

LOUISE GEORGE CLUBB

Giambattista Della Porta, Dramatist



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GIAMBATTISTA DELLA PORTA
DRAMATIST



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Dramatist

By LOUISE GEORGE CLUBB

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To My Parents

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Introduction

THE two greatest tourist attractions of Naples about the year 1600 were, according to contemporary report, the baths at Pozzuoli and Giambattista Della Porta.¹ Certainly Della Porta was one of the most famous men in Italy. The Emperor Rudolph and the Duke of Florence sent embassies, and the Duke of Mantua came in person to see the Neapolitan wonder-worker who had penetrated the secrets of nature and was expected at any moment to discover the philosopher's stone. He could count as friends, admirers, or detractors the most learned men of his time—Kepler, for example, and Sarpi, Bodin, Campanella, Peiresc, and Galileo. The literate world knew the results of Della Porta's investigations, experiments, and speculations through his heterogeneous publications, from the earliest edition of his *Magiae naturalis* (Neapoli, 1558) to *De aëris transmutationibus* (Romae, 1610), the last of his scientific works printed in his lifetime. He wrote on cryptography, horticulture, optics, mnemonics, meteorology, physics, astrology, physiognomy, mathematics, and fortification, and when he died at eighty, he was preparing a treatise in support of his claim to the invention of the telescope. In his spare time, Della Porta wrote plays.

Seventeen of them have survived: a tragicomedy, a sacred tragedy, a secular tragedy, and fourteen comedies. This hobby was more important than he could have foreseen, for while modern historians of science consider Della Porta an interesting curiosity, historians of the drama regard him as the foremost Italian comic playwright of his time. Despite the condescending interest of the former and the admiration of the latter, however, Della Porta has been neglected by scholars. Although the *Magiae naturalis* and *De humana phys-*

¹ Bartolomeo Chioccarelli, *De illustribus scriptoribus qui in civitate et regno Neapolis ab orbe condito ad annum usque MDCXXXXVI, floruerunt* (Neapoli, 1780), 314.

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iognomonia went into many editions and translations, and individual comedies were reprinted in Italy, adapted abroad in the seventeenth century, and are still occasionally included in modern anthologies of Italian drama, there has never been a complete edition of Della Porta's works, scientific or dramatic. Moreover, although for more than three centuries he has been the subject of paragraphs or chapters in encyclopedias, histories of science, literature, or drama, as well as of articles and pamphlets, there exists no definitive biography, no detailed analysis of the plays, no itemized account of their fortunes abroad. Instead, a great mass of fragmentary information and misinformation has waited to be sifted. The present study is an attempt to weld the sound pieces into a coherent synopsis of Della Porta's life, dramatic works, and influence, to indicate valuable sources and to suggest areas—and reasons—for further investigation.

Scraps of biographical material about Della Porta are to be found in the dedications and prologues to some of his works, in the many poems and epigrams addressed to him by such admirers as Bernardino Rota, the Cavalier Marino, and Giambattista Basile, in contemporary memoirs, compilations of witty sayings, collections of emblems, and above all in the two extant batches of Della Porta's correspondence: the first with Cardinal Luigi d'Este between 1579 and 1586, the second with his fellow members of the Accademia dei Lincei from 1603 until his death twelve years later. The first account of Della Porta's life was the deliberately misleading *précis* designed by the Lincei to give his memory an odor of orthodoxy, then left unpublished till the twentieth century. The Linceo manuscripts and the Este correspondence were not available to Giovanni Imperiali, Bartolomeo Chioccarelli, or Lorenzo Crasso, compilers of seventeenth-century biographical dictionaries in which brief biographies of Della Porta were first published. Pompeo Sarnelli appended to his translation of Della Porta's unpublished *Chirofisonomia* a biographical chapter based on documents furnished by Della

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Porta's descendants, Domenico and Niccolò di Costanzo. These four accounts, together with the general Neapolitan chronicles of Giovanni Antonio Summonte and Antonio Bulifon became the standard sources of information about Della Porta for historians of the next century.

