perfection of Painting,* 1668: ". . . not many years since, he is reported to have built a theatre at Rome, for the adornment whereof he not only cut the figures, and painted the scenes, but writ the play, and compos'd the musick which was all in *recitativo" (Miscellaneous Writings,* ed. W. Upcott, London, 1825, 562).

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artist's conversations in Paris in 1665, which are full of anecdotes about his productions — he was ingenuously proud of his accomplishments. Bernini was passionately involved in the world of the stage.

From a broader historical point of view, as well, Bernini's theatrical activities are of extraordinary importance. He lived through a decisive period in the creation of the opera, not only as a musical and dramatic but also as a visual art form. Although he had had many predecessors as artist-scenographer (not so many as artist-playwright and artist-actor), it is with Bernini that the relationship between art and theater becomes a critical question. The epithet "Baroque theatricality" has often been leveled at his work in general and the Teresa chapel in particular, implying a kind of meretricious stagecraftiness that transfers formal and expressive devices from the domain of ephemeral and artificial to that of permanent and "serious" arts, where they have no proper business. It might almost be said that our view of the whole period, as well as of the artist himself, has been colored by Bernini's activity in the theater.[4]

Yet, it is evident from our analysis that there is not a single device in the chapel which can be explained only by reference to the theater; every detail — the so-called audience in boxes, the so-called hidden lighting, the so-called stage-space of the altarpiece, the so-called dramatic actions of the figures, the mixture of media — every detail has roots in the prior development of the permanent visual arts. Nevertheless, the very conception of the Teresa chapel involves a reference to the theater, and this is what chiefly *distinguishes* it from Bernini's other works. The reference is not in the form of borrowed scenic devices, however, but in the form of a deliberate evocation of Bernini's own very special conception of what occurred in the theater.

It must be borne in mind that we actually know very little about Bernini's productions. Historians have generally been content to repeat the more spectacular instances of his scenographic wizardry, while neglecting many other references and descriptions in the sources.[5] It is also unfortu-

[4] The monograph of Fagiolo dell'Arco, *Bernini,* is the most recent attempt to interpret virtually the whole of Bernini's art under the aspect of the theater.

[5] The sources for Bernini's theatrical activities are conveniently gathered in C. D'Onofrio, *Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Fontana di Trevi: Commedia inedita,* Rome, n.d. [1963], 91ff., except for the letters describing his comedy of 1635 about academies of painting and sculpture in Naples (A. Saviotti, "Peste e spettacoli nel seicento," *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana,* XLI, 1903, 71ff.), the accounts of the *Fiera di Farfa* intermezzo of 1639 (see p. 18 below), and the unpublished documents of 1641 cited below, p. 18, n. 9.

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nately true that until recently nothing Bernini created for the theater had been known at first hand. A drawing once thought to be a design by him for a stage set is now generally ascribed to Juvarra.[6] Bernini was long credited with the sets for the famous Barberini operatic production of the early 1630s, *Sant'Alessio,* recorded in a group of eight engravings by Collignon (cf. Fig. 1); but from the documents in the Barberini archive in the Vatican, it appears that Bernini had no share in this production.[7] Nevertheless, because of the astonishment expressed by contemporaries and his association — willy-nilly — with this and other Barberini extravaganzas, Bernini came to be regarded as a major figure in the development of the Baroque machine spectacle.

This was surely not the case. To begin with, Bernini's name can be attached firmly to only two of the important Barberini operas during Urban

For a recent general treatment, see C. Molinari, *Le nozze degli dèi: Un saggio sul grande spettacolo italiano nel seicento,* Rome, 1968, 105–20.

[6] Brauer and Wittkower, *Zeichnungen,* 33f., pl. 15. Cf. A. E. Brinckmann, "I disegni," in Comitato per le onoranze a Filippo Juvarra, *Filippo Juvarra,* 1, Turin, 1937, 146, 162; Battaglia, *Cattedra,* 119, n. 2; L. Grassi, *Bernini pittore,* Rome, 1945, 48, 59, n. 1.

[7] The attribution to Bernini (which seems to occur first in G. Martucci, "Salvator Rosa nel personaggio di *Formica," Nuova antologia di scienze, lettere ed arti,* LXXXIII, 1885, 648) never had any basis in fact. To begin with, a monogram that appears in the corner of one state of the Collignon engravings (*Il* S. *Alessio: Dramma musicale* . . ., Rome, 1634, BV, Stamp. Barb. N. XIII. 199) was misconstrued as referring to Bernini (by F. Clementi, *Il carnevale romano, 2* vols., Città di Castello, 1938–9 [first ed. 1899], 1, 473, and again by A. Schiavo, "A proposito dei 'Disegni inediti di G. L. Bernini e di L. Vanvitelli' di A. Schiavo," *Palladio,* N.S., IV, 1954, 90). Then Fraschetti *(Bernini,* 261) quite gratuitously interpolated Bernini's name into the account of the performance given in Giacinto Gigli's *Diario romano* (ed. G. Ricciotti, Rome, 1958, 140); no such reference occurs in the manuscripts of the diary (Rome, Bibl. Vittorio Emanuele, MS.811, fol. 139v [autograph]; BV, MS. Vat. lat. 8717, 141; San Pietro in Vincoli, MS.147).

The monogram, by analogy with François Collignon's own initials as they appear in the opposite corner of the engravings, should probably be read as "F.B."; payment was made to the painter Francesco Buonamici for unspecified work on the production of 1634 (BV, AB, Armadio 100, Giustificazioni Nos. 1751–2000, Card. Francesco Barberini, 1632–4, No. 1907; cf. Arm. 86, Libro Mastro B, Card. Francesco, 1630–4, 346).

