

THE BEL COMPOSTO IN GIAN LORENZO BERNINI'S CORNARO CHAPEL

by

Samantha Landre

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ABSTRACT  
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Samantha Landre

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Gian Lorenzo Bernini's sculptural altarpiece, *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, in the Cornaro Chapel of the Roman Church of Santa Maria della Vittoria (1652), is regarded as the pinnacle of Baroque "theatricality" in Bernini's use of the *bel composto*, or unification of the arts. In this thesis, I argue Bernini's representation of the mystical event referred to the Counter-Reformation's canonization process due to the artist's profound engagement with Teresa's controversial autobiography, *El Libro de la Vida* (1562-5). Bernini presented the patron of the chapel and other esteemed members of the Cornaro family as witnesses who authorized her mystical experience. Through the *bel composto* and visual constructs influenced by theatrical elements, the audience is persuaded to mirror the appropriate behavior of the Cornaro family, who act as both performance and audience members.

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*The Cornaro Chapel*  
Gian Lorenzo Bernini  
1652

## INTRODUCTION

In 1647, Federico Cornaro (1579-1653) gained rights to the chapel in the left transept of the Roman church of Santa Maria della Vittoria. Intending it to be a mortuary chapel for himself and in honor of his distinguished family, he commissioned Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680) to be the designer, architect, and sculptor of the chapel. Bernini's *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (fig. 1) is the focus of devotion in the chapel. The marble sculpture group is composed of a seraph who smiles sweetly as he raises one arm, ready to plunge a gold spear into the recumbent figure of Saint Teresa, who rests on a cloud. The two figures are enclosed in colored marble architecture and are gazed at by members of the Cornaro family, who are located on the side walls.

Bernini's *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* has been a topic of debate among connoisseurs and scholars since the moment of its opening in 1652. Initially, there were two opposing opinions on the sculpture group of *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*. The first is exemplified by the anonymous author of an anti-Bernini pamphlet (late 17<sup>th</sup> or early 18<sup>th</sup> c.)<sup>1</sup> who claimed Saint Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582) was eroticized in the sculptural depiction.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, Bernini's earliest biographers, Filippo Baldinucci (1624-1697) and the artist's own son, Domenico Bernini (1657-1723), emphasized his devout Christian faith and insisted that his depiction of Saint Teresa was a

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<sup>1</sup> Proposed dates for the anti-Bernini pamphlet range from 1670 to 1725. This confusion is in part due to there being two versions of the pamphlet.

<sup>2</sup> Anonymous, "Constantine Brought to the Pillory," from "Il Constantino messo alla Berlina ó Bernina su la Porta di San Pietro," *Bernini in Perspective*, trans. and edited by George C. Bauer, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall Inc., 1976): 46-53.

beautiful demonstration of his devotion.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, an unidentified poet (mid 17<sup>th</sup> c.) ardently praised the altarpiece in long verses devoted to the Cornaro Chapel.<sup>4</sup>

In recent decades, scholars have often regarded Bernini's work in the Cornaro Chapel (fig.2) in terms of those primary sources. Consistent with this focus on reception and audience, they have emphasized "theatrical"<sup>5</sup> qualities of the sculpture group, among them, the placement of the Cornaro family in balconies resembling theater boxes and the dramatic lighting effects, which serve as a kind of spotlight on the altarpiece. This theatrical quality is a direct result of Bernini's notion of the *bel composto*, or the unification of architecture, sculpture, and painting.<sup>6</sup> Given the renown of Bernini's sculpture group, it is perhaps surprising that major aspects of its original context remain largely to be studied. In this thesis, I explore *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* in terms of how the chapel's *bel composto* and theatrical elements inform the viewer's interaction with Saint Teresa.

The church of Santa Maria della Vittoria is a Discalced Carmelite church with an adjoining monastery for Carmelite friars. Construction of the church was finished in 1612 and was financed by Cardinal Scipione Borghese. While there are many dedications to other saints in the additional chapels within the church, Saint Teresa of Ávila is especially significant because she founded the Discalced Carmelite order. Her importance within the church during the

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<sup>3</sup>Filippo Baldinucci, "The Life of Bernini," trans. by Catherine Enggas, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1966). Domenico Bernini, *The Life of Gian Lorenzo Bernini*, trans. and edited by Franco Mormando, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), 2.

<sup>4</sup> Roma, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Chig. D III fol. 52r, elegiac couplets, trans. by Tomaso Montanari in "A Contemporary Reading of Bernini's 'Maraviglioso Composto': Unpublished Poems on the Four River Fountain and the Cornaro Chapel," *Poetry on Art: Renaissance to Romanticism*, ed. by Thomas Frangenberg, (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2003), 193-7.

<sup>5</sup> The Baroque era did see what might be called the 'theatre', but it wasn't until 1711 the term, 'theatricality', was documented in English and then later documented in other languages. See Caroline van Eck and Stijn Bussels, "The Visual Arts and the Theatre in Early Modern Europe," *Association of Art Historians*, vol. 33, no. 2 (April, 2010), 211.

<sup>6</sup> Irving Lavin, *Bernini and the Unity of Visual Arts*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1980), 114.

Baroque period may seem to suggest she had always been well received; however, it is not the case. Her rather controversial approach to devotion, which included the right to a personal relationship with God, would make Teresa the object of much criticism during and after her life.

This thesis will examine Bernini's *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, by first providing a concise overview of the extraordinary life and writings of the Spanish mystic, Teresa of Ávila. Therefore, a key primary source to explore the altarpiece will be Teresa's autobiography, *El Libro de la Vida*, written in 1565.<sup>7</sup> Borrowing directly from *la Vida*, Bernini gave visual shape to her most famous ecstatic moment, in which she was stabbed in the heart with a spear by an angel, the feeling of which she identified as a "sweetness of... excessive pain".<sup>8</sup> This passage is often cited by scholars as the sole element of Teresa's writings referenced in Bernini's sculpture group. However, I argue that from a closer reading of *la Vida*, it can be established that Bernini merged many entries from the autobiography to create the altarpiece.

In order to place *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* within early modern visual culture, I will use etchings and paintings of Saint Teresa produced by earlier artists. Comparing these depictions will allow me to see how Bernini engaged with previous imagery as well as Teresa's writings. When considering images of Saint Teresa, the evaluation of those that depict her in ecstasy will provide useful comparanda to Bernini's sculpture group. Taking note from one of the most significant scholars of Bernini, Irving Lavin, the images will include: Fray Juan de la Miseria's portrait of Saint Teresa (1576), Hieronymus Wierix's etching after Miseria's painting (before 1619), Juan de Jesús Maria's engraving, *Transverberation of St. Teresa* (1609), Gilles Rousselet's engraving after Charles Le Brun's painting, *Transverberation of St. Teresa* (1643),

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<sup>7</sup> Saint Teresa of Jesús, *The Life of Teresa of Jesus: the Autobiography of Teresa of Avila*, trans. and edited by E. Allison Peers from the critical edition of Silverio de Santa Teresa, (New York: Doubleday, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> Saint Teresa of Jesús, *The Autobiography of Saint Teresa of Avila: the Life of Saint Teresa of Jesus*, trans. by David Lewis, (Rockford III: Tan Books and Publishers, 1997): 266-267.

Jacob Honervogt's engraving, *Transverberation - Death of St. Teresa* (1647), and Adriaen Collaert and Cornelis Galle's engraving, *Levitations of St. Teresa* (1613). These engravings were widely distributed and are all likely to have been seen by both Bernini and his audience. An analysis of Bernini's *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* in concert with the painting and these various engravings can be employed to demonstrate how the sculptor further transformed traditional imagery of Saint Teresa.

In the second chapter, the sculpture group will be put in the context of Bernini's larger *bel composto*. In discussing the chapel, it is important to emphasize that Bernini created not only the image of Saint Teresa and the angel, but also the sculptures of the Cornaro family as well as the illusionistic space in which they occupy. I argue these additional aspects of the chapel are as significant as the altarpiece with regard to their impact on the viewer. By utilizing the *bel composto*, Bernini created for the spectator a dramatic reenactment of one of the culminating moments in Teresa's spiritual life. Furthermore, the *bel composto* allowed Bernini to control the audience's interaction with the saint and their surroundings.

My analysis of Bernini's *bel composto* expands upon discourse on the chapel's relationship to the theatre, which was first introduced by Rudolf Wittkower in 1966.<sup>9</sup> According to Wittkower, the theatrical characteristics are seen most importantly in the often debated placement of the Cornaro family with respect to Saint Teresa.<sup>10</sup> Wittkower persuasively argues that the Cornaro family is sitting in theatre seats while they watch the vulnerable Saint Teresa, who seems to be positioned on a stage. Wittkower and others have also attributed the theatrical

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<sup>9</sup> Rudolf Wittkower, "The Cornaro Chapel, other Chapels, Churches, and the Baroque Stage," *Gian Lorenzo Bernini: The Sculpture of the Roman Baroque*, (London: The Paidon Press, 1966): 24-28.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

qualities to Bernini's own background as a set designer and producer of theatrical plays.<sup>11</sup> What has not been explored, however, is how the theatre relates to Bernini's notion of the *bel composto*. The theatre, like Bernini's *bel composto*, provides an all-encompassing experience for the spectator. Through the employment of a historical analysis of the "theatre" and sacred theatre during the Counter-Reformation, I will argue that Bernini was influenced by stage design, lighting and special effects, as well as by the interaction between performers and spectators.

An additional aspect of the theatrical character of the *bel composto* in the Cornaro Chapel is the gaze. The distinct gaze of Federico Cornaro is the first to engage the spectator as he or she approaches the chapel. His family, like an audience watching the actors and actresses on a theatre stage, is seen examining and deliberating over the exposed Saint Teresa. In turn, the viewer's gaze is redirected to the altar. Because the family members are positioned on the side walls, they also become part of the broader stage and act as performers. Therefore, the Cornaro family is both a symbol of Catholic authority and model for appropriate behavior while in the presence of the Teresa's ecstasy.

Because Bernini depicted Teresa's ecstasy as one physically felt, the sculpture had the potential to be read "incorrectly". Therefore, the image needed to be mediated through the *bel composto*. By comparing Bernini's *Blessed Ludovica Albertoni* (1671-4) and *Habakkuk and the Angel* (1656-61), I will be able to present how the addition of a designed context and location impacted the viewer emotionally and visually. I will also evaluate the erotic connotations of the altarpiece alongside the comparanda.

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<sup>11</sup> Wittkower, "The Cornaro Chapel, other Chapels, Churches, and the Baroque Stage," 24-28 and Robert Fahrner and William Kleb, "The Theatrical Activity of Gianlorenzo Bernini," *Educational Theatre Journal*, vol. 25, no. 1 (March, 1973): 5-14.

The Cornaro Chapel expands upon the rather “theatrical” qualities of Christian church architecture and Catholic liturgical practices. Therefore, I propose that it is in the unification of theatrical elements, by way of the all-consuming *bel composto*, that the chapel’s sacredness is made more potent. This is mainly due to the engagement of all five senses in the chapel that completely engrosses the devotee in an intense spiritual experience.

# BERNINI'S THE ECSTASY OF SAINT TERESA

## Chapter 1

*The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* is the focus of devotion in Gian Lorenzo Bernini's Cornaro Chapel. At the center of the altarpiece, the holy figure of Saint Teresa de Jesús acts as the mediator between the devout visitor and God. Her powerful position as an intercessor in the chapel deflects her treatment during the sixteenth century, when she was a contentious force within the Catholic Reform. Her controversial practices of devotion were predicated on the practice of mental prayer, an intimate form of meditation that resulted in levitation during Communion and mystical visions.<sup>12</sup> This extreme form of pious practice was not encouraged by the Church for the laity or even clerics to pursue. Throughout Teresa's life and far after her death until her canonization in 1622, her methods and writings were persistently suppressed and restricted.

In Bernini's chapel, the remnants of the controversy that surrounded her religious practices and debate of her sainthood can still be found in the materiality and symbolism of the chapel. In order to expose these effects, I will present a brief history on the life and achievements of Teresa of Ávila. I will also explore the preceding imagery of Teresa that seems to have been influential in the design of Bernini's altarpiece. Then, I will analyze *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* alongside Teresa's *Vida*. These comparisons will permit a thorough understanding of Bernini's compliance and his deviation from traditional imagery. Like the saint herself, Bernini was the subject of controversy among his contemporaries.

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<sup>12</sup> John Wynne, "Prayer," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 12, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12345b.htm> (accessed July 11, 2015).