In the early nineteenth century an increase of interest in Della Porta was reflected by the pamphlets of Henri Duchesne, Francesco Colangelo, Giovanni Palmieri, and Giuseppe Rossi, none of which, however, produced any important results. Later in the century, new discoveries were made, and articles written which remain valuable today. Francesco Fiorentino, the author of one of the best, attributed the resurgence of interest in Della Porta to Luigi Settembrini's urging his younger colleagues to study the neglected figures of the late Renaissance.² Fiorentino's research was facilitated by Giuseppe Campori's discovery of the Della Porta - Luigi d'Este correspondence and by Camillo Minieri-Riccio's publication of Della Porta's will.

At the beginning of our century new details about Della Porta's family were discovered by Gaetano Parascandalo and by Vincenzo Spampinato. Perhaps the largest contribution to knowledge of Della Porta's life was made by the archivists of the Accademia dei Lincei, especially Giuseppe Gabrieli, who between 1925 and 1940 compiled the best Della Porta bibliography to date, regularly published new fragments of knowledge, and ended by discovering the missing manuscript of *De telescopio*. In recent years one or another aspect of Della Porta's scientific career has attracted the attention of such historians of science as Gioacchino Paparelli, Mario Gliozzi, Vasco Ronchi, Lynn Thorndike, and George Sarton.

Della Porta's striking reputation as a scientist for so long

² "Del teatro di Giovan Battista de la Porta," *Giornale napoletano di filosofia e lettere, scienze morali e politiche*, Nuova serie, Anno II, Vol. III, fasc. 7 (marzo 1880), reprinted in *Studi e ritratti della Rinascenza* (Bari, 1911), 294.

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obscured his greater significance as a dramatist that his early biographers were usually content merely to list his plays without comment. Even after Gennaro Muzio published the only complete edition of the comedies in 1726, eighteenth-century historians of literature like Girolamo Tiraboschi paid more attention to the scientific works. But Tiraboschi also praised the plays and helped to spread the mistaken notion that Della Porta wrote them in his last years. Subsequently, Pietro Napoli-Signorelli repeated the error, warmly praising Della Porta as one of the few good playwrights of the seventeenth century. Napoli-Signorelli's high opinion is the more valuable for being based on acquaintance not only with the comedies but with the three verse plays as well—an acquaintance shared by few other scholars in any century. No new observations on Della Porta the dramatist were made until the middle of the nineteenth century, when Julius Leopold Klein devoted some fifty pages of his voluminous history to an analysis of three Della Portean comedies, concluding that their author had improved the Seicento *imbroglio* by means of his well-organized scientific mind and understanding of psychology and political intrigue.

The renewal of interest in Della Porta's life in the late nineteenth century was extended to his plays. Eugenio Camerini hailed him as the worthiest of Goldoni's precursors, especially admiring Della Porta's adaptation of *commedia dell'arte* figures to learned comedy. Fiorentino added to his biographical summary two short but very valuable articles on the drama. Having obtained the sole known copy of *Penelope*, one of the two extant copies of *Ulisse*, and the manuscript of *Georgio*, Fiorentino described these three verse dramas, attempted to date the comedies, and succeeded at least in proving that many of them were not seventeenth- but sixteenth-century works. A few years later, Benedetto Croce discovered a printed copy of *Georgio*, and in the course of general research on Neapolitan literature and his-

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tory, Croce turned up and published other useful items about Della Porta's theater, and also took part in the flurry of controversy about his relation to the *commedia dell'arte*.³ To the north, interest in Della Porta was growing as a result of Arthur Ludwig Stiefel's and Joseph Vianey's investigations of his influence on Rotrou and Tristan L'Hermite. In our time further information about adaptations of Della Porta's comedies abroad has been supplied by Joseph Bolton, D. J. Gordon, and Hugh G. Dick.

Della Porta studies were launched in the twentieth century by Francesco Milano's long article, which attempted a classification of the comedies and established many of their Latin and earlier Italian sources. In the following decade Vincenzo Spampanato undertook a modern edition of the comedies, but issued only eight, without notes or prefaces. Abridgements of two of them appeared in a theatrical journal, following Anton Giulio Bragaglia's production of *La Cintia* at the Teatro delle Arti in 1940.