A possible reading is "P.B."; Pietro Berrettini da Cortona made some small pieces of scenery and the "Eye of the Demon" for the 1632 production *(ibid.,* Arm. 155, Alfabeto di entrata e uscita della guardarobba, Card. Antonio, 1632, fol. I45r: "A di 18 feb.ro 1632. Lenzoli portati p. servitio della Representatione . . . Dati al Sig.r Pietro Cor.na lenzoli due . . . E più dato al Sig.r pietro lenzole n.o 1 . . . E Più dati al Sig.r Pietro p. servitio della

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VIII's reign. In the famous *Fiera di Farfa* intermezzo of the 1639 version of *Chi soffre speri,* he recreated on stage a bustling country fair with live animals, the garden of the Barberini palace itself with passing carriages and a ball game, and a sunrise and sunset.[8] In the 1641 production of *L'innocenza difesa,* for which Bernini was indirectly responsible, the sunset was repeated, and one scene included a fireworks display over a view of Castel Sant'Angelo.[9]

Rep.ne due lenzoli . . . E più dato al Sig.re Pietro tre Canne di tela di fare impanate cioè se ne servi per li lanternoni ch segnevano Ochi Ca.ne 3"; fol. 44.v: "A di 28 detto [February] 1632. Lenzoli usate uscite da Ga.ba p. ser.tio della Rep.ne date al Sig.r Pietro da Cortona n.o cinque ... de quali ne fu fatto alcuni pezzi di scene piccole . . . Tela quatretto uscita di Gar.ba per servitio della Rep.ne di S. Alesio Canne tre cioè date al Sig.r Pietro da Cortona de che ne fece li Ochio del Demonio"); but the style of the sets in the engravings scarcely supports an attribution to Cortona (proposed by M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, "Lo spettacolo barocco," *Storia dell'arte,* Nos. 1–2, 1969, 229).

[8] An important breakthrough, which confirms the attribution of the *Fiera di Farfa* intermezzo to Bernini, was the discovery of his record of accounts for the work among the documents of Cardinal Francesco Barberini, by F. Hammond, "Girolamo Frescobaldi and a Decade of Music in the Casa Barberini: 1634–1643," *Analecta musicologica,* XIX, 1979, 94–124.

On *Chi soffre speri,* see A. Ademollo, *I teatri di Roma nel secolo decimosettimo,* Rome, 1888, 28ff. Subsequent bibliography will be found in S. Reiner, "Collaboration in *Chi soffre speri," The Music Review,* XXII, 1961, 265–82; additional sources in Clementi, *Carnevale,* 1, 483f; M. L. Pietrangeli Chanaz, *Il teatro barberiniano,* unpub. diss., University of Rome, 1968, 114–28 and unpaginated appendix of documents; M. K. Murata, *Operas for the Papal Court with Texts by Giulio Rospigliosi,* unpub. diss., University of Chicago, 1975, 316–8. The sunrise and sunset are mentioned by H. Tetius, *Aedes barberinae ad Quirinalem,* Rome, 1642, 35; on this motif, see p. 151, n. 17 below.

It is tempting but probably incorrect to identify the *Fiera di Farfa* with the comedy called *La fiera* staged by Bernini for Cardinal Antonio Barberini (Bernini, 55; cf. Baldinucci, 150), since neither the text nor the descriptions of the former mention the false fire that highlighted the latter (see below).

[9] Bernini's role in the 1641 production of *L'innocenza difesa* emerges from several as yet unpublished sources. "A questa comedia hà fatte due vedute di lontan.za il nipote di Mon.re fausto già diventato ingegniere di machine sceniche in pochi giorni, e sono l'una, il sole cadente del Bernino, quale si p[...?] da tutti all'em.o non haverci parte nessuna ben che visibilm.te ci assista, e la seconda è la ved.ta della girandola presa da monte cavallo creduta da S. em.a p. inventione del s.r nipote: alla quale credenza il linguacciuto dice haver cooperato che in d.e machine tutta la spesa hà fatto mons.re fausto" (from a letter by Ottaviano Castelli to Mazarin, February 1, 1641, Paris, Ministère des affaires étrangères, Archives diplomatiques, Correspondance politique, Rome, MS.73, fol. 187v, from which another passage was excerpted by H. Prunières, *L'opera italien en France avant Lulli,* Paris, 1913, 26, n. 2). "La comedia . . . riuscì isquisitam.te; massime nelle scene, che all'usanza del Cav.r Bernino fecero

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For the most part, the scenes of the Barberini productions were not done by stage designers at all, but by artists, mainly painters, who were primarily employed by the family in other tasks: Andrea Camassei, Giovanni Francesco Romanelli, Giovanni Francesco Grimaldi, Andrea Sacchi. Apart from the Medici court spectacles in Florence staged by Giulio Parigi and his son Alfonso, the main line of evolution of Italian scenography was North Italian. There a great tradition emerged in the early seventeenth century, in Ferrara and Bologna with Giovanni Battista Aleotti and his successors Francesco Guitti and Alfonso Chenda, in Venice with Giuseppe Alabardi and Giovanni Burnacini, culminating in the work of the "grande stregone" of High Baroque stage design, Giacomo Torelli.[10] These men made stage design and theater architecture a full-time, professional occupation, and it is naïve to ascribe to Bernini rather than to them the leading role in the development of Baroque stage technology.