## Teresa de Ávila and the Carmelite Reform

Saint Teresa de Jesús was born as Teresa Sánchez de Cepeda y Ahumada at Ávila on March 28, 1515. She took the veil in 1537 at the Carmelite Convent of the Incarnation in Ávila and remained there for twenty-seven years. There, she was plagued by physical ailments and spiritual conflict. She struggled with the social codes and notions of self-importance aligned with the beliefs and practices of the Incarnation.<sup>13</sup> It was in the midst of her distress and quest for spiritual answers that Teresa began to witness her first divine revelations and, in 1558, experience her first rapture and vision of Christ.<sup>14</sup> These divine revelations encouraged Teresa to find a solution to the problems internal to the Carmelites, as well as deal with Lutheranism and other perceived threats to Catholicism as a whole.<sup>15</sup> She would spearhead the Carmelite reformation.

Teresa's reformation of the Carmelite Order, and the attendant trials and tribulations, were documented in the multiple books written by the saint herself. Her *Libro de la Vida* (c. 1562-5)<sup>16</sup> was the earliest, presenting the first fifty years of her life.<sup>17</sup> Shortly thereafter, she wrote *Spiritual Relations* (c. 1562-5) as a sequel to her *Vida*, which discussed the subsequent sixteen years of her life in terms of her spiritual practices.<sup>18</sup> *The Book of Foundations* (c. 1573),

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<sup>13</sup> Jodi Bilinkoff, "Teresa of Jesus and Carmelite Reform," *Religious Orders of the Catholic Reformation: In Honor of John C. Olin on His Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, ed. by Richard L. DeMolen, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1994), 168.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 169.

<sup>16</sup> There is a slight disagreement on the dates of Teresa's writings. I have used E. Allison Peers, *Complete Works of St. Teresa*, vol. 1 and 2, trans. and edited by E. Allison Peers, (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975).

<sup>17</sup> Teresa of Ávila, *Handbook to the Life and Times of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross*, trans. and edited by E. Allison Peers, (London: Burns Oats, 1954).

<sup>18</sup> Teresa of Ávila, "Spiritual Relations," *Complete Works of St. Teresa*, vol. 1, trans. and edited by E. Allison Peers, (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975).

described the foundation of her convents.<sup>19</sup> *The Way of Perfection* (c. 1565) and *Interior Castle* (c. 1577), in contrast, focused on prayer.<sup>20</sup>

Because of her controversial religious practices, Teresa took caution when creating her books and often asked religious advisors for their opinions and revisions. All of her books underwent various phases of editing and ecclesiastical censorship in order for them to be read “correctly” by the public. Yet, despite all of Teresa’s preparation and the books’ mandatory censorship, there were some religious figures who did not want her writings exposed to the public. After vigorous debate among theologians, several of whom found Teresa’s writings to be precarious and heretical,<sup>21</sup> the books were only allowed to be published by church authorities thirteen years after her death. For those entirely opposed, they would still not be satisfied and sought to diminish Teresa’s legacy by urging the burning of her writings.<sup>22</sup>

Despite many of the setbacks brought about by opposition, Teresa would effectively reform the Carmelite order to establish the Discalced, or barefoot, Carmelite Order with the support of women at the Incarnation and sympathetic clergymen and laity.<sup>23</sup> In her venture, she would remain true to the traditional reformer’s cause; however, she would also distinguish herself from all other founders. In the spirit of other Catholic reformers, Teresa sought to restore the Carmelites’ original intentions and mandates. Due to centuries of misconduct and importance placed on worldly honor and possessions, the order’s purpose became blurred.<sup>24</sup> With her reform, Teresa sought to counteract what she perceived as the laxity of the rules.

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<sup>19</sup>Teresa of Ávila, “Book of Foundations,” *Complete Works of St. Teresa*, vol. 3, trans. and edited by E. Allison Peers, (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975).

<sup>20</sup>Teresa of Ávila, “The Way of Perfection,” and “Interior Castle,” *Complete Works of St. Teresa*, vol. 2, trans. and edited by E. Allison Peers, (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975).

<sup>21</sup> Erin Kathleen Rowe, *Saint and Nation: Santiago, Teresa of Avila, and Plural Identities in Early Modern Spain*, (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), 51.

<sup>22</sup> Alison Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 3.

<sup>23</sup> Bilinkoff, “Teresa of Jesus and Carmelite Reform,” 169.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 170.

Influenced by the Reform happening among the Franciscans, Teresa would regard the vow of poverty as imperative to the Carmelites' restoration.<sup>25</sup> As a result, she would establish all seventeen of the Discalced Carmelite foundations on the concept of humility based in poverty, in spite of the objections of many order members.<sup>26</sup> Those who lived less austere felt their comfortable way of life was threatened, while others feared that Teresa's foundations would impose financial burdens upon donors who were already generously giving more than they could manage.<sup>27</sup>

Nonetheless, Teresa would found her first foundation, Saint Joseph's, in her strictest endeavor toward absolute poverty. She required that her nuns live completely on the fruits of their own labor and on donations, which were dependent on the good will of others.<sup>28</sup> While poverty equalized her nuns, Teresa would also abolish practices which identified financial and social rank.<sup>29</sup> In addition, Teresa chose not to follow the Old Christian regulation of *limpieza de sangre*, or purity of blood, which rejected prospective members who had the "taint" of Jewish or Moorish blood. This was especially significant to Teresa because this statute would not have allowed herself to join due to her Jewish ancestry.<sup>30</sup>

In the reformation of the Carmelite order, Teresa would uphold prayer as the most important source of religious restoration within her new foundations.<sup>31</sup> For Teresa, the practice

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<sup>25</sup> Teresa believed the Carmelites, including many from the Incarnation, had become lax and no longer obeyed the strict rules of Pope Eugenius IV's Bull of Mitigation of 1432 that called for austere poverty, chastity, and obedience. See Teresa of Ávila, *The Life of Teresa of Jesus: The Autobiography of Teresa of Ávila*, trans. and edited by E. Allison Peers, (New York: Image Books Doubleday, 1991) and Bilinkoff, "Teresa of Jesus and Carmelite Reform," 165, 170.

<sup>26</sup> E. Allison Peers, *Saint Teresa of Jesus and Other Essays and Addresses*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1953), 18.

<sup>27</sup> As shown in a census taken in 1570, one-third of the entire population of Spain was clerical. This many have led to a pattern of small cathedral cities attempting to limit the number of new foundations. See E. Allison Peers, *Saint Teresa of Jesus and Other Essays and Addresses*, 18.

<sup>28</sup> Bilinkoff, "Teresa of Jesus and Carmelite Reform," 170.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 171.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 169.

of mental prayer would aid in a spiritual awakening of the Church and allow her nuns personal growth.<sup>32</sup> The nuns would have individual experiences with God and seek spiritual council from a confessor of their own choosing. In Teresa's opinion, it was imperative for them to have "holy freedom" when speaking their minds in confession, even if that meant confessing to someone outside of the order.<sup>33</sup> The ability to choose confessors would distinguish the Discalced Carmelite Order from all other orders in sixteenth-century Spain.<sup>34</sup>

Despite Teresa's achievements in the reformation of the Carmelite Order, she and her reform would endure many setbacks resulting in permanent losses. Personally, Teresa would suffer an examination by the Inquisition during the last years of her life because officials grew suspicious of her methods of interior Christianity, which included the practice of mental prayer and reading the Scripture.<sup>35</sup> To many clergy in mid-sixteenth century Spain, Teresa's practice of mental prayer was seen as highly problematic because the mysticism involved was intensely personal and did not require the mediation of priests.<sup>36</sup> The apprehensive clergy believed the results of mental prayer included lies, pacts made with the devil, and sexual authorization.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, some argued that those who practiced mental prayer were related to the controversial Illuminists, a sect of *conversos*.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, numerous male clergy, including

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<sup>32</sup> Alison Weber, "Spiritual Administration: Gender Discernment in the Carmelite Reform," *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 31, no. 1, Special Edition: Gender in Early Modern Europe (Spring 2000), 123.

<sup>33</sup> Bilinkoff, "Teresa of Jesus and Carmelite Reform," 173.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>35</sup> Saint John of the Cross, the other founder of the Discalced Carmelite Reformation, was kidnapped and imprisoned by the Inquisition. Saint Teresa's pupil, María de San José, was also imprisoned over her refusal to surrender her practice of Teresian principles. See Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*, 34 and Bilinkoff, "Teresa of Jesus and Carmelite Reform," 176.

<sup>36</sup> Weber, "Spiritual Administration: Gender Discernment in the Carmelite Reform," 124.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Illuminists, or *conversos*, believed an individual could comprehend Scripture when encouraged or "illuminated" by the Holy Spirit. The Illuminists also contended that women could hold leadership roles. See Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*, 19-22.

Inquisitor General Fernando de Valdés, believed that it was a social and religious threat.<sup>39</sup> Even several order members in support of mental prayer considered it only suitable for male clergymen.<sup>40</sup> These fears are largely due to early Church fathers who deemed women more susceptible to deception because of their supposed intellectual inferiority and sensuality.<sup>41</sup>

As part of Teresa's setbacks, her foundations and mandates of the reformation would also suffer. Due to an economic downfall, Teresa was forced to retract some of her mandates for the sake of her nuns' wellbeing. Many rural houses were required to give up their religious poverty in order to survive and she encouraged, but never required, prospective nuns to come into convents with dowries.<sup>42</sup> After her death in 1581, her efforts of equalizing nuns within the order disappeared when male Discalced Carmelite officials began to require a minimum dowry payment, rejecting many who were not from wealthy families.<sup>43</sup> By 1597, the officials would also reinstate the policy of *limpieza de sangre*.<sup>44</sup>

Despite all efforts to erase Teresa's reformation, her legacy would rise again. Tales of her personal charisma and the miracles brought about by her bodily relics spread throughout Spain and indicated an increase in devotion to her cult. Discalced houses opened in locations from Spain to Italy to the Americas. In fact, the first Discalced Carmelite convent in Italy, Santa Ana, was found in Genoa in 1584.<sup>45</sup> By the end of the sixteenth century, Rome established its first Discalced Carmelite convent, Santa Maria della Scala.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Inquisitor General Fernando de Valdé prohibited many books that mentioned mental prayer. See Weber, "Spiritual Administration: Gender Discernment in the Carmelite Reform," 124.

<sup>40</sup> Weber, "Spiritual Administration: Gender Discernment in the Carmelite Reform," 124.

<sup>41</sup> Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*, 19-20.

<sup>42</sup> Bilinkoff, "Teresa of Jesus and Carmelite Reform," 176, 7.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 177.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>45</sup> Rowe, *Saint and Nation: Santiago, Teresa of Avila, and Plural Identities in Early Modern Spain*, 201.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*.

While news of Teresa's saintliness spread, so did the efforts to make her into a saint. In the fight for Teresa's canonization, support came from King Philip II, and his successors, who continuously led a letter-writing campaign for papal support starting in 1597.<sup>47</sup> In 1614, thirty-three years after her death, Teresa was beatified by Paul V. According to early modern chroniclers, during the night of the announcement the skies of Madrid lit up with fireworks.<sup>48</sup> The Spanish king himself attended a mass in her honor and the celebrations lasted for days throughout the country. Many friars recorded sermons spoken during the festivals,<sup>49</sup> assembled them in large volumes, and sent them to Rome, dedicated to the pope.<sup>50</sup> In so doing, the friars sought to further disseminate Teresa's cult and pave the road to her canonization.<sup>51</sup>

Teresa's beatification and royal support sparked a demand for an Italian translation of Teresa's *Vida* by Spanish Discalced Carmelite, Alfonso Manzanedo de Quiñones.<sup>52</sup> The distribution of her writings within Rome encouraged the Italian Discalced Carmelites -- who held powerful positions in Rome due to their close relationships with many individuals in the papal curia,<sup>53</sup> -- to aid in the campaign for Teresa's canonization. The Discalced Carmelites emerged victorious when Teresa was canonized in 1622 by Gregory XV, along with SS. Isidro, Ignatius of Loyola, and Francis Xavier.

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<sup>47</sup> Rowe, *Saint and Nation: Santiago, Teresa of Avila, and Plural Identities in Early Modern Spain*, 54, 56.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>49</sup> The definition of beatification is "an act of the Pope, by which he declares that a deceased member of the Church is in the enjoyment of heavenly bliss, and grants to certain persons the privilege of paying a particular form of worship or reverence to him". See OED Online, "Beatification, n," Oxford University Press, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/16624> (accessed November 23, 2014).