Some of the best work on Della Porta's theater is to be found in general histories of Italian literature or drama. Luigi Tonelli has emphasized Della Porta's sense of theater, Mario Apollonio and Marvin Herrick his blending of *commedia erudita* with *commedia dell'arte*. Attilio Momigliano likens Della Porta's florid imagination to Shakespeare's and classifies him with Bruno, Tasso, and Guarini as representative of the pre-baroque style, adding that these four transitional figures are more important to Italian literature than those whose way they prepared. Perhaps the most useful discussion of Della Porta's comedy is that of Ireneo Sanesi in his history of the genre in Italy. Recently, articles by Giorgio Pullini and Antonio Corsano have offered analyses, respectively, of Della Porta's prose style and of his intellectual characteristics revealed in both the scientific works and the comedies. Although no one has yet undertaken a

³ See Appendix B for an account of this controversy.

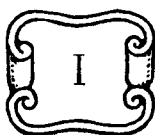
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complete study of Della Porta's comedy, various scholars have prepared the way for one. The non-comic dramas, however, have been generally ignored.

The characteristics invariably pointed out by admirers of the comedies are their expert construction and rich mixtures of learned with popular elements, and of sentiment with hilarity. The language is praised lavishly by some scholars, criticized by others, and has caused many to overestimate the baroque element in Della Porta's dramas. Whatever individual disagreements there may be, however, the scholarly consensus is that if the single masterpieces of Machiavelli and Bruno are excepted, Della Porta's are the best Italian comedies before Goldoni's.

On the periphery of Della Porta scholarship are the enthusiasts who have from time to time associated him with their doomed or dubious causes. Certain portions of the *Magiae naturalis* have caused his name to be invoked by spiritualists. A somewhat more respectable association was the department of Lombrosian criminal anthropology christened Gabinetto-Scuola di Antropologia Criminale "Giambattista della Porta," established at the University of Naples in 1917. Because of his *De humana physiognomonia* and *Chirofisionomia* Della Porta was regarded by the director and his colleagues as the Italian grandfather of their science and was extensively eulogized in the departmental journal, *Anomalo*. The department is no more, but the bust of Della Porta commissioned for its inauguration still ornaments the university. A decade later Della Porta became the patron saint of Neapolitan photographers when his claim to the invention of the camera obscura was defended against an attack in the Vicentine *Rivista fotografica italiana*. But however such manifestations may have spread Della Porta's fame, they added nothing to the miscellany of facts from which the following biographical sketch is constructed.

GIAMBATTISTA DELLA PORTA
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Della Porta's Life

GIOVANNI BATTISTA was the third of Nardo Antonio Della Porta's four sons, and the second of the three who survived childhood. The boys' mother was a Neapolitan patrician, sister to Adriano Guglielmo Spadafora (or Spatafora), learned *conservator quinternionum* of the Naples archives from 1536.¹ The Della Portas claimed a family tree planted in the time of Hannibal. It flourished later in the person of the Lombard prince Adalferio, whose descendants held important positions in Salerno, Vico Equense, and Naples.² The main branch of the family, established in Salerno, was considered noble from the beginning of Angevine rule in the thirteenth century, but the subsidiary line from which Nardo's father, Ferdinando, sprang seems to have been less exalted.³ Father and son are referred to in various documents, however, as *magnifici*,⁴ a

¹ Francesco Fiorentino, *Studi e ritratti della Rinascenza* (Bari, 1911), 238, a reprinting of "Della vita e delle opere di Giovan Battista de la Porta," *Nuova Antologia*, Serie II, XXI (Roma, maggio 1880), 251-284. Della Porta's eldest brother, Francesco, who died in childhood, is mentioned only by Luigi Amabile, *Fra Tommaso Campanella, la sua congiura, i suoi processi e la sua pazzia* (Napoli, 1882), 33. Spadafora's fame as an antiquarian and collector is mentioned by Carlo Celano, *Notizie del bello, dell'antico e del curioso della città di Napoli . . .* (Napoli, 1692), I, 110.

² Giuseppe Gabrieli, "Giovan Battista Della Porta Linceo," *Giornale critico de filosofia italiana*, VIII, fasc. I (1927), 423; and Vincenzo Spanpanato, "I Della Porta ne' Duoi fratelli rivali," *Anomalo* (Napoli, 1918), 199.

³ Amabile noted that an established noble family would not have needed the privileges bestowed by Charles on the Neapolitan Della Portas (. . . *Campanella . . . congiura . . .*, 33, note b).

⁴ Gaetano Parascandolo, *Notizie autentiche sulla famiglia e sulla patria di Giovanni Battista della Porta* (Napoli, 1903), 14.

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term often used to denote untitled property owners of good birth.

