

“Gian Carlo Bernini Parla (Bernini Speaks)

By Frances Roberts

Foreword: With apologies to Robert Browning, iambic pentameter, verse narrative, etc., here is a poem in 19th C. style on a 17th C. true story. The bust of Costanza by Bernini was exhibited at the Getty Museum of Art and Costanza was only recently identified and described by a noted art scholar from Emory University who spoke there.

So many days I've grieved and thought "Unfair,"
That she should live and breathe the ambient air,
She whom I loved with all a lover's rage,
She whom I should have locked in iron cage!

But no, I loved the way she spread her wings
And took to knowing all artistic things.
It was as if I'd gained a new, free life
To live, away from that benighted old-crone wife
(As dry as pumice and as full of pox:
The house had turned into an empty box.)

Oh, my Costanza, inconstant as the wind,
Why could I not read thy foxy, devious mind?
But I was so smitten with the dove's-wing skin
The clear green eyes, the heart I had to win
Or die....It was that grim a game I played..

She sat for me, hours into days we stayed
In that close congress, her beauty well displayed
So as to make the clay easy to work, shaping to my will.
I see her soft, sweet smile, her hands so still,
How was I to know they soon would spread
Over his shoulders, loving, 'round his head?

I fashioned her in marble then, they said "A Jewel!".
How could I have known the ending would turn cruel?
He said goodbye so gaily as he went,
Stepping lightly, as if careless and content.
Curious, I followed, tracing his steps, intent
On knowing where it was, on what errand he was sent.

My brother's outing ended at her door. He bent;
I saw him enter quickly, and with laughter.
She smiled. I could but guess what might come after,
So I went, too. They lay in bed together,

Oblivious to all but their own sunny weather.

My knife cut deep, her cheek was slashed and bled,
And soon the bed was covered all in red.
Her beauty never more could man inspire—
I felt as if my rage and love were fire.

The deed's been done long years ago, and still
I live again the moment, a last will
And legacy of hate and love and spite
That has not harmed her, no, not one small mite.
Her husband—my assistant!—joined her in her plight,
Took her to an asylum for battered wives in Rome;
I wish to God I'd never left my home.

So what's the end? In the house I gave her, now a grand salon,
She sells fine art like a duchess to the manor born.
She wins all hearts, her talents praised in fame.
My heart's still heavy, acid-sour, and lame.

The Pope's her patron; she's left him the place;
I hope the termites work on it apace.

Note: The house still stands in Rome, and still belongs to the Vatican.

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