<sup>50</sup> Rowe, *Saint and Nation: Santiago, Teresa of Avila, and Plural Identities in Early Modern Spain*, 55.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

## Teresa's Imagery as Form of Propaganda

The campaign for Teresa's beatification, canonization, and eventual patronage of Spain employed visual propaganda in the effort to combat the supposed inferiority of her gender. During the Counter-Reformation there was a move towards reestablishing men as religious authority due to a threat of heightened female spirituality.<sup>54</sup> The opposition's efforts are reflected in the decline of female saints from 27.7 percent in the fifteenth century to 18.1 percent in the sixteenth century.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, those who supported Teresa's spiritual leadership and practice of mental prayer had to communicate their ideas through a misogynist framework, as Alison Weber has argued.<sup>56</sup> Teresa needed to possess characteristics that protected her from the supposed susceptibility towards the deception of the female soul. Consequently, there was a need for "gender reassignment" within images and texts in order for Teresa to be virtuous.<sup>57</sup> For example, during a celebratory sermon when Teresa was momentarily proclaimed patron saint of Spain, a Carmelite friar announced:

This woman ceased to be a woman, restoring herself to the virile state to her greater glory than if she had been a man from the beginning, for she rectified nature's error with her virtue, transforming herself through virtue into the bone from which she sprang.<sup>58</sup>

This would not be the only time Teresa was spoken of in terms of being masculine or possessing the virtues of a "great man". In some cases, her feminine physiology was rejected in order to celebrate her worth. A lost text from 1614, presented by Weber, contained a hieroglyph of Teresa "with walls in the middle of her body and towers growing out of her breasts"; floating

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<sup>54</sup> Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*, 25.

<sup>55</sup> Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 220-221, 225.

<sup>56</sup> Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*, 17.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

<sup>58</sup> Fray Francisco de Jesús, *Relación sencilla y fiel de las Fiestas que el rey D.Felipe III nuestro Señor hizo...*, (Facticio volumen: Vatican Library, 1627), cited in Alison Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*, 17-18.

above were Saints Elijah and Elisha, who were believed to have founded the Carmelite order.<sup>59</sup> The accompanying text translated from Latin stated, “I am a wall and my breasts are like towers” as the saints proclaim, “Our little sister does not have breasts”.<sup>60</sup>

With the same intention to present Teresa as containing masculine and thereby, “righteous”, characteristics, Francisco de Ribera, a Jesuit priest and author of Teresa’s first spiritual biography, defended her visions. He said: “Those women who conquer their passions through strength and subject themselves to God, are to be called men, and men who are conquered by passions are women. This is not a result of bodily differences, but of the strength of the soul...So here we are talking about the visions of a woman more manly than many great men”.<sup>61</sup> To elaborate, he distinguished between the body and the soul, arguing that the soul could be gendered.<sup>62</sup>

During 1617 to 1630, the fight between the people of Spain and papal curia for Teresa’s co-patronage of Spain ensued. Teresa’s supporters met the opposition’s negative reception of her gender with two solutions, claimed by separate groups. One group believed they should emphasize her feminine traits to present Teresa as a complementary co-patron with the male, Santiago.<sup>63</sup> The other group wanted to transform Teresa’s renowned characteristics of humility, femininity, and obedience to military strength, enabling her to protect the country.<sup>64</sup> Her defenders would attribute victories in battle to her and chose to depict her in battle armor.<sup>65</sup> With

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<sup>59</sup> Fray Francisco de Jesús, *Relación sencilla y fiel de las Fiestas que el rey D.Felipe III nuestro Señor hizo...*, 18.

<sup>60</sup> Diego de San José, *Compendio de las solenes fiestas que en toda España se hicieron en la Beatificación de N. B. M. Teresa de Jesús Fundadora de la Reformación de Descalzos y Descalzos de N. S. de Carmen*, (Madrid: Viuda de Alonso Martín, 1615), as cited in Alison Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*, 18.

<sup>61</sup> Francisco de Ribera, *Vida de Santa Teresa de Jesús*, (1590), cited and trans. in Rowe, *Saint and Nation: Santiago, Teresa of Avila, and Plural Identities in Early Modern Spain*, 51.

<sup>62</sup> Rowe, *Saint and Nation: Santiago, Teresa of Avila, and Plural Identities in Early Modern Spain*, 51.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 110, 122.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 110.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 116. See also Kate Marie Negri, *The Pen and the Sword: Changes in Teresian Imagery in the Golden Age of Spain*, Thesis (M.A. in Art History)--University of Wisconsin--Milwaukee, 2009.

this endeavor, they would follow the tradition set by Teresa's supporters during the campaign for her canonization. Furthermore, Teresa was associated with "manly" women such as Deborah and Judith.<sup>66</sup>

Despite her followers' efforts, Teresa was not made co-patron of Spain, and the imagery of her as co-patron was destroyed upon papal decree.<sup>67</sup> The desire for the destruction of these images can only attest to their symbolic power and lasting effect. In fact, Teresian imagery would continue to evolve from this point.

### **Teresian Iconography**

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it was fairly common for a nun, even one as humble as Teresa, to pose for a portrait. In 1576, Discalced Carmelite, Fray Juan de la Misericordia would famously execute the first portrait of Teresa (fig. 3), which was commissioned by her spiritual advisor, Fray Jerónimo Gracián de la Madre de Dios. The portrait is traditional, depicting the founder in the center of a tight composition, at bust length, and in three-quarter profile. Marking her station, she modestly wears the habit from her order. Her hands are clasped in prayer and as her eyes gaze upward, toward the dove, a symbol of the Holy Spirit. The Latin words, "I will sing of the mercy of God eternally" seem to unravel from her mind.<sup>68</sup>

While this portrait would become the foundation of succeeding Teresian iconography, there were some who were not pleased with the result. For Father Ribera, Teresa was painted as

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<sup>66</sup> Rowe, *Saint and Nation: Santiago, Teresa of Avila, and Plural Identities in Early Modern Spain*, 118.

<sup>67</sup> For further information on the debate over Saint Teresa's co-patronage of Spain. See Rowe, *Saint and Nation: Santiago, Teresa of Avila, and Plural Identities in Early Modern Spain*. Also, Erin Kathleen Rowe, "The Spanish Minerva: Imagining Teresa of Avila as Patron Saint in Seventeenth-Century Spain", *The Catholic Historical Review*, vol. 92, no. 4 (October 2006), 575.

<sup>68</sup> Elisabetta Cova, translation given via email, January 22, 2015.

an “ugly” woman in spite of her actual “good appearance”.<sup>69</sup> Teresa’s depiction in the portrait, whether close to her genuine appearance or not, was meant to be humble. In her solemn, timeworn countenance, her devotion to God was showcased. Fray Juan seemed to intend for viewers of the portrait to recall the great many things they had heard about her reformation, not her “good appearance”.

Fray Juan de la Misericordia’s portrait would become the base from which the majority of subsequent imagery would begin. An engraving thought to be created by Hieronymus Wierix before 1619 (fig. 4),<sup>70</sup> was clearly influenced by the painting in both its composition and Teresa’s humble appearance. Embellishing Fray Juan’s composition, however, Wierix further identified her as a prolific writer by inserting a desk and aligned her with the Virgin Mary by including a spindle and distaff which was often seen in images of the Annunciation.<sup>71</sup> Wierix’s engraving was the first to provide Saint Teresa with iconographical symbols which the mass population would recognize. While Fray Juan’s portrait would be the beginning of Teresian iconography, it is the engraving, not the painted portrait that would be seen by many and would therefore contribute to how Saint Teresa’s legacy would be disseminated.

At the same time that Teresa’s engraved portrait began circulating, artists also began producing images of the most famous incident of Saint Teresa’s life, her “transverberation”.<sup>72</sup>

Documented in *la Vida*, the spiritual moment was described as follows:

It pleased the Lord that I should sometimes see the following vision. I would see beside me, on my left hand, an angel in bodily form – a type of vision which I am not in the habit of seeing, except very rarely. Though I often see representations

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<sup>69</sup> Margareta Salinger, “Representations of Saint Teresa,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, New Series, vol. 8, no. 3 (November 1949), 100.

<sup>70</sup> Salinger suggested the date of the engraving by Wierix to be 1553 to 1619, however, as it is after the portrait by Fray Juan de Misericordia, it cannot be before 1576. See “Representations of Saint Teresa”, 100.

<sup>71</sup> Negri, *The Pen and the Sword: Changes in Teresian Imagery in the Golden Age of Spain*, 23.

<sup>72</sup> There are scholars who disagree that what is being shown here is the ecstasy. Susanne Warma believes it is primarily a vision. See Susanne Warma, “Ecstasy and Vision: Two Concepts Connected with Bernini’s Teresa,” *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 66, No. 3 (Sep., 1984): 508-511.

of angels, my visions of them are of the type which I first mentioned. It pleased the Lord that I should see this angel in the following way. He was not tall, but short, and very beautiful, his face so aflame that he appeared to be one of the highest types of angel who seem to be all afire. They must be those who are called cherubim: they do not tell me their names but I am well aware that there is a great difference between certain angels and others, and between these and others still, of a kind that I could not possibly explain. In his hands I saw a long golden spear and at the end of the iron tip I seemed to see a point of fire. With this he seemed to pierce my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails. When he drew it out, I thought he was drawing them out with it and he left me completely afire with a great love for God. The pain was so sharp that it made me utter several moans; and so excessive was the sweetness caused me by this intense pain that one can never wish to lose it, nor will one's soul be content with anything less than God. It is not bodily pain, but spiritual, though the body has a share in it – indeed, a great share. So sweet are the colloquies of love which pass between the soul and God that if anyone thinks I am lying I beseech God, in His goodness, to give him the same experience.<sup>73</sup>

Teresa's transverberation, or mystical union

with God, is one of the most popular themes in Teresian imagery. The majority of these images have been exhaustively examined by Lavin as comparanda to Bernini's work. Therefore, I will only present a few examples to demonstrate how previous artists depicted the physical symptoms of the ecstasy. The first of these images is Juan de Jesús Maria's engraving, *Transverberation of St. Teresa* (1609) (fig. 5). This image depicts the interaction between Teresa and the angel which has been copied several times by later artists.<sup>74</sup> Informed by Teresa's writings, de Jesús Maria's composition includes an angel who supports Teresa as he lifts up his arrow prepared to plunge it straight into her heart. Teresa places one hand to her chest as the other remains opened, away from her body. Her eyes roll backward as her face tilts upwards.

Also relevant to Bernini's sculpture is Gilles Rousselet's engraving after Charles Le Brun's painting, *Transverberation of St. Teresa*, from 1643 (fig. 6). One angel supports Teresa as

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<sup>73</sup> Teresa of Ávila, *The Life of Teresa of Jesus: The Autobiography of Teresa of Ávila*, 274-275.

<sup>74</sup> This engraving is also very close to Karel de Mallery's *Transverberation of St. Teresa* of the Bibliothèque Royale of Brussels.

a second attempts to stab her heart with the spear. Here, Teresa leans back slightly and opens her arms in preparation. Another print, created before 1647 by an unknown artist (fig. 7), depicts the ecstasy more physically than de Jesús Maria's. Similar to the Rousselet's, an angel supports Teresa from behind, but he also lifts up her garment so that the arrow of divine love can pierce her heart without any material getting in the way. The result is a more intimate moment between the angels and Teresa.

The last precursor to Bernini's sculpture group is Jacob Honervogt's print, *Transverberation - Death of St. Teresa* (1647) (fig. 8). As indicated by the title, the engraving depicts the ecstasy Teresa experienced at the moment of her death. Here, Teresa's relaxed pose is taken another step further and she is shown almost fully collapsed.

Bernini's altarpiece would both deviate from and emphasize certain characteristics of these images. From de Jesús Maria's engraving, Bernini seems to have adapted the representation of Teresa's body formed in the act of receiving with her head rolling back slightly. Similarly, he seems to have translated into marble the tenderness of the angel as he lifts up her garment in the prints by the unknown artist, as well as the heavy figure of Honervogt's Teresa. When one acknowledges these previous images, it is clear that Bernini did not completely invent the imagery seen in the chapel; rather, he unified certain aspects from previous imagery to create a new composition.

### ***The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa***

As one enters the Roman church of Santa Maria della Vittoria, his or her senses become overwhelmed. The light seeps through windows to illuminate the multifaceted surfaces of the interior, reflecting on the gilded details, and highlighting the frescos and artworks that adorn the

walls and ceiling. All of the decorative elements glimmer extravagantly and luxuriously as the very definition of the Roman Baroque. The lustrous high altar lures the viewer's eye and holds his or her attention, but only for a moment. Just as one's eye begins wandering, it meets the unwavering gaze of Cardinal Federico Cornaro, who sits in the far side of the left transept of the church. Along with him, a family carved from marble awaits. Their figures are formed around the central point of the chapel, the altarpiece consisting of Saint Teresa and the seraph. The marble sculpture is composed of a seraph gazing lovingly down at the vulnerable figure of Teresa as she relaxes on a cloud. The light from a hidden window above illuminates the white marble as gold rays project outward, as if the divine presence itself shines down upon Teresa during the miraculous event.