Nardo Antonio's considerable wealth comprised land and ships. He once leased three vessels to Charles V, and together with his father and three uncles, received from the emperor in 1548 the formal status of familiar or court domestic, exemption from all tribunals but the *Collaterale*, and the right to maintain armed followers. From 1541 Nardo Antonio held the office of *Scrivano di Mandamento* or royal secretary for civil appeals to the vicariate, in which he was succeeded by his eldest surviving son, Gian Vincenzo.⁵ Like many other petty nobles of the time, some of the Della Portas lost their fortunes in 1551 by supporting the unsuccessful anti-Spanish rebellion of Ferrante Sanseverino, prince of Salerno,⁶ but Nardo Antonio must have cherished more profitable sympathies, for the Spanish viceroy never revoked his privileges nor deprived the family of the office which Gian Vincenzo held for many years.

The Neapolitan branch of the Della Portas had three domiciles: a town house in Via Toledo near the Piazza Carità, in that aromatic hive known today as Napoli vecchia but forming then the most elegant central section of the city; a villa in Due Porte, a tiny hamlet in the hills immediately to the northwest of Naples; and another, more magnificent, villa at Vico Equense. This little paradise on the sea, twelve miles south of the city, had been from the time of the Angevine kings a favored summer resort of aristocratic Neapolitans, who followed the example of Charles II by spending lavishly on local improvements. In the sixteenth century it became the site of the printing presses of Giovanni Cacchio, Carlino e Pace, and Orazio Salviani, from which issued learned texts in some of the most beautiful editions of the period. The Villa delle Pradelle at Vico Equense may well have been the actual birthplace of Giambattista and his brothers, for although he

⁵ Gabrieli, "G. B. Della Porta . . .," 423-24.

⁶ Spanpanato, "I Della Porta . . .," 200.

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always signed himself "napoletano" it appears that all his life Della Porta exercised rights in Vico Equense's church politics permitted only to native-born landowners.⁷

For many years the date of Della Porta's birth was, owing to his own mis-statements, a controversial subject, providing material for numerous little scholarly notes and articles and resulting in the playwright-scientist's being considered in some quarters a monster of unscientific inaccuracy, and in others a congenital liar. The preface to the first edition of *Magiae naturalis* gives an impression of experience and wisdom, but in the preface to the second edition of 1589, Della Porta stated that he was then fifty and that he had first published the book at fifteen. The earliest known edition, however, is that of 1558. In 1612 he wrote to Cardinal Borromeo that his *Taumatologia* contained the labors of seventy-seven years.⁸ Della Porta was, in fact, seventy-seven at this time, but since even Hercules could hardly have begun such intellectual labors in the cradle, some scholars have been misled by his statement to think that he was eighty-five when he died in 1615, a misconception carelessly launched by Prince

⁷ Parascandolo, *op.cit.*, 11ff. This neglected study of church records by the pastor of the parish church of SS. Cino e Giovanni in Vico Equense notes that citizens of towns tributary to Naples customarily had their children baptized in the capital so as to secure for them certain municipal privileges granted by Charles V. The most popular church for the ceremony was San Giovanni Maggiore, accounting for the great number of Neapolitan Christian names prefixed by "Giovanni" or "Gian," as in the case of the Della Porta brothers. Since Giambattista's heirs were excluded from the right of nominating rectors and chaplains in Vico Equense on grounds of Neapolitan birth, it might be concluded that Giambattista's simultaneous exercise of these rights in Vico Equense and of those of citizenship in Naples resulted from his birth in the former and baptism in the latter. The conclusion seems valid, even though it contradicts Carlo Celano's statement that Della Porta was born in Via Toledo, (*op.cit.*, I, 7), where there is a plaque bearing the same information, perhaps on Celano's authority.

⁸ Gabrieli, "Bibliografia Lincea. 1. Giambattista Della Porta. Notizia bibliografica dei suoi mss. e libri, edizioni, ecc., con documenti inediti," *Rendiconti della R. Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Classe di scienze morali, storiche, e filologiche*, Serie 6, VIII (Roma, 1932), 268.