The truth is that Bernini did not really have much use for elaborate contraptions. He ridiculed them as too slow and cumbersome. The secret, he said, is to avoid doing things that will not succeed perfectly. He recommended a stage no more than twenty-four feet deep, and advised against scenes that could be seen from only one point. What pleased him was that his successes had been achieved with productions staged in his own house,

vedere lontananze maravigliose" (Avviso di Roma, February 2, 1641, Rome, Bibl. Corsini, MS.1733, fol. 109, found and transcribed by Pietrangeli Chanaz, *Teatro,* unpaginated documents; also Murata, *Operas,* 362); ". . . con Intermedij apparenti et specialmente questo Castello Sant'Angelo tutto circondato di lumi, facendo la Girandola, come si fà la Festa de Santi Pietro, et Paolo Apostoli" (Avviso, February 2, 1641, *ibid.,* MS.1735, fols. 15v and f., Pietrangeli Chanaz, *Teatro,* Murata, *Operas,* 362). See now also M. K. Murata, "Rospigliosiana ovvero: Gli equivoci innocenti," *Studi musicali,* IV, 1975 (publ. 1978), 131–43. On the Castel Sant' Angelo fireworks, see p. 151, n. 17 below.

The sets of *II palazzo d'Atlante,* 1642, attributed to Bernini by Baldinucci and Domenico Bernini, were actually by Andrea Sacchi; cf. the letters of the eyewitness Ottaviano Castelli to Mazarin (H. Prunières, "Les répresentations du Palazzo d'Atlante à Rome [1642]," *Sammelbände der internationalen Musik-Gesellschaft,* XIV, 1912–3, 219ff.), the Avvisi di Roma (G. Canevazzi, *Di tre melodrammi del secolo XVII,* Modena, 1904, 44ff.), and payments to Sacchi in March 1642 "in conto delle spese p. le scene della comedia" (BV, AB, Arm. 76, Libro Mastro C, Card. Antonio Barberini, 1636–44, p. 342).

[10] The picture of this whole period has been very much enlarged and enriched in recent years by the pioneering researches of Elena Povoledo, in many publications, including numerous articles in the *Enciclopedia dello spettacolo,* and by Per Bjurström's monograph *Giacomo Torelli and Baroque Stage Design,* Stockholm, 1961 (Nationalmusei Skriftserie, 7). On Guitti's work as a theater architect, see Lavin, "Lettres."

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at his own expense and costing no more than "tre baiocchi." Characteristically, he said that the important thing is to have ideas, in which case one can hire someone who knows how to paint scenes, and someone who understands machines, to carry them out.[11] In some respects, it is evident, Bernini's principles were diametrically opposed to those underlying the vast machine productions that were the hallmark of the period.

What is essential is a more balanced assessment of the character and underlying motivation of Bernini's scenographic technique. Far too much emphasis has been placed on the sheer mechanics of stage engineering, and this has obscured the real nature of Bernini's achievements in the theater. It is significant that Bernini's own productions were comedies and farces in the informal tradition of the *commedia dell'arte,* and the sources leave no doubt that one of the reasons for his success in this field, especially at the outset, were his daring satires of important people. It is very unlikely that ordinary commedia dell'arte troupes could have had an immunity from reprisal such as Bernini, darling of the Barberini, enjoyed. He could poke fun in public at anyone, including the Barberini themselves and in their very presence! One can well imagine that nothing of the kind had been seen on stage before. These direct references to highly placed people and their doings should not be thought of merely as reflections of Bernini's privileged position. They were also a device that helped Bernini break through theatrical convention and establish links with the real world.[12]

An analogous point may be made about Bernini's use of illusionistic devices, the second and perhaps chief source of his renown. In the great court spectacles and to some extent also in the regular theater, more or less elaborate stage effects had a long history. By contrast, the commedia dell'arte, to which Bernini's own private productions belong, was above all the domain of the performer, with scenic elements secondary and largely stereotyped. Actual practice varied considerably, needless to say, and the great actor-dramatist Giovanni Battista Andreini, Bernini's predecessor in more ways than one, introduced considerable visual interest into some of his commedia dell'arte plays.[13] He seems to have done so, however, mainly

[11] Chantelou, 68, 69, 115, 116f., 213.

[12] There is a close and obvious parallel in Bernini's caricature drawings of important people, which begin at exactly the same period (cf. I. Lavin, "Duquesnoy's 'Nano di Créqui' and Two Busts by Francesco Mochi," *The Art Bulletin,* LII, 1970, 144, n. 75).

[13] Cf. K. M. Lea, *Italian Popular Comedy,* 2 vols., Oxford, 1934, I, 320ff.

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through lavish settings and costumes — which were probably rare in Bernini's own productions — with no hint of the surprising special effects for which Bernini was acclaimed.

It can be shown that none of the methods Bernini used was actually invented by him. In 1638, after a disastrous flood of the Tiber at Rome the year before, Bernini staged his celebrated *Inundation of the Tiber.*[14] In the play, boats passed across the stage on real water, retained by embankments. Suddenly the levee broke and water spilled out toward the audience, whereupon a barrier rose just in time to stop it. As background to this trick of stage hydraulics, we need only mention that Giovanni Battista Aleotti, in addition to being an important stage designer and theater architect, had been one of the founders of modern hydraulic engineering; he wrote several treatises on the subject with experience gained from such projects as the regulation of the waters of the Po at Ferrara and land reclamation in the Polesine region of northeast Italy. In 1628 Francesco Guitti, Aleotti's successor, had arranged to flood the huge Teatro Farnese on the second story of the Palazzo della Pilotta in Parma for a marine spectacle involving a mock naval battle; Guitti, indeed, was the one professional stage designer who worked for the Barberini, on productions in 1633 and 1634.