We have already seen how Teresa described her interior experience of transverberation. Yet it is in other passages from her *Vida* that Teresa offers her readers insight into the exterior or physical appearance of one in the grips of ecstasy. More than previous artists, Bernini seems to have engaged with those passages in creating *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*. Teresa describes the bodily experience of divine rapture as:

... while the rapture lasts, the body often remains as if dead and unable of itself to do anything: it continues all the time it was when the rapture came upon it – in a sitting position, for example, or with the hand open or shut. The subject rarely loses consciousness: I have sometimes lost it altogether, but only seldom and for but a short time. As a rule the consciousness is disturbed; and, though incapable of action with respect to outward things, the subject can still hear and understand, but only dimly, as though from a long way off. I do not say that he can hear and understand when the rapture is at its highest point – by “highest point” I mean when the faculties are lost through being closely united with God. At that point, in my opinion, he will neither see, nor hear, nor perceive.<sup>75</sup>

At other times the impulses are so strong ... The entire body contracts and neither arm nor foot can be moved. If the subject is on his feet, he remains as though

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<sup>75</sup> Teresa of Ávila, *The Life of Teresa of Jesus: The Autobiography of Teresa of Ávila*, 197.

transported and cannot even breathe: all he does is to moan – not aloud, for that is impossible, but inwardly, out of pain.<sup>76</sup>

In his sculpture, Bernini gave visual form to Teresa's account of spiritual rapture. He included the lifeless form of her body, emphasizing her passivity. In his sculpture, Teresa is seemingly unresponsive while in the "highest point" of ecstasy (also known as rapture),<sup>77</sup> as shown with eyes half-open and no acknowledgment of the viewer. Her mouth is slightly open as if barely breathing or in the midst of an inward moan.

Bernini seemingly consulted a third passage:

In these raptures the soul seems no longer to animate the body, and thus the natural heat of the body is felt to be very sensibly diminished: it gradually becomes colder, though conscious of the greatest sweetness and delight. No means of resistance is possible... often it comes like a strong, swift impulse, before your thought can forewarn you of it or you can do anything to help yourself; you see and feel this cloud, or this powerful eagle, rising and bearing you up with it on its wings.<sup>78</sup>

From this passage of *la Vida*, one description is almost certain to have been employed by Bernini in his depiction of the ecstasy. Teresa writes that she can "see and feel this cloud, or this powerful eagle" as it lifted her.<sup>79</sup> I suggest that this line influenced Bernini's addition of the cloud placed so dominantly beneath her.

### **A Spanish Mystic in a Roman Chapel**

The ecstasies of Saint Teresa have been widely debated since the moment of their recordings in her *Vida*. As previously discussed, some sixteenth century theologians and male

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<sup>76</sup> Teresa of Ávila, *The Life of Teresa of Jesus: The Autobiography of Teresa of Ávila*, 274.

<sup>77</sup> For Teresa, "rapture" and "ecstasy" have the same definition. In *Vida*, Teresa states: "I should like, with help of God, to be able to describe the difference between union and rapture, or elevation, or what they call flight of the spirit, or transport – it is all one. I mean that these different names all refer to the same thing, which is also called ecstasy." See Teresa of Ávila, *The Life of Teresa of Jesus: The Autobiography of Teresa of Ávila*, 189.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

members of the Carmelite Order opposed Teresa's use of mental prayer (which resulted in her transverberation) and believed her claim of a mystical union with God was a lie. It was only after she was made a saint in 1622 that the widely known miracle was accepted by most. The event was further recognized when it was quoted in the 1622 Bull of Canonization.<sup>80</sup> This recent rise in her status would have made her an acceptable choice for the subject of the altarpiece within the Cornaro Chapel. Furthermore, the monastery attached to Santa Maria della Vittoria is of the Discalced Carmelite Reform. As Michael Call has suggested, Teresa's figure within the church would remind members of her great life, so that they could strive to be more pious and devout.<sup>81</sup>

Furthermore, there is a direct relationship between Saint Teresa's Reform and Federico Cornaro. The Discalced Carmelite Reformers were introduced in Venice while Cornaro was patriarch in 1633 and he had since maintained a close relationship with the Order.<sup>82</sup> In addition, Call brought to light Cornaro's involvement with the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith, which sought to re-advance Catholicism after the Protestant Reformation.<sup>83</sup> As part of his work for the Congregation, Cornaro was interested in bringing attention to Teresa's miraculous life and saintly miracles in order to demonstrate God's approval of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>84</sup> In fact, one could say Saint Teresa's image was used by Cornaro and the Church as a form of propaganda in the battle against Protestant Reformers.

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<sup>80</sup> Michael J. Call, "Boxing Teresa: The Counter-Reformation and Bernini's Cornaro Chapel," *Woman's Art Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Spring – Summer, 1997), 37.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 34-35.

<sup>82</sup> Lavin, *Bernini and the Unity of Visual Arts*, 78.

<sup>83</sup> Call, "Boxing Teresa: The Counter-Reformation and Bernini's Cornaro Chapel," 35.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*.

### Reception of *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*: Bernini's Biographers

Cornaro's and Bernini's choice to depict Saint Teresa in ecstasy, instead of in prayer as in previous imagery, was fraught with challenges. These challenges, if not addressed properly, could result in the altarpiece being read "incorrectly" and therefore be in defiance of fundamental principles of the Counter-Reformation.<sup>85</sup> Teresa would need to be close to the spectator so that he or she might aspire to be more pious, but placed at a distance so that he or she would not experience her ecstasy first hand. To do so, Teresa's image would have to be mediated through the Cornaro family and separated by visual framework.

Most of Bernini's contemporaries argued that he handled the subject matter appropriately. They contended that the altarpiece was exceptionally beautiful and provoked immense religious devotion. This position is best demonstrated by Bernini's biographers, Domenico Bernini (1657-1723; the artist's son) and Filippo Baldinucci (1624-1697)<sup>86</sup>, as well as by an anonymous poet. On the other hand, there were those who found the figure of Teresa sexually indecent. This opposition's feelings are confirmed by an anonymous critic. Both of these conflicting receptions will now be addressed.

Domenico Bernini praises *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, claiming "there never came forth from his hands a marble statue executed with greater poignancy and of greater design than this".<sup>87</sup> Describing the sculpture, he states: "Bernini depicted the saint in the throes of a most sweet ecstasy: beside herself in rapture and abandoned unto herself, she lies in a swoon. Close to

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<sup>85</sup> Call, "Boxing Teresa: The Counter-Reformation and Bernini's Cornaro Chapel," 34.

<sup>86</sup> Filippo Baldinucci's biography of Gian Lorenzo Bernini was the first to be published in 1682. Due to similarities and a question of origin, there is reason to believe Baldinucci's biography was derived from a draft written by Bernini's son, Domenico. This is a point first brought about by Cesare D'Onofrio in a seminal article, *Priorità della biografia di Domenico Bernini su quella del Baldinucci*, and later established by Franco Mormando. See Franco Mormando, *The Life of Gian Lorenzo Bernini*, trans. and edited by Franco Mormando, (University Park, Pennsylvania, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011).

<sup>87</sup> Domenico Bernini, *The Life of Gian Lorenzo Bernini*, trans. and edited by Franco Mormando, (University Park, Pennsylvania, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), 158.

her is an angel, who, hovering in the air with its wings, sweetly wounds her heart with the golden arrow of divine love”.<sup>88</sup> This excerpt is the starting point for most scholars who work on the subject, for it tells us what the exact moment depicted was: Teresa in ecstasy and rapture. It also characterized the sculpture as corporeal and even sensuous.

When considering how Bernini and the people of Rome felt about the sculpture, Domenico states that his father “used to say that ‘this was the least bad work that he had ever done.’”<sup>89</sup> Domenico clarifies Bernini’s language, “But this modest manner of speaking of his was easily contradicted by the universal and public consensus of Rome, which claimed that ‘with this sculptural group the Cavaliere had surpassed himself, having completely mastered his art with this object of exceptional marvel’”.<sup>90</sup> These statements make clear that Domenico not only wanted to commend the work, but also portray his father as humble in a religious context.

Employing similar rhetoric, Baldinucci described the creation of the chapel as a part of a period that Bernini “brought forth for Rome to see the most beautiful works he had ever done”.<sup>91</sup> He defines the work as a “wonderful group of St. Theresa and the Angel who pierces the Saint’s heart with the arrow of Divine Love while she is in the transports of the sweetest ecstasy. For its great tenderness and for all its other qualities this work has always been an object of admiration.”<sup>92</sup> Baldinucci also states that Bernini “himself used to say that this was the most beautiful work ever to come from his hand.”<sup>93</sup>

In both Domenico’s and Baldinucci’s biographies, an encouraging madrigal written by Bernini’s other son, Monsignor Pietro Filippo Bernini, is featured:

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<sup>88</sup> Bernini, *The Life of Gian Lorenzo Bernini*, 158.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Filippo Baldinucci, *The Life of Bernini*, trans. by Catherine Enggass, (University Park, Pennsylvania, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 35.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

Languishment so sweet  
 Immortal must be,  
 Yet in its pain does not ascend  
 To the Divine Presence;  
 In this stone, Bernini rendered it eternal.<sup>94</sup>

### Reception of *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*: Anonymous Poet

Mirroring the positive reception of Bernini's biographers, however presumably less swayed by any personal relationship or agenda, is a contemporary anonymous poet who wrote three poems devoted to the altarpiece.<sup>95</sup> The poems were some of the few known contemporary attempts at describing *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*.<sup>96</sup> Tomaso Montanari has dated the following poems soon after July 1652, when the *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* was unveiled.<sup>97</sup> Attributed to the same anonymous author are four others dedicated to the Cornaro Chapel; those will be discussed in the second chapter. The first poem reads:

*Equiti Joanni Laurentio Bernino.  
 De simulacro Divae Teresiae in templo Beatae Mariae de Victoria [quae]  
 estaticum amoris deliquium patitur.*

*Quicquid tu vitae saxo, Bernine, negasti  
 Deficit, atque patet te renuisse dare.  
 Ut vitae et mortis simulacra expromeret idem,  
 Te cogente lapis vivit et emoritur.  
 At nimium fallor! Vita meliore besti  
 Hac quicquid vita vivere rite vetas.*

To Cavaliere Gian Lorenzo Bernini. On the image of St Theresa suffering the ecstatic swoon of sacred love in the church of S. Maria della Vittoria. What life you denied to the stone, Bernini, is now lacking, and it is clear that you did not want to give it. Forced by you, the stone lives and dies, so that the same

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<sup>94</sup> Monsignor Pietro Filippo Bernini, *The Life of Gian Lorenzo Bernini*, translated and edited by Franco Mormando, (University Park, Pennsylvania, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), 159.

<sup>95</sup> According to Tomaso Montanari, the same style and content of all unpublished poems suggest that it was one author. See Tomaso Montanari, "A Contemporary Reading of Bernini's 'Maraviglioso Composto': Unpublished Poems on the Four River Fountain and the Cornaro Chapel," 182.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

stone may present images of life and death. But err too greatly! You blessed with a better life all that what in this life you rightfully did not permit to live.<sup>98</sup>

*Exanimis artus animat, iam numine plenos:  
Numen amatum, Numen amans. Oh, quam bene saxo  
Numinis atque animae spectandi dantur amores!  
Sculpsit utrumque faber, quam das Bernine perennem  
Vivet uterque tibi moribundo in marmore vitam.  
Inde tibi multisque dabit, te auctore, beatam  
E saxo mentem, cum qui se dulce propinat  
Divinum mirumque bibet spectator amorem.*

The beloved God, the loving God, infuses life into the lifeless limbs, already full of God. Oh, how well are the loves of God and of the soul made visible in the stone! An artist sculpted them both, and in the dead marble both live the eternal life that you, Bernini, acquire for yourself. Thus due to your workmanship, the stone will inspire a blessed state of mind in you and in many others, when the spectator will drink Divine and wondrous love which offers itself as a sweet drink.<sup>99</sup>

*Estasim Divae representat angelumque praecordia ipsius vulnerantem.*

*Effingi Teresa sui per viscera saxi  
Verum deliquium vidit et obstupuit,  
Et gratata sibi vulnus iam dulce paratum  
Cordi quod lapidi iussit inesse faber,  
“Ignara me ergo” dixit “sub marmore possum,  
Si Bernine velis, vulnera vera pati”?*

He represents the ecstasy of the Saint and the angel who wounds her breast. Theresa saw, and was astounded, that in the entrails of a stone her true swoon was depicted, and rejoicing in the sweet wound already inflicted on her heart, created by the artists in the stone, she spoke: “So I, without my knowing it, if you want it, Bernini, can suffer real wounds in the marble?”<sup>100</sup>

- Anonymous Poet

<sup>98</sup> Roma, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Chig. D III fol. 52r, elegiac couplets, translated by Tomaso Montanari in “A Contemporary Reading of Bernini’s ‘Maraviglioso Composto’: Unpublished Poems on the Four River Fountain and the Cornaro Chapel,” *Poetry on Art: Renaissance to Romanticism*, edited by Thomas Frangenberg, (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2003), 193-194.