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Cesi in 1625.⁹ Even the date of his death was temporarily cast in doubt by a stonecutter's error in lettering the family tomb. Such discrepancies and the equivocation in Della Porta's own account are responsible for Gabrieli's and Duchesne's dating his birth 1538 and 1545, respectively, and for Guiscardi's dating his death 1610.¹⁰ Now that Gioacchino Paparelli has persuasively marshaled the arguments for dating Della Porta's birth between October 3 and November 15, 1535,¹¹ there remains in question only the reason for the mystery. It is likely that Della Porta's conflicting statements about his age were dictated less by forgetfulness or sheer inability to tell the truth than by his instinct for showmanship in presenting an image of himself to the world, and in part by the necessity of self-defense. He loved secrets and ceremony, enjoyed mystifying the public, and cultivated a remarkable variety of interests, some of which were frowned on by the Inquisition. Had the Holy Office not threatened, or had he not felt the Renaissance urge to be, or at least seem to be, simultaneously as many things as possible, he might have spared himself his unsynchronized attempts to appear now more precocious, now more mature than he actually was.

Circumstances more than half determined Della Porta's choice of a many-faceted *persona* for himself, by providing him with a wonderfully broad education. Nardo Antonio had a taste for learning, and so delighted in the company of philosophers, mathematicians, poets, and musicians that his house in Naples became a veritable academy.¹² In hot weather the erudite society was probably transported down the coast

⁹ Gabrieli, "G. B. Della Porta . . .," 428.

¹⁰ Gabrieli, "Bibliografia . . . Della Porta," 227; [Henri Gabriel Duchesne], *Notice historique sur la vie et les ouvrages de J. B. Porta, gentilhomme napolitain* (Paris, An. ix 1800-1801), 5; and Roberto Guiscardi, . . . *MDCXV(?)* (n.p., 1885?).

¹¹ "La data di nascita di Giambattista Della Porta," *Vita italiana*, iv (Buenos Aires, 1955), 14-15.

¹² Gabrieli, "G. B. Della Porta . . .," 424.

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to the Villa delle Pradelle, as Giambattista's learned circle of friends was to be in later years. In this intellectual ambience Gian Vincenzo, Giambattista, and Gian Ferrante were reared, stimulated by celebrated visitors and tutored by permanent members of the group. Giambattista's lifelong devotion to his maternal uncle, and the similarity between their minds and methods observed by Bernardino Rota¹³ suggest that Spadafora supervised his nephew's education, which included the usual humanistic curriculum but emphasized mathematics and medicine. Della Porta's first biographer, Pompeo Sarnelli, skims over the early years of schooling by remarking that in boyhood the future playwright and scientist shone in literary studies, composing admirable orations in Latin and the vernacular after he had mastered rhetoric and poetics, and excelled in "natural philosophy," substituting his own speculations wherever the opinions of his masters struck him as commonplace.¹⁴ Among these masters were Domenico Pizzimenti, classicist and alchemist, Donato Antonio Altomare and Giovanni Antonio Pisano, philosophers and doctors active in Naples during Della Porta's youth. The last of these, who was also public lecturer in applied medicine from 1557 to 1585 and attracted capacity crowds,¹⁵ is praised by Della Porta in the dedication of *De refractione* (1593) to Pisano's son, Ottavio. Possibly Della Porta also attended lectures by the adventurous physician Girolamo Cardano, who roamed the peninsula, expounding his wild and brilliant theories at every university which received him. Although the University of Naples was not officially established until 1581, there were *scuole pubbliche* fostering science, to which

¹³ *Delle poesie . . . colle annotazioni di Scipione Ammirato sopra alcuni sonetti* (Napoli, 1737), 206. First edition 1572.

¹⁴ "Vita di Gio: Battista Della Porta," in *Della Chirosfonomia*, trans. . . . (Napoli, 1677), A7verso.

¹⁵ Gabrieli, "Spigolature Dellaportiane," *Rendiconti . . .*, Serie 6, xi (Roma, 1936), 492; and Amabile, . . . *Campanella . . . congiura* . . . , 35, note a.

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the young experimenter progressed when his private instruction ended, and where he could have heard Cardano.¹⁶ But while *Magiae naturalis* xvii, 15, indicates that Della Porta knew and disagreed with some of Cardano's teachings, there is no proof of personal acquaintance between them.

Gian Vincenzo, Giambattista, and Gian Ferrante were all deeply interested in music, and refused to allow a total lack of talent for it to impede their progress in theory at the Scuola di Pitagora, an exclusive academy of musicians,¹⁷ who were apparently sufficiently impressed by sheer intellectual power to receive into their midst the trio of tone-deaf young mathematicians.