In 1637 and 1638 Bernini produced a comedy that involved two audiences and two theaters. The spectators saw an actor on stage reciting a prologue; behind him they saw the back side of another actor facing another audience and also reciting a prologue. At the end of the prologue a curtain was raised between the two actors and the play began. At the end of the play the curtain dropped, and the audience saw the other audience leaving the other theater in splendid coaches by the light of torches and the moon shining through clouds. This conceit was certainly related to the play-within-a-play tradition, familiar to us from Shakespeare, in which there had recently been significant developments. A comedy of 1623 by Andreini, titled *The Two Comedies in Comedy,* even included two successive performances as part of the plot.[15]

[14] Cf. the title of a treatise on the technical problems of controlling the river, O. Castelli, *Della inondatione del Tevere,* Rome, 1608.

[15] Lea, *Comedy,* I, pp. 322ff.; cf. F. Neri, "La commedia in commedia," *Mélanges d'histoire littéraire générale et comparée offerts à Fernand Baldensperger, 2* vols., Paris, 1930, II, pp. l30ff. See further below, p. 29, n. 27.

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In Bernini's comedy called *The Fair* (before 1645), a Carnival float was shown returning from the celebration.[16] One of the revelers carrying a torch "accidentally" set fire to the scenery. The audience, thinking the theater was about to burn down, scrambled for the exit. At the height of the confusion the scene suddenly changed, and when the spectators looked, the fire had disappeared and the stage had become a delightful garden. Here, Bernini profited from the sophisticated devices of theatrical pyrotechnics that had been developed especially for hell scenes, long a part of great court spectacles (Fig. 1).[17]

One certainly must not underestimate the significance of pure spectacle for Bernini. It is essential to realize, however, that his secret lay not in lavishness or complex engineering, but in the *way* he used the techniques of illusion. When Francesco Guitti flooded the Farnese theater, it was for a marine performance in the middle of the arena; when Bernini did his trick, the water was on stage and threatened to spill out over the spectators. (Guitti's was no doubt a far more ambitious engineering feat.) When Bernini adopted the play-within-a-play formula, he created the impression that the two plays were going on simultaneously, confronting the audience with duplicate actors and a duplicate theater and audience as well. Bernini's fire was not presented as part of the play in a scene of hell; in a feigned accident with the torch held by the actor, it threatened to burn down the theater itself. Clearly, it was by means of these sudden thrusts into the mind and heart of the spectator — accomplished without elaborate machinery — that Bernini created his wonderful effects.

[16] See p. 18, n. 8 above. A *terminus ad quem* is provided by the fact that when Bernini described the production in Paris in 1665, the Abbot Francesco Buti says he had been present; by 1645 Buti, who was secretary to Cardinal Antonio Barberini, had left Rome for Paris (cf. *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart,* 15 vols., Kassel, etc., 1949–73, II, cols. 532f.). The comedies previously mentioned are dated by contemporary descriptions.

[17] Fig. 1 is the hell scene from *Il S. Alessio,* 1634, pl. 2. On hell scenes generally, cf. Bemmann, *Bühnenbeleuchtung,* 24ff., 92ff., I07ff. The treatise of Nicola Sabbattini, which certainly does not represent the most advanced technique of its day, even contains a chapter titled "Come si possa dimostrare che tutta la scena arda." Another of Sabbattini's chapters, "Come si possa fare apparire che tutta la scena si demolisca," shows that Bernini did not invent the trick for his comedy (1638) in which a house collapsed on stage (N. Sabbattini, *Pratica di fabricar scene, e machine ne' teatri,* Ravenna, 1638, ed. E. Povoledo, Rome, 1955, 70f.).

For the depiction on stage of the Castel Sant'Angelo fireworks display, which Bernini evidently introduced in 1641 (p. 18 and n. 9 above), see the comments on Giovanni