<sup>99</sup> Roma, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Chig. D III fol. 52r, hexameters, “A Contemporary Reading of Bernini’s ‘Maraviglioso Composto’: Unpublished Poems on the Four River Fountain and the Cornaro Chapel,” 194.

<sup>100</sup> Roma, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Chig. D III fol.52v, elegiac couplets, “A Contemporary Reading of Bernini’s ‘Maraviglioso Composto’: Unpublished Poems on the Four River Fountain and the Cornaro Chapel,” 194-195.

The three poems, similar in language and style to those that will be presented in chapter two, enthusiastically praise Bernini's talent in the forming of Teresa's ecstasy and sculpting the marble in such a way that its illusion of physical expression almost becomes real for the spectator. Furthermore, the poet addresses the divine love experienced by Teresa as amorous and bodily, her ecstasy becoming of the flesh. While many thus commended Bernini's new interpretation of Teresa's text, there were others who did not.

### **Reception of *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*: Anonymous Critic**

At least one critic argued that *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* presented an unashamed melding of spirituality and sensuality in the face of the Counter-Reformation.<sup>101</sup> The expression of Teresa's ecstasy as not only internal, but of the flesh was challenging for some. One anonymous critic denounced the sculpture at the time of the chapel's unveiling saying:

... one virtue is exchanged for another and a nursing sheep for the Roman wolf by one who, in forming his *St. Teresa* in the church of Vittoria, dragged that most pure Virgin not only into the Third Heaven, but to the dirt, to make a Venus not only prostrate but prostituted...<sup>102</sup>

It is clear by this quote that the writer was not only insinuating that Bernini lacked religious morals himself, but that he depicted Saint Teresa in an inappropriate and sexual way. To him, the ecstasy was depicted as physical pleasure. The critic's claims can now give scholars insight into to the context of Bernini's Rome. While this is the only negative critique found published from the seventeenth-century, it was probably not alone.<sup>103</sup> The sensual nature of the

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<sup>101</sup> Franco Mormando, *Bernini: His Life and His Rome*, (Chicago and London, Chicago University Press, 2011), 161.

<sup>102</sup> "Constantine Brought to the Pillory," from "Il Costantino messo alla Berlina ò Bernina su la Porta di San Pietro," trans. and edited by George C. Bauer in *Bernini in Perspective*, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976), 53.

<sup>103</sup> Mormando, *Bernini: His Life and His Rome*, 162.

altarpiece certainly would have attracted negative attention considering there was nothing in sculptural form depicting Teresa's ecstasy from the past or contemporary time like it.<sup>104</sup>

### Chapter Conclusion

In sixteenth century Spain, Teresa of Ávila was a vital force in the Catholic Counter-Reformation. In her establishment of seventeen Discalced Carmelite foundations, she sought to return the Carmelite Order to its origin of poverty and humility, while encouraging her nuns and followers to have a personal relationship with God. Teresa's radical notion of Catholicism and practice of mysticism as a female would be influential to many and found dangerous to others. After her death, many would seek to diminish her legacy and foundations, but they would not achieve their goal. Through the dissemination of sermons, stories, and imagery, Teresa of Ávila's cult would spread worldwide and her support would require her canonization. By the seventeenth century, Saint Teresa as reformer, founder, and mystic would be known by all within the Catholic world.

Despite Saint Teresa's reception, however, imagery that focused on her ecstasies would always be met with caution. Therefore, *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* would require the *bel composto* within the Cornaro Chapel to restrict and control the spectator's interaction with her. She would require the witnesses of religious authority such as the Cornaro family and visual constructs to sanction her ecstasy.

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<sup>104</sup> Mormando, *Bernini: His Life and His Rome*, 162.

# The Performing Cornaro Chapel

## Chapter 2

From art, to architecture, to religion, all components of seventeenth century Rome were a spectacle. Therefore, it is no surprise today's scholars refer to the Baroque with words like "theatrical" and "performance",<sup>1</sup> especially when considering Gian Lorenzo Bernini's work in the Cornaro Chapel. In the chapel, Bernini's *bel composto* would engage the viewer in a way that had not been seen before. He would unify the sacred and profane of the theatre by introducing lighting effects, architectural elements resembling theatre boxes, and the complicated relationship between actors and the audience. Like the theatre, Bernini's chapel would control the visual depiction of Teresa's ecstasy and manipulate the spectator's experience.

Through the combination of the arts, Bernini would masterfully design a chapel that gives the devotee an immersive and continuous religious experience. To argue this, I will first set the stage and provide a concise impression of Baroque Rome and "theatre". This information will then be related to all parts of the *bel composto* within the chapel. Additionally, I will contrast the altarpiece with other works by Bernini to explore the reasoning for his use of the *bel composto* and theatrical elements.

### The Baroque Spectacle

After Pope Sixtus V Peretti died in 1590, Rome became a battle ground for control between the French and Spanish monarchies. Whoever would gain the papacy had the potential

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<sup>1</sup> When considering the Baroque period, the term, theatricality, comes to mind, especially when contemplating the work of Gian Lorenzo Bernini. While it is true the Baroque did see what might be called the 'theatre', it wasn't until 1711 the term, 'theatricality', was documented in English and then *later* documented in other languages. See Caroline van Eck and Stijn Bussels, "The Visual Arts and the Theatre in Early Modern Europe," *Association of Art Historians*, vol. 33, no. 2 (April, 2010), 211.

to influence all parts of domestic and international law and society. For many years, Rome's noble families and cardinals were forced to choose between the two monarchies.<sup>2</sup> Affluent Roman families demonstrated their allegiance by adorning their magnificent palaces with brilliantly colored flags, transforming neighborhoods into territories. They would competitively spend fortunes on lavish banquets and processions that would march throughout the city streets; the attendance of these events was scrutinized and calculated.

While it may seem the Roman elite were employing visual displays of loyalty and wealth to impress, spectacles also represented a way in which nobility could gain "symbolic compensation" for their loss of power in Roman politics, as Peter Burke has astutely suggested.<sup>3</sup> The French and Spanish monarchies may have been dueling for control over Rome, but it was Romans who would act as esteemed (however cautious) spectators. While many of the most important families, including the Orsini, Medici, Colonna, and Farnese, sided with the Spanish, it would be the French monarchy that would gain strength when the pro-French pope, Urban VIII Barberini came into power between 1623 and 1644.<sup>4</sup>

Under the Barberini reign, the arts flourished. The new pope would express his Roman power and influence by spending multitudes of money on new buildings, artworks, and excessive parties that were filled with special effects fashioned by creative minds. Spectacles were to be found everywhere in Baroque Rome and as such this period in Italy has often been referred to as

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Dandeleit, "Setting the Noble Stage in Baroque Rome: Roman Palaces, Political Contest, and Social Theatre, 1600-1700," *Life and the Arts in the Baroque Palaces: Ambiente Barocco*, edited by Stephanie Walker and Frederick Hammond, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1999), 39.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Burke, "Varieties of Performance in Seventeenth-Century Italy," *Performativity and Performance in Baroque Rome*, edited by Peter Gillgren and Mårten Snickare, (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012), 20.

<sup>4</sup> Dandeleit, "Setting the Noble Stage in Baroque Rome: Roman Palaces, Political Contest, and Social Theatre, 1600-1700," 42.

a *società dello spettacolo* by scholars.<sup>5</sup> To borrow from Shakespeare, for the 17<sup>th</sup> century Roman elite, “all the world was a stage,” as indicated by the spectacle involved in events ranging from christenings, weddings, funerals, and even the dissection of cadavers. This spectacle manifested itself in what scholars today have referred to as the Roman “theatre”.<sup>6</sup>

With every single part of life an act or “performance”, it could be said the theatre was a way for nobility to escape into another world and to be entirely immersed in a performance on stage. Even though the theatre had its own rules outside of regular societal restraints, as it will be discussed later, it did not completely protect individuals from the social and political hierarchy of Roman life. In the theater, the nobility was the subject of all gazes. As theatre scholar, Maurice Slawinski, has persuasively argued, “no better metaphors could be found for the fear that what took place on stage, for all its contrivance, might overwhelm real life, the anxiety as to where a truly effective drama might be found and the suspicion that the audience itself could be the real spectacle, unwitting performers in a play not of their making, and destined to fade into nothing”.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Baroque Stage**

The Roman Baroque, and formerly, the Florentine Renaissance spectacles adopted stage design and forms of playwriting from ancient Greek theatre. Simple Greek theatrical elements would be exploited and built upon to invent innovative and grand special effects and machines created to awe the elite audience. However, unlike the open air theatre of the ancient Greeks, the early Baroque “theatre” was of a private nature, meant only to be seen by invited nobility. As

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<sup>5</sup> For a critical look on social drama of the Baroque age, see Burke, “Varieties of Performance in Seventeenth-Century Italy,” 15-23.

<sup>6</sup> See Caroline van Eck and Stijn Bussels, “The Visual Arts and the Theatre in Early Modern Europe,” *Association of Art Historians*, vol. 33, no. 2 (April, 2010), 211.

<sup>7</sup> Maurice Slawinski, *A History of Italian Theatre*, edited by Joseph Farrell and Paolo Puppa, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 141.

such, the Baroque theatre emerged from a converted room of a palace which would be given benches, a raised stage, theatrical lighting, and special machinery for effects.<sup>8</sup> Later in the period, the wealthy would be inspired to build attachments to their great Roman palaces that would act solely as theatres. These “theatres” would be competitively added to the Farnese palace and Barberini palace at Quattro Fontane (1636-1639).

As one would expect, the production of Baroque theatre during the reign of Urban VIII would attract many creative minds, including Bernini. For a decade, Bernini would work sporadically as a stenographer and *caomaestro delli theatri* for the Barberini.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, it has been recorded by his biographers that he composed and produced twenty plays to be performed at such locations as the Vatican foundry and the “New Barberini theatre” (a location that could hold up to 3,500 people) for Roman Carnival seasons and other special events.<sup>10</sup>

Like the participatory nature of the Cornaro Chapel, Bernini productions would require an involved audience that was entirely consumed in the fantasy. The plays, mostly comedic in theme, would require a certain amount of surprise using illusionary effects and improvisation of the actors. Bernini’s most celebrated play, the *Inundation of the Tiber* (1638), was one of great excitement for its audience. During the play, the stage itself was flooded to reenact the actual flooding of the Tiber that happened one year before.<sup>11</sup> At the sight of rushing water that threatened to spill over, the audience became frightened and attempted to leave. At once, a protective barrier miraculously took form. Another popular play, *The Fair* (before 1645),

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<sup>8</sup> William Weaver and Kazuo Nakajima, “The Creation of the Roman Festival: Barberini Celebration for Christina of Sweden”, *Life and the Arts in the Baroque Palaces: Ambiente Barocco*, edited by Stephanie Walker and Frederick Hammond, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1999), 54-57.

<sup>9</sup> Donald Beecher and Massimo Ciavolella, “A Comedy by Bernini,” *Gianlorenzo Bernini: New Aspects of His Art and Thought*, (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 64.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Fahrner and William Kleb, “The Theatrical Activity of Gianlorenzo Bernini,” *Educational Theatre Journal*, vol. 25, no. 1 (March, 1973), 6.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

included a torchbearer who “accidentally” set the scenery on fire. Again, the audience became alarmed and just at the moment they started to evacuate, the fire was put out and the scenery transformed into a luscious, blooming garden. Bernini was also known for the staging of two operas with live animals and another that included two sets of audiences, theatres, and actors.

Bernini’s interest in the theatre would not stop with special effects, but would extend to the *impresario*’s profession when he wrote a play within the play, *The Impresario*.<sup>12</sup> Within his plays, Bernini would emphasize the blurred lines between what was real and illusionary within the theatre. He did this to such an extent that the audience was left in a state of real emotion such as fear.