Had Nardo Antonio intended to rear his sons as professional scholars, applied music would not have been introduced into their curriculum. But the Della Portas were too much aware of social position to think in terms of professions or specialization; Giambattista and his brothers struggled vainly to carry a tune because singing was a courtly accomplishment, and they were being trained as courtiers, i.e., as learned gentlemen with the emphasis on GENTLEMEN. To this end they were taught to dress well, to dance, to ride, and to take part in tournaments and other games. Such training inculcated in Della Porta a lasting taste for public finery and noble company, despite the natural inclination which later led him in his private life to play the part of the other-worldly scholar, unathletic and carelessly dressed.

The only one of his youthful recreations which left a mark on his career was the drama. Spurred on by Ferrante Sanseverino's patronage of private theatricals as well as of professional troupes,¹⁸ wealthy Neapolitans of Nardo Antonio's

¹⁶ Lorenzo Crasso, *Elogii di huomini letterati* (Venetia, 1666), I, 170. Crasso said Della Porta followed in the footsteps of Arnaldo di Villanuova and Cardano, but he may have referred only to the undoubted influence of their works.

¹⁷ Gabrieli, "G. B. Della Porta . . .," 424.

¹⁸ Giovanni Antonio Summonte, *Historia della città e regno di Napoli*, 2^a ed. (Napoli, 1675), IV, 235.

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generation delighted in dressing up and reciting comedies for each other. The incomplete records of Neapolitan academies offer only hints about the literary milieu in which Giambattista grew up. The scientific brotherhood of the Segreti is the only sixteenth-century academy with which the Della Portas have been linked by historians of these societies. But on the fragmentary membership lists of mid-century academies, the names of Neapolitan literary lions are frequently mingled with those of Della Porta's teachers and of families to whom he was bound by friendship or marriage. Before its dissolution in 1543, the Accademia Pontaniana included Bernardino Rota,¹⁹ the leading Neapolitan poet of his generation, who later addressed a poem jointly to Della Porta and his uncle, A. G. Spadafora.²⁰ Probably Rota was one of the early *distinti letterati* in Spadafora's own academy, of which little is known save that it still existed in 1589.²¹ Until 1580 the poet Giovanni Battista Rinaldi presided over a club which held summer meetings at the Carafa villa in Vico Equense.²² Proof of Giambattista's later association with the Carafas and the proximity of their estates suggests that the Della Portas were among Rinaldi's acquaintance. Through Rota and G. A. Pisano, they may also have been connected with the poet Angelo di Costanzo and with the Sereni, the Eubolei, and the Ardenti, three of the many academies suppressed by the viceroy in 1547 and 1548, in retribution for Neapolitan objections to the Spanish Inquisition.²³

Rota and di Costanzo both wrote comedies,²⁴ and one of the latter's fellow members in the Accademia degl'Incogniti,

¹⁹ Camillo Minieri-Riccio, "Cenno storico delle accademie fiorite in Napoli," *Archivio storico per le province napoletane* v, fasc. II (Napoli, 1880), 364.

²⁰ See page 7, note 13.

²¹ Minieri-Riccio, *op.cit.*, v, fasc. III, 603.

²² *Ibid.*, v, fasc. II, 370.

²³ *Ibid.*, v, fasc. III, 590; IV, fasc. I, 172-174; and IV, fasc. III, 520.

²⁴ Benedetto Croce, *I teatri di Napoli. Secolo XV-XVIII* (Napoli, 1891), 47-8, 49. Croce's source was Minturno's *Arte poetica* (Venetia, 1564), Lib. II, 66, 114.

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Giovanni Domenico di Lega,²⁵ was the author of a very early sacred tragedy.²⁶ Possibly these were among the first examples of drama set before the young Della Porta. In spite of the difficulty of dating the composition of most of his dramatic works, it is safe to suppose that he first tried his hand at playwriting in boyhood, and that some of his published comedies were revisions of scripts he originally produced for the amateur players among his family and friends, a conclusion supported by several of his contemporaries' later references to Della Porta's literary precocity. The first of his comedies, *L'Olimpia*, was published in 1589 but composed in "i suoi primi anni," according to Pompeo Barbarito. Regrettably, the editor did not specify which years he meant. The earliest possible date for the play is 1550.