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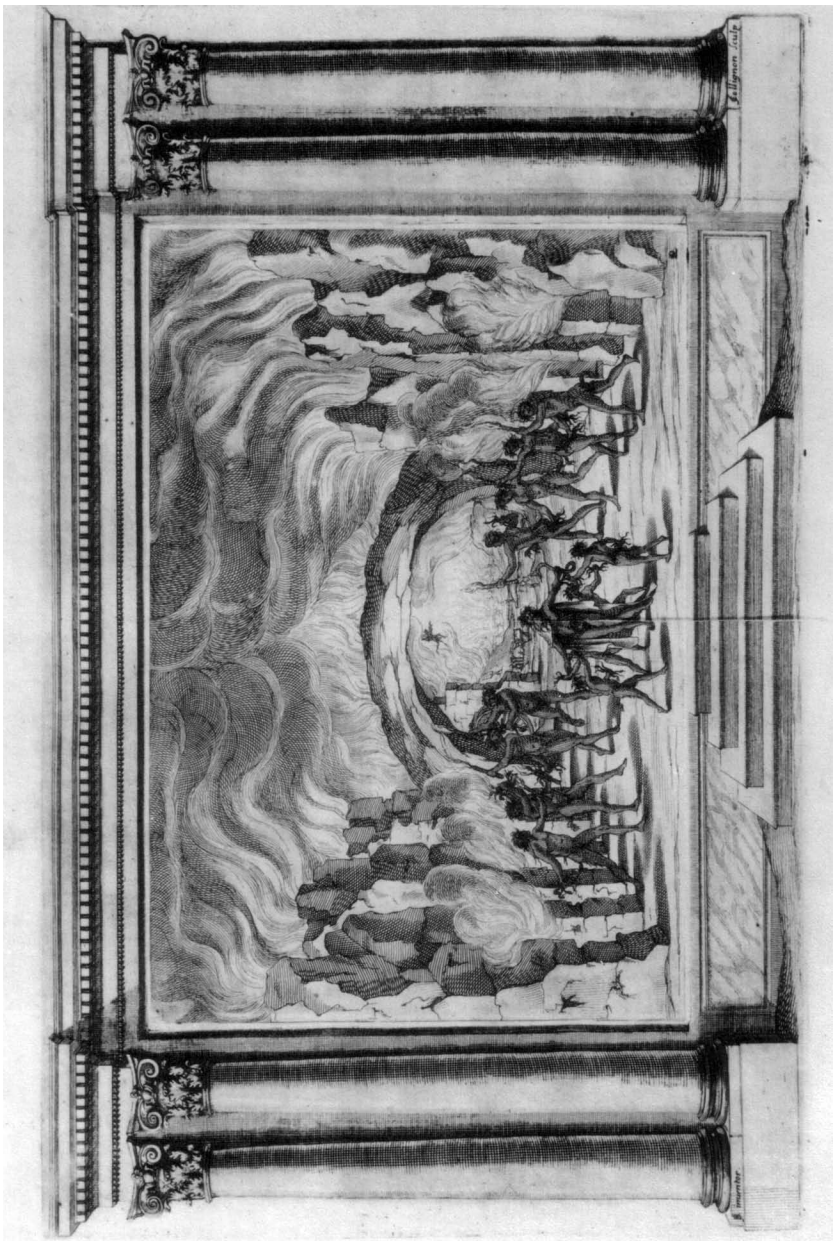

1. Stage set from *Il S. Alessio*, 1634, pl. 2, engraving.

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Immediacy of effect and simplicity of technique are also the keys to an understanding of the one direct trace of Bernini's work for the theater that has come down to us, a fragmentary manuscript of a comedy published only a few years ago. The text is incomplete, and it is not certain that the play was ever performed — probably not, since it seems to be identical with an "idea" for a comedy that Bernini later described, commenting that it had never been carried out (see below). The play is especially important in our context for two reasons: first, there is compelling evidence that it was intended for the Carnival season of 1644, barely three years before the Teresa chapel was begun; second, its plot contains an autobiographical element that makes it an explicit statement of Bernini's own ideas.[18]

The story, briefly, is as follows: Cinthio, a young, gentleman in the service of a prince, is in love with Angelica, the daughter of Dottor Gratiano, an aging and famous master of scenography, who also writes and acts in his own plays. Cinthio has no money and Coviello, his charming and scheming Neapolitan valet, proposes a stratagem that will net enough at least to

Francesco Grimaldi's replica for the 1656 production of *La vita humana,* in W. Witzenmann, "Die römische Barockoper *La Vita humana ovvero il trionfo della pietà," Analecta musicologica,* XV, 1975, I75f. On Bernini's pyrotechnical style, see E. Povoledo, "Gian Lorenzo Bernini, l'elefante e i fuochi artificiali," *Rivista italiana di musicologia,* X, 1975, 499–518.

Bernini's sunrises and sunsets (see p. 18 above) belonged in a tradition that went back at least to Serlio *(Architettura,* Venice, 1566, bk. II, 64; cf. Bemmann, *Bühnenbeleuchtung,* 71ff, 99f., 110f.). The sunrise mentioned by Baldinucci (151) and Domenico Bernini (56f.; cf. also Chantelou, 116) must date before 1643, since Louis XIII, who died in that year, requested a model.

The treatise of Sabbattini and the relevant portion of that of Serlio have been translated in B. Hewitt, ed., *The Renaissance Stage: Documents of Serlio, Sabbattini and Furttenbach,* Coral Gables, Fla., 1958.

[18] The text, preserved in a manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, was published by D'Onofrio, *Fontana.* The play is written in a scribe's hand, without title, in a fascicule inscribed, "Fontana di Trevi MDCXLII," originally intended as a ledger of accounts for work on the fountain. Only a few entries were made, however, the latest of which dates from April 1643 (D'Onofrio [28] through a lapsus gives August 1643 for the last entry in the ledger). Scene two of the second act contains an anti-Spanish jibe that D'Onofrio feels would not have been written under the Hispanophile Innocent X; and since Urban VIII died in July of 1644, the most plausible assumption is that the play was intended for the Carnival season of that year. The manuscript copy cannot have been used for performance, since it contains a number of lacunae and errors; moreover, the third act is exceedingly short (only two scenes) and the ending seems not a proper denouement at all.