### **Theatrical Performance in the Catholic Church**

Bernini’s Cornaro Chapel is deeply rooted in the same balance between real and illusion found in the theatre. That is not to say, however, that his chapel design is not deeply spiritual as well, as Wittkower has already demonstrated.<sup>13</sup> In fact, it is in the combination of theatrical performance and Catholic tradition that makes Bernini’s design effect so religiously potent. Furthermore, the Catholic practice as a whole is rather theatrical in itself. In the active space of the church, one continuous religious experience is created for the Catholic visitor. The way in which the devotee interacts with the divine is mediated by the Church.

In the Catholic Church, the devotee is detached from the outside world. Through careful design and manipulation, architecture both enhances and restricts the viewer’s experience within sacred space. Imagine stepping into Santa Maria della Vittoria, the doors swinging to a close

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<sup>12</sup> For more on *The Impresario*, see Beecher and Ciavolella, “A Comedy by Bernini.”

<sup>13</sup> Rudolf Wittkower, “The Cornaro Chapel, other Chapels, Churches, and the Baroque Stage,” *Gian Lorenzo Bernini: The Sculpture of the Roman Baroque*, (London: The Paidon Press, 1966), 27-8.

behind you, cutting off the loud noises of the Roman streets outside. During Mass, you sit in the church pew, your location determined by your rank within society. The fragrance of frankincense fills the air with the promise of purification as the priest swings the thurible. The sound of his voice will then bounce off the many facades of the interior with confidence and supremacy. The extravagant organ placed high above the entrance plays as angelic voices of choir singers surround you. Every element completely envelopes and absorbs its intended congregation. Every element has been specifically chosen for an optimal religious experience.

Because each effect had the potential to deeply influence Catholics, much of it was regulated and regularized. Similar to the way Teresa's mystical events were approached with care, so was the artwork and music within the Baroque church. While all sensory components, visual and audible, were meant to evoke emotion from its congregation, the Church considered them dangerous if not handled properly. This caution would eventually lead to a decree released in 1657 by the administration of Pope Alexander VII.<sup>14</sup> It deemed that music was to only be "grave, ecclesiastical and devout" and taken exclusively from the Bible, liturgy, or Church fathers.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, performers' locations and even tones were to be controlled and standardized.<sup>16</sup>

Much like the invisible pedestal supporting the sculptural Saint Teresa in the midst of her miraculous event, so would even singers be hidden from sight, shutters positioned over the choir in which they stood.<sup>17</sup> Concealing the singers would create the illusion that their voices were not

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<sup>14</sup> Lars Berglund, "Angels or Sirens? Questions of Performance and Reception in Roman Church Music around 1650," *Performativity and Performance in Baroque Rome*, edited by Peter Gillgren and Märten Snickare, (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012), 105.

<sup>15</sup> Mary E. Frandsen, *Crossing Confessional Borders: The Patronage of Italian Sacred Music in Seventeenth-Century Dresden*, (London: Oxford University Press, 2006), 175-85.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Berglund, "Angels or Sirens? Questions of Performance and Reception in Roman Church Music around 1650," 105.

their own but God's. As scholar Lars Berglund argued, this was especially important because the Church feared devotees would become attached to the individuals that belonged to the beautiful voices, a problem accentuated during the Barberini reign, when operas became popular and solo voices were celebrated.<sup>18</sup> The inner-workings of a church, including architecture and singers, was not meant to be understood by the less-perfect devotee. Catholicism and its products were to be shrouded in mystery to all but the divinely ordained. When the musical and architectural elements are hidden from sight, the church itself becomes a performer, or an entity in itself. Music protrudes from its walls, rebounding off of the countless planes of the interior to fully surround those inside its keep.

### **The Spectacle of the Cornaro Chapel**

*Eidem Berninio.  
De lapidibus et praecipue de maculosis in eodem Sacello Divae Teresiae mirifice dispositis.*

*Nominibus variis insignitura theatrum  
Exhilarant sese votis tua saxa superbis,  
Nec maculosa pudet nitidae molimina molis,  
Si formosa lues pretiosis emicet umbris  
Quando iubet sacro maculas servire nitori.*

To the same Bernini. On the stones, and in particular the spotted ones, which are wonderfully arranged in the same Chapel of St Theresa.

Your stones will ennoble the theatre with their various names, and they delight in the superb project. And it is not shameful that the materials of a pure construction are spotted, the beautiful lues [sic] glistening with precious shadows, when you command that the spots serve sacred lucidity.<sup>19</sup>

- Anonymous Poet

<sup>18</sup> Berglund, "Angels or Sirens? Questions of Performance and Reception in Roman Church Music around 1650," 107.

<sup>19</sup> Roma, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Chig. D III fol. 51r, "A Contemporary Reading of Bernini's 'Maraviglioso Composto': Unpublished Poems on the Four River Fountain and the Cornaro Chapel," 196.

*Spectatori.  
De vestibus eorundem cardinalium affabre exculptis.*

*Cerne ut nobilitant Tyria sub veste theatrum  
Ingentes animae votaue magna partum.  
En rubet arcano spectatus murice candor,  
Cum lapide in Pario purpura sacra patent.  
Sed quid miraris fabrum sculpsisse colores  
Quando tot heroum sculpitur hic anima?*

To the spectator. On the garments of the same cardinals, wonderfully sculpted.

See how, in their purple garments, the great souls and the abundant prayers of the fathers ennoble the theatre. And behold, as one looks, the whiteness turns red through the arcane purple, as the sacred purple is represented in the Parian stone. But why do you marvel at the fact that an artist sculpted colours when the souls of so many heroes are sculpted here?<sup>20</sup>

- Anonymous Poet

In the preceding poems, the author refers to *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*'s larger context, the "theatrum" or "theatre" which is made "ennobled" by opulent materials and the virtuous Cornaro's presence, as distinguished by Tomaso Montanari.<sup>21</sup> The word "theatrum" does not refer to what we may call a "play house" or "theatre" today.<sup>22</sup> Rather, it seems to speak of the *bel composto* due to the poet's awareness of the chapel as a whole, not just its famous parts. In fact, the anonymous poet designates two poems to marble, qualifying the material's importance to the entire design.

Of all the lavish materials forming the Cornaro Chapel, the seventeen varieties of marble including *verde antico*, *breccia*, *giallo antico*, *bardiglio*, and *alabastro antico* are the most

<sup>20</sup> Roma, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Chig. D III fol. 51r, "A Contemporary Reading of Bernini's 'Maraviglioso Composto': Unpublished Poems on the Four River Fountain and the Cornaro Chapel," 196.

<sup>21</sup> Tomaso Montanari, "A Contemporary Reading of Bernini's 'Maraviglioso Composto': Unpublished Poems on the Four River Fountain and the Cornaro Chapel," *Poetry on Art: Renaissance to Romanticism*, edited by Thomas Frangenberg, (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2003), 187.

<sup>22</sup> "Theatrum" is defined as "a play-house, theatre" on *The Perseus Digital Library*, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=theatrum&la=la> (accessed July 21, 2015).

extravagant.<sup>23</sup> Standing as a symbol of Cornaro's wealth and Bernini's elaborate design sense, the material also emphasizes the preciousness of the sacred space. Recalling the Pantheon, it dynamically covers the mortuary pavement and forms Corinthian columns, pilasters, multileveled moldings, and frames. The result of the polychrome marble would have overwhelmed the eye, if not for the pure white of the Italian Carraran marble forming the figures of the Cornaro family and altarpiece. At these figural depictions, the eye can rest and then reevaluate the whole of the chapel.

Chromatic similarities of the Carraran marble can be found in the lighter color of two skeletal figures depicted in the mortuary pavement (fig. 9, 10). Positioned to flank the altar, the skeletons are shown in animation as one clasps its hands in prayer while the other raises its arms joyfully. Therefore, the sentiments evoked from these skeletons parallel the contemplative and active lives, but they also refer to the theatre. Contrasting with the simple portrayal of the animated skeletons seen in other mortuary pavement design, their overly exuberant gestures take on the exaggerated gestural characteristics of theatre performers who were meant to be seen from a greater distance. As performers, the skeletons act as models of suitable behavior as well as direct the viewer back to the altarpiece. In their orientation toward the altar, the skeletons allude to the promise of redemption provided by the intercessory powers of the saint above.

The promise of redemption is mirrored overhead in a fresco of the heavens (fig. 11). Two angels located on the ceiling at the entrance present a banderole, stating a phrase directly out of one of Teresa's recorded ecstasies: "If I had not created heaven I would create it for you alone".<sup>24</sup> Joyful angels further occupy the chapel. As G. B. Passeri states, some are seen

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<sup>23</sup> Margaretha Rossholm Lagerlöf, "The Apparition of Faith: The Performative Meaning of Gian Lorenzo Bernini's Decoration for the Cornaro Chapel," *Performativity and Performance in Baroque Rome*, edited by Peter Gillgren and Mårten Snickare, (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012), 189.

<sup>24</sup> Lavin, *Bernini and the Unity of the Visual Arts*, 139.

“performing a concert”<sup>25</sup> and decorating the walls with garlands celebrating the marvelous event occurring below. The association between the heavens and the active space of the chapel is made more compelling as the stucco clouds cross the boundaries of architectural frames and seem to descend toward the mystical event displayed at the altar. As the heavens appear to fall towards the visitor, the illusion of movement is created. It would appear as though mystical and heavenly powers were at work, not an illusion of which Bernini’s hand manipulated.

All elements of the *bel composto*, the marble architecture, mortuary pavement, and fresco, combine and surround the spectator so that the individual becomes part of the event, or performance. The chapel becomes a space where the separate realms of the living and dead can overlap visually and symbolically to create a moment that is both undistinguishable in location and time. The instability of the chapel’s illusionistic and atmospheric qualities refer to the theatre (religious or secular), where machines and special effects transport holy figures into the spectator’s world.

The illusionistic properties within the chapel are also made possible by the *bel composto*, a term that has only recently been employed by scholars to speak about the unification of the arts within the Cornaro Chapel. However, the effects of Bernini’s design have always been understood subconsciously due to the chapel’s single optimal viewpoint positioned at the center axis of the church. Here, all perspective lines found in the background relief of the Cornaro family and the forms of the sculptures themselves, not carved in the round, make the most visual sense. This optimal viewpoint of the chapel is also the most advantageous position within the church itself. At the center axis, the viewer who has the approval to see Bernini’s chapel, has

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<sup>25</sup>G.B. Passeri, *Die Künstlerbiographien, nach den Handschriften des Autors herausgegeben und mit Anmerkungen versehen*, edited by J. Hess, (Leipzig, Vienna, 1934), 238 as seen in Tomaso Montanari, “A Contemporary Reading of Bernini’s ‘Maraviglioso Composto’: Unpublished Poems on the Four River Fountain and the Cornaro Chapel,” 186.

also a privileged view of the entire church of Santa Maria della Vittoria. Like the theatre stage, the one point from which one could attain the optimum and all-encompassing viewpoint of both the spectacular event and the audience (who was also on display) was designated for those of the highest esteem: the uppermost nobility and thereby those who were “chosen” by God.

However “privileged” a viewer might be, he or she would still be controlled by the same design constructs that honored his or her individual status. Through only one vantage point, the viewer’s vision and therefore, experience, is controlled. Unlike Bernini’s later Altieri Chapel, the viewer is unable to move freely about if he or she wishes to stay within the holy realm. The viewpoint is not placed within the chapel or from where one would kneel. Therefore, the viewer is not sharing in Teresa’s intimate and mystical experience, but viewing it.

### *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*

*Sol per aditus rite machinatos cogitur ex voto simulacrum illustrare.*

*Quonam vota tuae lucis meliore beari,  
O Sol, sorte vides quam, cum penetrata recessus  
Mire molitos, praescripto munere divam,  
Bernino statuente, colunt, ut splendida praestent  
Officia, atque data famulentur lumina lege?  
Quo praeclara magis potuerunt fulgida Solis  
Oscula defigi? Quanam de fronte recussi  
Plus digna radii maiori foenore vultum,  
Phoebe, tuum repetunt? Debes haec maxima lucis  
Munia Bernino. Hoc fabro tu illustior ibis  
Quam olim facundo simulacro Memnonis esses.  
Diva loqueretus radiis animata disertis,  
Si vox deliquis non arceretur amoris.*

The sun, via paths accurately arranged, is made to illuminate the altarpiece in a given way.

What happier fate could the light issuing from you, oh Sun, enjoy than when it enters by these wonderfully constructed recesses and venerates the Saint with this pre-ordained gift, as Bernini wished, to fulfill its splendid function and to do its

task according to a given project. Where could the brilliant kisses of the sun be materialized in a more splendid manner? From what more worthy forehead could the rays be reflected back to your countenance more fruitfully, of Phoebus? That light performs these extraordinary services to you, you owe to Bernini. Because of this artist, you will be more famous than you once were because of the talking statue of Memnon. The Saint would speak, animated by eloquent rays, if her voice were not silence by the swoons of love.<sup>26</sup>

- Anonymous Poet

Placed within the bowed tabernacle and framed with Corinthian columns and a broken pediment, Saint Teresa and the angel await the spectator's gaze as the focus of the chapel. The curving architecture of the tabernacle -- an element that Bernini later reiterated in his *Sant' Andrea al Quirinale* -- pushes the altar forward into the devotee's space as the chapel seems to exhale. The tabernacle is deepened by this effect and gives way for a window to be placed above. The light filters through amber glass of the window and cascades over the altarpiece, as if heaven itself was opened only to shine down upon the miraculous event. This amber glow merges with the muted light from the church proper and reflection of the warm candlelight from the altar. Natural daylight and manipulated light unite to pour over the two holy figures and bounce off the lower rock-like edges of the cloud. The illumination shining upon all three sides seems to lift up the sculpture group, raising Teresa and the angel up towards the heavens and the holy dove.

The manipulation of light seen in the Cornaro Chapel is not an isolated instance. In fact, we see controlled light used for a number of altarpieces in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the most popular being the altar of San Giovanni dei Fiorentini, by Pietro da Cortona, and Nicolas Cordier's *Saint Sylvia* in San Gregorio Magno.<sup>27</sup> Bernini himself explored light his entire career beginning with *Saint Bibiana* and later expanded on in the *Raimondi Chapel*. In his

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<sup>26</sup> Roma, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Chig. D III fol. 53r, hexameters, "A Contemporary Reading of Bernini's 'Maraviglioso Composto': Unpublished Poems on the Four River Fountain and the Cornaro Chapel," 196-197.

<sup>27</sup> Comparisons for controlled light given by Lavin, *Bernini and the Unity of the Visual Arts*, 139.

investigation of light manipulation, Bernini's *Four Rivers Fountain*, unveiled in 1651, would be a point of breakthrough in its play of shadow and water's reflective light. As such, manipulation of light seen in the fountain would be mirrored in *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, as the anonymous poet perceptively suggested.<sup>28</sup>

The manipulation of light adjoins with that of other atmospheric elements to create an illusion that promotes heaven's consent of the saint's transverberation. Teresa and the angel seem to be unattached from the world of the living as they float on an unwieldy, rocky cloud. The addition of the cloud references the ancient symbol of visionary experience. Yet, its physical form it also deviates from this traditional imagery. Bernini's choice to depict the form with such an earthy presence instead of as weightless (as with his design of *Saint Andrew* in Sant' Andrea al Quirinale) was not only because there was a visual need for texture variation. Instead, I argue the cloud may be likened to a medieval Florentine machine which took the shape of clouds fashioned to raise holy figures "heavenward" during *sacre rappresentazioni* and sacred theatre.<sup>29</sup> These clouds were employed by Baroque artists in their theatrical plays<sup>30</sup> and would have likely been used by Bernini in his own productions.

The use of such an earthy cloud would not only reference theatrical machines, but also tie Teresa to the spectator's world. Teresa transcends heavenly and earthly boundaries. She is both mortal and ethereal. Therefore, Bernini has portrayed her as idealized in both her ecstatic state and physical appearance. Bernini's depiction of Teresa is not realistic or humbling, contrary to the majority of Teresian iconography before the seventeenth century. Bernini has knowingly

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<sup>28</sup> Roma, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Chig. D III fol. 53r, hexameters, "A Contemporary Reading of Bernini's 'Maraviglioso Composto': Unpublished Poems on the Four River Fountain and the Cornaro Chapel," 196-197. Also, Tomaso Montanari, "A Contemporary Reading of Bernini's 'Maraviglioso Composto': Unpublished Poems on the Four River Fountain and the Cornaro Chapel," *Poetry on Art: Renaissance to Romanticism*, edited by Thomas Frangenberg, (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2003), 189.

<sup>29</sup> Mark S. Weil, *Baroque Theatre & Stage Design*, (St. Louis, Missouri: Washington University, 1983), 14.

<sup>30</sup> Weil, *Baroque Theatre & Stage Design*, 14.

diverted from Teresa's writings, which state she was forty-five the first time she experienced her transverberation. In the Cornaro Chapel, she is a young and beautiful woman, free of wrinkles with supple and glowing skin.

Bernini's idealized form of the human figure is a hallmark of his sculptures. Moreover, specific features of his forms were continuously reused in works with similar themes. In *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, Teresa's soft, youthful face is reminiscent of Bernini's *Memorial to Maria Raggi* in Santa Maria sopra Minerva (1647) (fig. 12), and, most importantly, her figure precludes *The Blessed Ludovica Albertoni* in the Altieri Chapel in San Francesco a Ripa (1671-4) (fig. 13). The visual connection between the images of these three holy women effectively presents Bernini's desire to idealize their outward appearance and mystical experiences in order to disconnect them from their faulted viewers. This is especially relevant when Bernini depicted Teresa and Ludovica in the throes of spiritual rapture.

The state of transverberation is depicted by Bernini as a bodily expression. In *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, the mystic is even audible, mimicking Bernini's "talking statues". Teresa's eyes roll back as her eyelids begin to close. Her lips part and the viewer can almost hear her moan in the midst of her union. This audibility, paired with her limp, leaning body, and her youthful appearance had led some to suggest her ecstasy is one of an erotic nature, as the anonymous critic cited in the first chapter suggested. In order to explore the possible erotic tones of the altarpiece, a comparison with its sculptural successor, *The Blessed Ludovica Albertoni*, is needed.

Completed twenty-two years after the Cornaro Chapel, *The Blessed Ludovica Albertoni* seems to contain an exaggerated pose of *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*. The most obvious characteristic the two figures share is their reclining pose, only made dissimilar by what they

lean on: Teresa on her cloud and Ludovica on her bed. Clearly, a bed has a more erotic charge than a cloud. What further distinguishes Teresa from Ludovica is that the former's bodily femininity is denied while Ludovica's is almost accentuated. Teresa's drapery covers her corporeal body completely, only permitting her elegantly posed feet and hands to be seen. Ludovica, reeling from her ecstasy, does draw more attention to her body by pressing her hands to her stomach and chest. Consequently, she reveals her feminine body through the shifted drapery.

The allowance and denial of the female body indicates the difference between how the spectator was meant to read and interact with the two holy women. This alteration could be because Ludovica was not canonized, nor did she live without worldly pleasures. In fact, she was a blessed, who was both a widow and mother. Therefore, Ludovica could be seen as more vulnerable to having a sexualized and corporeal experience while in ecstasy. Furthermore, Ludovica takes physical responsibility for her union because at the moment of her death she offers herself to God, as scholar Shelley Karen Perlove has convincingly suggested.<sup>31</sup> As a result, it would be more reasonable to show her body through drapery and have a more intense physical reaction.

However more active in her experience, Ludovica is also completely unaware of the visitor's gaze while utterly consumed in the emotional and physical "sweetness of pain".<sup>32</sup> Like Teresa, she lacks complete control over her ecstasy and she does not make eye contact with another being. Both Teresa's and Ludovica's intimate moments are to be watched as if they are enacting events as performers on stage for the audience.

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<sup>31</sup> Shelley Karen Perlove, *Bernini and the Idealization of Death: The Blessed Ludovica Albertoni and the Altieri Chapel*, (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), 42-3.

<sup>32</sup> Teresa of Ávila, *The Life of Teresa of Jesus: The Autobiography of Teresa of Ávila*, 274-275.

### Marble Shaped by Gender Roles

When considering the erotic implications of Bernini's depictions of female mystics in the midst of ecstasy, it is imperative to explore Bernini's imagery of holy men in ecstatic states: comparanda usually ignored by scholars of *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*. Bernini's *Habakkuk and the Angel* from the Chigi Chapel (1655-61) (fig.14) mirrors *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* in its composition. Just as with the image in the Cornaro Chapel, the youthful, beautiful angel hovers above the holy prophet's right side, ready to plunge an arrow of divine love straight into his chest. However, Habakkuk is caught by surprise, the sheer force of the angel knocking him backward, his left foot flailing upward. Yet, in spite of his shock, Habakkuk engages in direct eye contact with angel. This suggests his control over his experience with the divine.

The contrast between Habakkuk's engagement and Teresa's act of receiving of divine love speaks to the wider reception of gender in both Baroque society and the Church. Habakkuk was a holy male and therefore was seen as less susceptible to the evils that could arise during transverberation. In contrast, Teresa was a female who sought out a close and personal relationship with God. Engaging in this activity as a woman was seen as highly dangerous by Church during her lifetime (a notion discussed in chapter one). While Teresa was canonized and her ecstasies approved by the time Bernini created the Cornaro Chapel, the artist would still need to place certain restrictions on her depiction, unlike that which would be necessary for Habakkuk.

In order to confine Teresa's controversial ecstasy and implement the Church as mediator in the face of Protestant heresy, the female saint and viewer were to be divided. Teresa is suspended, neither completely a part of our world nor heaven. Situated above eyelevel and

enclosed in the tabernacle by columns, Teresa is visually removed.<sup>33</sup> It is the audience's specific vantage point and the looming presence of the Cornaro family where Bernini accentuated the need for Teresa's spiritual authorization.

### The Cornaro Family

*Eidem Bernino.  
De simulacris cardinalium Corneliorum.*

*Ut domus in Sacro numeret Cornelia Circo  
Purpureos promunt hic simulacra patres.  
Sed mage de fabro cerno, Bernine, superba  
Quae sub tam multo principe saxa tument.*

To the same Bernini. On the portraits of the Cornaro Cardinals.

Here the images represent the fathers so that the Cornaro family may count how many [of their kin] were purple-clad members of the sacred College [of Cardinals]. But I see that the stones are more proud of their maker, Bernini, even though they pride themselves under so great a prince.<sup>34</sup>

- Anonymous Poet

Federico Cornaro's carved pupils linger on the space in front of the right side of the church's entrance (fig. 15). His expression almost seems impatient as he both beckons the visitor to see the mystical event occurring at the chapel's altar, as well as requests them to pray for his soul and that of his esteemed family. At Federico's demand, the privileged visitor will move to the main axis of the church (where all perspective lines visually meet). They will then quickly recognize a Renaissance triptych-like orientation which situates the Cornaro family as patrons on the far left and right walls to surround *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (fig. 15, 16).

<sup>33</sup> We have seen a female saint separated by architectural framework in works such as Carlo Maderno's *Saint Cecilia* in Saint Cecilia of Trastevere (1600).

<sup>34</sup> Roma, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Chig. D III fol. 51r, elegiac couplets, "A Contemporary Reading of Bernini's 'Maraviglioso Composto': Unpublished Poems on the Four River Fountain and the Cornaro Chapel," 195.

Depicted as bust length effigies, some members of the Cornaro family follow the tradition of Renaissance figures in the act of prayer or devotion. The figure closest to the altar on the right-hand side leans forward in faithful admiration, while the second closest on the left-hand side, reads. The others depart from convention in their variation of gesture, more closely resembling Bernini's innovative "talking statues" of Scipione Borghese and Constanza Bonarelli.<sup>35</sup> These cardinals seem to be in a heated discussion, speaking with their hands. In some sense, these figures who gesticulate mirror the relief of the Last Supper decorating the front of the chapel's altar, as Lavin has previously suggested.<sup>36</sup> Lavin has also persuasively argued, the relationship between the depiction of the Cornaro family and the popular image of the Last Supper is relevant to Teresa because she was recorded as experiencing an ecstasy while receiving communion.<sup>37</sup>

To further connect the Cornaro family to Church sensibilities, Lavin and Call have convincingly proposed their poses refer to the need for ocular testimony during the canonization process of the Reformation.<sup>38</sup> This was especially relevant to Teresa, whose visions and ecstasies were widely disbelieved. In order for the Church, and therefore, the viewer, to accept Teresa's claims, appointed men would have to deliberate over presented evidence. Therefore, the Cornaro family represents both the rational and the faithful found in the male members of Catholic Church during Teresa's canonization process. The rational discuss whether or not the alleged mystical events experienced by her and others were legitimate, while the figure reading, perhaps

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<sup>35</sup> For more on Bernini's portrait sculpture, see *Bernini and the Birth of the Baroque Portrait Sculpture*, edited by Andrea Bacchi, Catherine Hess, and Jennifer Montague, (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2008).

<sup>36</sup> Lavin, *Bernini and the Unity of the Visual Arts*, 125-6.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Lavin, *Bernini and the Unity of the Visual Arts*, 125-6 and Call, "Boxing Teresa: The Counter-Reformation and Bernini's Cornaro Chapel," 37.