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make a show of wealth. The plan is to obtain 1000 scudi from a mysterious stranger, Alidoro, who will pay that amount to see Gratiano's marvelous stage effects. Cinthio tells Gratiano that the prince has ordered him to do a comedy. Gratiano resists, but is finally persuaded by his maidservant Rosetta (with whom he has a flirtation). Gratiano tells Rosetta the plot he has devised: a certain Dottor Gratiano is enamored of his maidservant, named Rosetta. Gratiano is married, but his wife is "un pezz de carnaccia vecchia che sà di rancido che appesta."[19] Gratiano will try to accommodate the situation by making use of Rosetta, in anticipation of his wife's demise, to have a child. In a remarkable conversation between the real Dottor Gratiano and his imaginary self, the latter scolds the former roundly for having such dirty thoughts ("sporchi pensieri"). The second act includes a brilliant scene in which, at a trial lowering of the "cielo" ("sky"), the mechanism fails to perform adequately. Gratiano expresses his dissatisfaction vehemently, making two canonically "Baroque" esthetic pronouncements: that stage machines are supposed to amaze people, not amuse them; and that invention, design ("l'inzegn, el desegn") is the magic art that fools the eye so as to cause astonishment. Alidoro, we learn in the third act, is himself a producer of plays who also acts in them and paints the scenes. With Zanni, Dottor Gratiano's manservant, as an accomplice, he dons a disguise in which he will be employed to assist with the preparations and thus learn Gratiano's techniques. The manuscript comes to an end as Cochetto, a French scene painter, is about to put Alidoro to work.

The play, thus, is basically a conventional commedia dell'arte farce, with conventional commedia dell'arte characters who speak informally and often spicily in conventional commedia dell'arte dialects. Dottor Gratiano is certainly Bernini himself, a man of genius and fame, from whom jealous competitors would seek to pilfer what they imagine to be the secrets of his success. He is reluctant to do the comedy because of the taxing creative effort and time involved: "These are things that require the whole man, and much time," he says ("sien cos che rezercan tutt l'hom e molto tempo").[20] In a funny but touching moment, Gratiano even refers to the agony of

[19] Compare Bernini's description, reported by Baldinucci (145), of a painting of "una rancida e schifosa vecchia, che viva e vera ci apporterebbe nausea, e ci offenderebbe."

[20] Bernini used similar phraseology concerning the various steps in the creative process: "ciascheduna di quelle operazioni ricercava tutto l'uomo" (Baldinucci, 145).

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artistic creation, confessing that "the hardest thing is to find a subject" ("la mazzor difficultà lè 'l trovar un sozzet"). He also wants people kept away from the preparations, not in order to prevent his ideas from being stolen, but because advance knowledge will spoil their effects ("e si quand si sann non son più belle").

The plot again evidendy refers to the play-within-a-play motif, but here Bernini forsakes the normal convention by not showing the inner play at all, only the preparations for it. Thus Bernini's is not strictly a play that contains a play, but a play about the creation of a play. The inner play, therefore, instead of being merely an episode within the main plot, becomes itself part of the subject of the comedy, or rather the preparations for it do; the levels of illusion completely interpenetrate. When the characters being created for the inner play turn out to be, in part, duplicates of those in the main plot — the chief character of the main play actually holding a conversation with his fictitious self — still further links are added to the chain.[21]

If all this seems very literary, it should be emphasized that the ultimate point of the play was visual. Its chief purpose, surely, was to give scope to the beautiful notion of having Gratiano try out stage devices that do not perform to his satisfaction. Thus a scene that functions badly becomes the perfect illusion. Moreover, since the sets need only fail, the trick could be done with "tre baiocchi" and it also fulfilled Bernini's requirement not to try anything that could not be done convincingly. One is very tempted to see in this plot the "bella idea" for a comedy, mentioned by Baldinucci and Domenico Bernini, in which Bernini would have shown all the errors that occur in manipulating stage machinery, together with the means for their correction.[22]

The comedy permits two further observations that are of interest. It has been assumed that Bernini did not really write plays, but that his comedies were improvised in the pure commedia dell'arte tradition.[23] The topicality

[21] Compare Andreini's *Lo schiavetto* (eds. Milan, 1612, Venice, 1620), in which one of the characters proposes his own love intrigue, retaining the "real" names of the participants, as the theme for a comedy (ed. Venice, 1620, 197f.; cf. Lea, *Comedy,* I, 323).

[22] Baldinucci, 151; Bernini, 57.

[23] I. Balboni, "Le commedie di Gian Lorenzo Bernini e un diario francese del seicento," *Rivista di cultura,* III, 1922, 231ff.; but see the remarks of C. Molinari, "Note in margine all'attività teatrale di G. L. Bernini," *Critica d'arte,* IX, No. 52, 1962, 57ff.

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of the wit, the repetition of successful tricks in different contexts, and above all the impression one gets from the sources of an extraordinary liveliness in the recitation, all seem to point in this direction. The conclusion is, however, profoundly misconceived. We know Bernini worked his assistants mercilessly in preparing his productions, and that he would himself act out all the parts for them, so as to make sure they performed exactly as he wished. We know from the very gist of the play about Dottor Gratiano that Bernini was a perfectionist in the matter of scenic effects. Finally, the manuscript itself distinguishes Bernini's method from pure commedia dell'arte, where the plot was merely outlined in brief scenarios. Bernini wrote out the parts completely. It could hardly be maintained that improvisation was forbidden in Bernini's productions, but there can be no doubt that here, as in his other works, the effect of immediacy and freedom was planned and calculated down to the last detail. A second, equally significant point is that there is not the slightest hint from any source that Bernini ever intended to put his theatrical activity into permanent form by publishing the texts of his plays or prints of his sets. This fact alone would prevent our placing him in a class with real *hommes du métier* like Andreini or Torelli. The same fact also makes it clear that his achievements in the theater were among the most deeply rooted and spontaneous products of his creative spirit.