Teresa's testimony, symbolizes the contemplative, and the figure "seeing" the event represents the faithful.

Imagery of religious men as witnesses of miraculous events has been seen before. In fact, when considering Bernini's depiction, Lavin has offered a direct visual reference, Adriaen Collaert and Cornelis Galle's print, *Levitations of St. Teresa*, from 1613 (fig. 17).<sup>39</sup> While this might not be a print of Teresa's famous transverberation per se, it is another moment investigated during her canonization process: a levitation at the convent of St. Joseph at Ávila. In the print, the window-like element through which the men witness the event is quite similar to the architectural element in which the Cornaros sit in the chapel.

The architectural element has also been visually related to other objects as well. In 1955, Wittkower was the first to suggest the family was seated in box theatre seats.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, the architecture would have been known to Bernini by drawings of the first four public theatres built in Venice between 1637 and 1641. Also, this invention would have been seen by Bernini when the Barberini theatre added theatre seats in 1640-1.<sup>41</sup> These box seats were located in balconies to allow the upper classes and/or favored elite to have increased privacy and therefore emphasize political and social hierarchy of the era.<sup>42</sup>

The notion of box theatre seats has been criticized by some. In 1978, Anthony Blunt argued the architectural feature supporting the Cornaro family was influenced by *correti* or oratories, as the pillowed element before them takes the form of kneelers.<sup>43</sup> By 1980, Lavin

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<sup>39</sup> Lavin, *Bernini and the Unity of the Visual Arts*, 100.

<sup>40</sup> Wittkower, *Gian Lorenzo Bernini: The Sculptor of the Roman Baroque*, (London: Phaidon Press, 1955), 29.

<sup>41</sup> The box seats were a later addition commissioned by Cardinal Antonio Barberini after the initial construction. See Weaver and Nakajima, "The Creation of the Roman Festival: Barberini Celebration for Christina of Sweden," 57.

<sup>42</sup> Balconies were used in tournaments in Florence and Bologna, also in theatre and public performances in Parma, Rome, and Padua in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. These balconies could have played a role in the development of the Venetian box seats. See Per Bjurström, *Giacomo Torelli and Baroque Stage Design*, (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1962), 37. See also Weil, *Baroque Theatre & Stage Design*, 23.

<sup>43</sup> Anthony Blunt, "Gianlorenzo Bernini: Illusionism and Mysticism," *Art History*, vol. 1, no. 1 (March 1978): 76.

proposed the space does not represent an actual architectural site, but rather an ideal location which takes from both the theatre seats and *correti*.<sup>44</sup> Lavin's argument is the most persuasive for it establishes the Cornaro Chapel as a space that unifies the sacred and profane, or the Counter-Reformation Church and the secular theatre, to create a powerful message of devotion and redemption.

If we read the architectural element the family inhabits as a marriage between box theatre seats and *correti*, then we can view the Cornaro family as both performers and spectators. When linked to the box theatre seats, the chapel mirrors the "U" shape of the theatre. This shape allows the two side walls to become part of the chapel's stage as painted wings which were elements designed to produce depth.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, the perspective given to the low relief of the architectural background of the Cornaros adds illusionary depth to the shallow space of the chapel. Now, the family becomes part of the performance as actors or subjects of the gaze. When the architectural element is connected to the *correti*, the Cornaros become viewers who gaze upon both the mystical event happening upon the stage and the chapel's visitor.

The chapel visitors are both aware they are akin to and different from the Cornaro family. This relationship is much like how audience members realize they are similar to theatre performers, but also different because they are separated by an illusionary location and time.<sup>46</sup> In the chapel, Federico is like his family in form and also the viewer because he addresses us with his gaze set by carved pupils. Therefore, he stands as the only link to the mystical event and immortalized beings within the chapel.

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<sup>44</sup> Lavin, *Bernini and the Unity of the Visual Arts*, 94.

<sup>45</sup> Weil, *Baroque Theatre & Stage Design*, 26.

<sup>46</sup> Rossholm Lagerlof, "Life Transformed: Performative Meaning, Analogy, and the Art of Bernini's Funerary Chapel Decorations," 21.

Due to their rank as both religious authorities and deceased, Federico and his family become the spectator's models for exemplary behavior. They are the ideal audience of the mystical event. Furthermore, as actors on the stage and fellow audience members, the Cornaro family is likely to arouse appropriate emotion from the spectator in the presence of Teresa's transverberation. The representation of emotion paired with constant atmospheric transformations effect the spectator's senses and can convert the individuals into deeply affected devotees or audience members.<sup>47</sup>

The viewer's gaze is mediated through the figures of the Cornaro family and as an extension, Bernini, the living patron, and the Church. By means of the employment of theatrical devices and traditional depiction, the audience will imitate the Cornaros in both admiration, devotion, and caution. When the viewed becomes the voyeur and spectator becomes the unknowing subject of another's gaze, the willing audience member is controlled and his or her experience with the mystical saint carefully formed.

## Conclusion

The Cornaro Chapel in the Roman church of Santa Maria della Vittoria has often been referred to as the height of Baroque theatricality due to its overwhelming design and architecture. This "theatricality" is more than just the visual constructs, however. I have argued that through the employment of the *bel composto* and framework of the theatre, Bernini controlled the interaction between Saint Teresa and the devoted.

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<sup>47</sup> Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Transforming Spectators into *Viri Perculsi*: Baroque Theatre as Machinery for Producing Affects," *Performativity and Performance in Baroque Rome*, edited by Peter Gillgren and Mårten Snickare, (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012): 94.

In chapter one, *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* was discussed in terms of its subject matter, related imagery, and reception. First, I presented the life and works of Teresa of Ávila. While many believed her practices and beliefs to be controversial and dangerous to the Catholic tradition, her followers would construct iconography as propaganda during the fight for her canonization. This iconography, highlighted by the images discussed, would continuously ignore her femininity to emphasize her humility and legitimacy. Therefore, when Bernini's sculptural altarpiece depicted Teresa's ecstasy as one experienced by the body as well as the soul, it would be received negatively by some. Yet, if *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* was viewed as part of the *bel composto*, as done by Bernini's biographers and the anonymous poet, it would be understood as an episode authorized by the Church.

In the second chapter, I argued the Cornaro Chapel was a reflection of the difficult canonization process met by supporters of Teresa. In order to present Teresa's ecstatic experiences as deemed genuine by the Church, Bernini would need to control the spectator's interaction with the Saint through the *bel composto* and theatrical elements. The devotee is kept at a distance from the intimate display on the altarpiece. He or she mirrors the appropriate behavior of the Cornaro family, who acts as both performers and audience members symbolizing Church authority during the Counter-Reformation.

In conclusion, I propose it is through the *bel composto* that Bernini not only motivated "correct" devotion from the spectator, but also reflected the conflicting unification of the sacred and profane in Baroque Rome. The spectacle was to be seen in all parts of the period. Even within the Catholic Church, the Barberini Pope would act as both the height of religious authority and prolific patron of theatrical arts and events. As echoed within the chapel, the sanctity of Teresa's legitimized ecstasy would be unified with elements derived from machines

and balcony seats of the theatre. The gaze of the Church would become one with that of fellow audience members.



Fig. 1 *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*  
Gian Lorenzo Bernini  
1645-165



Fig. 2 *The Cornaro Chapel*  
Gian Lorenzo Bernini  
1652



Fig. 3 *Teresa de Jesús*  
Juan de la Miseria  
1576



Fig. 4 *St. Teresa*  
Hieronymus Wierix  
1553-1619



Fig. 5 *Transverberation of St. Teresa*  
Juan de Jesús María  
1609



Fig. 6 *Transverberation of St. Teresa*  
Gilles Rousselet, after Charles Le Brun  
1643



Fig. 7 The Transverberation of St. Teresa

Artist Unknown

1647





Fig. 9 Right Side of Mortuary Pavement in the Cornaro Chapel  
Gian Lorenzo Bernini  
1645-1652



Fig. 10 Left Side of Mortuary Pavement in Cornaro Chapel  
Gian Lorenzo Bernini  
1645-1652



Fig. 11 Ceiling of Cornaro Chapel  
Gian Lorenzo Bernini  
1645-1652



Fig. 12 *Memorial to Maria Raggi*  
Gian Lorenzo Bernini  
1647

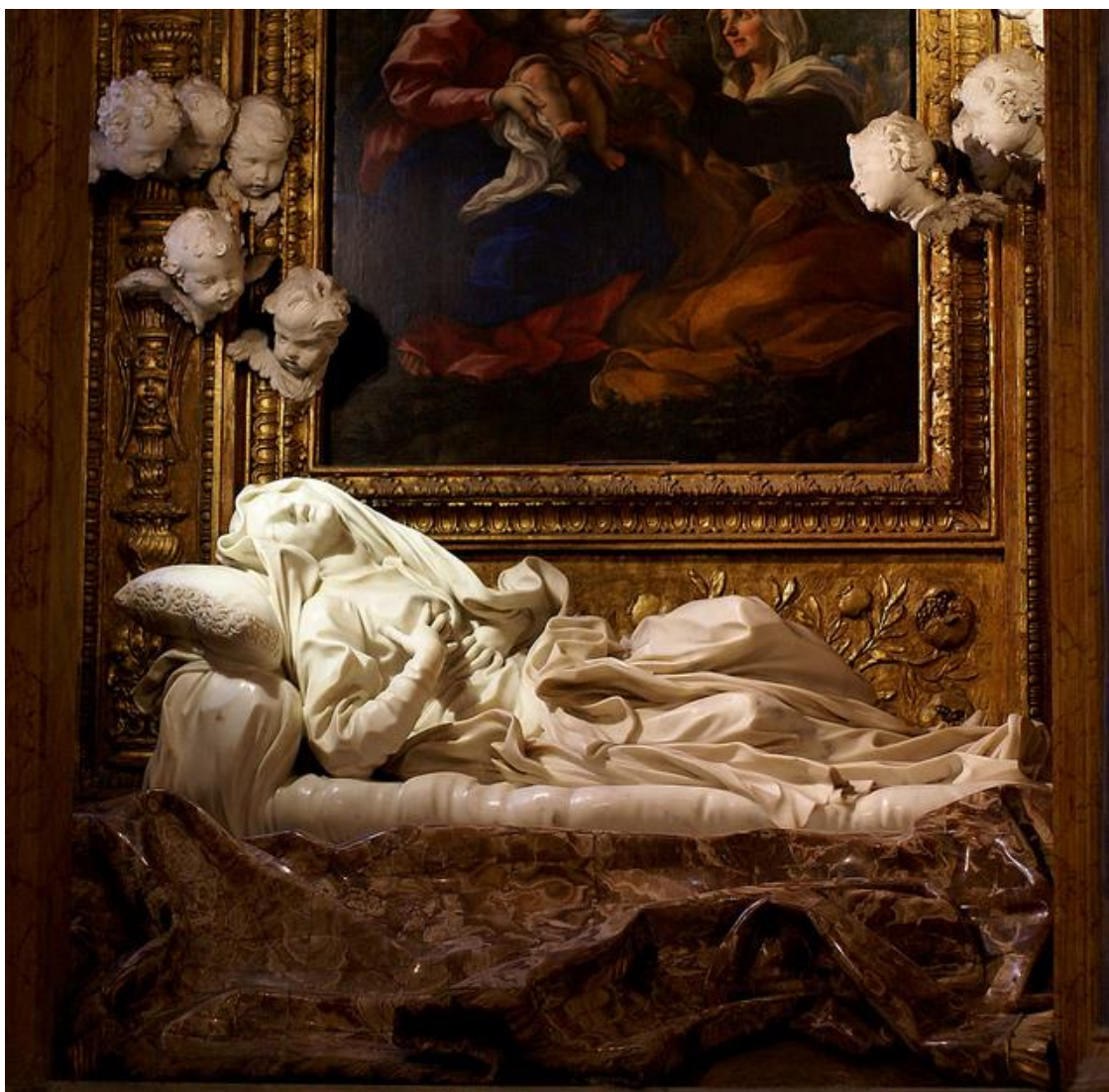


Fig. 13 *Blessed Ludovica Albertoni*  
Gian Lorenzo Bernini  
1671-1674



Fig. 14 *Habakkuk and the Angel*  
Gian Lorenzo Bernini  
1655-61



Fig. 15 Right Side of Cornaro Chapel  
Gian Lorenzo Bernini  
1645-1652



Fig. 16 Left Side of Cornaro Chapel  
Gian Lorenzo Bernini  
1645-1652



Fig. 17, *Levitations of St. Teresa*  
 Adriaen Collaert and Cornelis Galle  
 1613

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