Considering the evidence as a whole, one is struck by the fact that, without exception, the startling illusionistic conceits described in the sources can be dated to the period of little more than a decade between the early 1630s, when Bernini became interested in the theater, and the late 1640s (though his theatrical activity continued long afterward). Moreover, the accounts suggest that the appeal of the earliest comedies was due primarily to their element of social satire, whereas in subsequent examples and especially in the extant comedy, the overlapping spheres of reality are the main fascination. There are important gaps in the evidence and, certainly, pungent dialogue did not cease to lend spice to Bernini's comedies. Yet the shift in emphasis that seems to emerge from the sources probably does reflect an actual development — parallel to the increased complexity and underlying unity of illusion we discerned in Bernini's other work during the same period, culminating in the Teresa chapel.

Perhaps Bernini's "secret" will now have become clear. 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, conscious of himself as an active, if dis-

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concerted, participant in the "happening." The crucial thing is that when he returned to his ordinary level of existence he became aware that *someone* had *created* this response.

The relevance of this awareness lies in a series of interlocking conceits which link the theater and art on a level that can only be described as metaphysical. It has repeatedly been observed that in the long and continuous history of metaphors relating the theater on the one hand to real life and on the other to abstract ideas, the early seventeenth century was of special importance. A growing sense of the reality of the stage seems to have converged with a growing sense of the illusoriness of reality, to produce a paradoxical equation of the two. The equation became a leading topos of the period — in its most encompassing form as the *theatrum mundi,* or theater of the world, whose "producer" is God; in its most concrete and circumscribed form, as the play-within-the-play.

Concerning the global theater, it can be observed that as the references of the metaphor became more varied and enlarged, the notion of the theater itself did likewise.[24] The word was applied in a vast range of contexts — a landscape, a palace courtyard, a garden fountain, a city, the sea, public opinion, the art of writing, the art of memory — whose connections with the theater as a building or as a performance might be extremely tenuous.[25] The applications are so disparate, in fact, that only one underlying idea is discernible, although it is never part of any explicit definition of the term: the idea of wholeness or totality. It is this quality that Bernini's Teresa chapel

[24] On the *theatrum mundi,* see the seminal chapter in E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages,* New York and Evanston, 1953 (first ed. 1948), 138–44, and the article by R. Bernheimer, "Theatrum Mundi," *The Art Bulletin,* XXXVIII, 1956, 225–47; further, F. J. Warnke, "The World as Theatre: Baroque Variations on a Traditional Topos," in B. Fabian and U. Suerbaum, eds., *Festschrift für Edgar Mertner,* Munich, 1969,185–200; F. A. Yates, *Theatre of the World,* London, 1969, esp. 164f. A vast collection of material will be found in M. Costanzo, *Il "gran theatro del mondo": Schede per lo studio dell'iconografia letteraria nell'età del manierismo,* Milan, 1964, 7–46. The idea has been brought to bear in the interpretation of Bernini's St. Peter's colonnade, by Kitao, *Circle,* 22–6.

[25] The variety of uses is best gauged from the citations in Costanzo, *Theatro;* for some applications in architecture, see K. Schwager, "Kardinal Pietro Aldobrandinis Villa di Belvedere in Frascati," *Römisches Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte,* IX–X, 1961–2, 379–82; Kitao, *Circle,* 19ff. On the art of memory and the theater, Bernheimer, "Theatrum," 225–31; F. A. Yates, *The Art of Memory,* Chicago, 1966, l29ff, 320ff.

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shares with the contemporary notion of the theater.[26] What distinguishes his work, on the stage as well as in chapel decoration, is his concern at once to elicit the sense of unity — "un bel composto" — and to engulf the spectator in it.

Concerning the play-within-the-play, various devices had been adopted to double the redundancy of the motive, and thus relate it to a larger context.[27] The performers of the inner play may have the role of actors in the main play; the characters of the main play may retain their identities in the inner play; the plot of the inner play may reflect that of the main play. So far as I can discover, however, Bernini's comedy about Dottor Gratiano is the first in which the chief character is an impresario and the very subject of the main plot is the staging of a play in which the same characters and plot are retained. The focal point of these mirror images is the impresario himself, whose significance is revealed in a crucial exchange between Dottor Gratiano and his alter ego:

> Gratiano: . . . chi el quel Gratian . . . ?
> Gratiano: Chi el? liè la favola de sta comedia, liè!
> Gratiano: Sigur; sel mondo non lè altr ch'una Comedia, Gratian lè la favola del mond.[28]
>
> (Gr: . . . who is that Gratiano . . . ? Gr: Who is he? He's the theme of this play, he is ! Gr : Indeed; if the world is nothing but a play, Gratiano is the theme of the world.)

[26] Corollaries in theater history for the kind of unity discussed here are the development of the box theater with proscenium arch (see p. 93 above) and the development of stage sets with symmetrical, continuous and—by the mid-seventeenth century—closed structures (for a convenient survey, see Mancini *et al., Illusione).*

[27] The literature on the play-within-a-play is vast, although there is still no comprehensive treatment of the theme; for recent studies and further bibliography, see besides Neri, "Commedia," R. J. Nelson, *Play within a Play: The Dramatist's Conception of His Art, Shakespeare to Anouilh,* New Haven, 1958; A. Brown, "The Play within a Play: An Elizabethan Dramatic Device," *Essays and Studies,* XIII, 1960, 36–48; D. Mehl, "Forms and Functions of the Play within a Play," *Renaissance Drama,* VIII, 1965, 41–61; R. W. Witt, *Mirror within a Mirror: Ben Jonson and the Play-within,* Salzburg, 1975 (Salzburg Studies in English Literature, No. 46); L. Maranini, ed., *La commedia in commedia: Testi del seicento francese,* Rome, 1974.

[28] D'Onofrio, *Fontana, 66.*

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The play-within-the-play is thus related to the theater of the world through the role of its creator.

In the case of the comedies it was all in fun; in the case of the Teresa chapel it was utterly serious. The conventional, expected illusion in a chapel was that the setting of the liturgy was symbolic; the unexpected illusion Bernini superimposed is that the setting is real. Thus, the Teresa chapel does suggest a prestidigitator; in fact, its point is that it suggests a prestidigitator — a sublime, metaphysical, theological prestidigitator who has consciously and as if by magic created and labeled this world, the inhabitants of which, namely we, act as though it were real. On one level the name of the prestidigitator is God; on another level, it is Bernini. This seems incredibly conceited. Bernini was an extremely conceited, but at the same time a most thoughtful and pious man. The metaphor linking God and the artist was also an ancient one, deeply ingrained in the Christian tradition. God the painter, God the sculptor, God the architect of the universe are ideas that occur frequently in medieval theological treatises to exemplify divine creativity. In the Renaissance the relationship became more than an analogy, expressing a special bond between the supreme creator and the artist. The reference underwent a fundamental shift: whereas before God's creativity was compared to the artist's, in the flood of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century literature on art the artist's creativity came to be likened unto God's.[29] In part, Bernini went beyond the Renaissance, yet he also recaptured an essential element of the medieval spirit. He was acutely conscious of his own inventiveness and he acknowledged unabashedly that his inspiration was supernatural. His relationship to divinity was not a motive for self-aggrandizement, however, but for self-abnegation. He attributed his ability to God, and, while he was very proud of his talent, he was very humble indeed about its source.[30]

[29] For a reference to this process in another context, cf. I. Lavin, "The Sculptor's 'Last Will and Testament,' " *Allen Memorial Art Museum Bulletin,* XXXV, 1977–8, 38f., with bibliography on the artist-God metaphor, to which should be added E. Zilsel, *Die Entstehung des Geniebegriffes: Ein Beitrag zur Ideengeschichte der Antike und Frühkapitalismus,* Tubingen, 1926, 276–80; and, recently, M. Kemp, "From 'Mimesis' to 'Fantasia': The Quattrocento Vocabulary of Creation, Inspiration and Genius in the Visual Arts," *Viator,* VIII, 1977, 384ff.

[30] For the foregoing, see the statements in Chantelou's diary assembled by Schudt, "Schaffensweise," 76f.

A closely analogous relationship to tradition underlies Bernini's attitude toward death and the works he made in preparation for it (Lavin, "Bernini's Death").

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As the Teresa chapel itself was Bernini's metaphor for heaven, so the fusion of the arts and the unity of the whole were his metaphor for divine creation.[31] In the end, perhaps the great achievement of the Teresa chapel is just this awareness of creation it provokes.

Abbreviations and Bibliography of Frequently Cited Works

AB: Archivio Barberini
BV: Biblioteca Vaticana, Rome

Baldinucci, F., *Vita del Cavaliere Gio. Lorenzo Bernino,* Florence, 1682, ed. S. S. Ludovici, Milan, 1948.
Battaglia, R., *La cattedra berniniana di San Pietro,* Rome, 1943.

[31] A comparable sense of the metaphysical and theological nature of verbal metaphor is fundamental to the great mid-seventeenth-century manual of the subject, Emanuele Tesauro's *Il Cannocchiale aristotelico: O sia idea delle argutezze heroiche vulgaramente chiamate imprese,* Venice, 1655; cf. the analyses by E. Donato, "Tesauro's Poetics : Through the Looking Glass," *Modern Language Notes,* LXXVIII, 1963, 15–30, esp. 23ff. on the importance of visual perception in Tesauro's thought, and J. A. Mazzeo, "Metaphysical Poetry and the Poetic of Correspondence," *Journal of the History of Ideas,* XIV, 1953, 221–34; further, the chapter "Tesauro o dell' 'ingannevole maraviglia'," in M. Costanzo, *Critica e poetica del primo seicento,* 3 vols., Rome, 1969–71, III, 91ff. Useful material on the seventeenth-century literary tradition of conceit will be found in the preface by A. Buck to a reprint of the 1670 Turin edition of Tesauro's work, Bad Homburg, Berlin, Zurich, 1968; aspects of Bernini's imagery have been discussed in this connection by Fagiolo dell'Arco, *Bernini,* 203ft, and Blunt, "Bernini."

Particularly interesting in our context is Tesauro's concept of the metaphor of Deception, or the Unexpected (referring to Aristotle, *Rhetoric,* III, 11); this he illustrates by the prestidigitator ("giocoliere"), at the discovery of whose illusion the viewer is both pleased and enlightened: "Egli è dunque vna segreta, & innata delitia dell'Intelletto humano, l'auuedersi di essere stato *scherzeuolmente ingannato:* peroche quel trapasso dall'inganno al disinganno, è vna maniera d'imparamento, per via non aspettata; & perciò piaceuolissima. Questo piacer tu sperimenti nel vederti sorpreso da' Giocolieri; che gabbano la tua credenza con la destrezza della mano: onde tu ridi del tuo inganno dapoiche l'hai conosciuto; hauendo tu insperatamente appresa quella sperienza che non sapeui" *(Cannocchiale,* ed. Turin, 1670, 460; cf. W. T. Elwert, "Zur Charakteristik der italienischen Barocklyrik," *Romanistisches Jahrbuch,* III, 1950, 460; E. Raimondi, *Letteratura barocca: Studi sul seicento italiano,* Florence, 1961, 2).

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