In that year Della Porta was fifteen, the age at which he claims to have published the first edition of the *Magia*. In the absence of an edition to substantiate the claim, however, and despite the twisting and turning of his words and dates by scholars who wish to avoid impugning his veracity, it seems necessary either to agree with Edward Rosen that Della Porta was quite willing to lie in order to pass himself off on the public as a *wunderkind*,²⁷ or to assume that he hoped to excuse as youthful errors certain magic formulae in the book which first attracted the Inquisition's attention to him. But although the *Magiae* was not printed until Della Porta was twenty-three, it is very probable that at fifteen he was already experimenting with chemicals, herbs, and magnets, and collecting the occult rumors which make up the first version of this remarkable work. His classics master, Pizzimenti, later privately claimed to be the author of the original *Magiae*.²⁸ But whatever aid he may have received, Della Porta was uni-

²⁵ Minieri-Riccio, *op.cit.*, iv, fasc. III, 528.

²⁶ Lione Allacci, *Drammaturgia . . . accresciuta e continuata fino all'anno MDCCLV* (Venezia, 1755), 539.

²⁷ *The Naming of the Telescope* (New York, 1947), 15 *passim*.

²⁸ Nicolas Guibert, *De interitu alchymiae metallorum transmutoriae tractatus aliquot . . .* (Tulli, 1614), 134.

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versally credited with the work. The years of his young manhood, of which even less is known than of other parts of his long, poorly documented life, were probably the most untroubled he was ever to enjoy, for the clouds that were to settle permanently over him later had not appeared and could not appear until they had been set in motion by the disquieting reputation he was now in the process of acquiring.

In this pleasant period perhaps occurred the youthful love affair recorded by Giulio Cesare Capaccio. Once involved, Della Porta felt that he had been incautious and determined to fall out of love. Either his will power was strong or his love weak, for he succeeded, then celebrated his release by inventing an *impresa*: a butterfly breaking out of a cocoon, with the motto, *Et feci et fregi*.²⁹ His own man once more, Giambattista could return to the laboratory.

He was not working alone. Gian Vincenzo followed the example of their uncle in building a collection of books, statues, and ancient marbles. His interest lay more in the library than the laboratory, and he put his classical learning at the disposal of his experimenting younger brother.³⁰ The elder was more proficient in the art of astrology, which fascinated them both, and it has been suggested that he taught Giambattista much of what he knew, especially about the classical methods of prognostication. There was great love between the two, and the marked taste Giambattista displayed all his life for working in fellowship was undoubtedly fostered not only by the atmosphere of his father's circle, but also by the long and fruitful association with his quiet, learned elder brother. The youngest, Gian Ferrante, shared the others' interests, but before fame touched the family he died, leaving behind an excellent collection of crystals and geological specimens as a monument to his scholarly pursuits.

²⁹ *Delle imprese trattato . . . in tre libri diviso* (Napoli, 1592), I, 39verso-40.

³⁰ Crasso, *op.cit.*, 171.

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About the time of his death the Della Porta fortunes dwindled a bit, necessitating the sale of Gian Ferrante's collection.³¹

The financial crisis may have been precipitated by expenditures in the name of learning. The mysterious and undoubtedly costly academy of the Segreti was formed probably before Della Porta's first travels, during the period when he was collecting material and preparing his first published work. Each aspirant to the academy, which met in its founder's home, was required to discover a secret of nature unknown to the rest of mankind.³² To judge by some of the hare-brained fictions Della Porta published as scientific revelations, the emphasis was on *meraviglia* rather than on empirical proof. Nevertheless, the founder's pride in his academy was justified, for the joint experiments of its members produced many of the valid observations of phenomena in physics, optics, and botany which appear in the greatly augmented second edition of the *Magiae*. It is not known whether or not the Segreti were organized before 1558, in time to contribute to the first edition, that shorter and less scientific potpourri of magic.³³

While his experiments proceeded apace, Della Porta turned another part of his mercurial mind to an interest that lay out-

³¹ Gabrieli, "G. B. Della Porta . . .," 429.

³² *Magiae naturalis libri viginti* (Neapoli, 1589), preface. The 1558 edition in four books and the augmented 1589 edition in twenty will henceforth be distinguished as *Magiae*₁ and *Magiae*₂, respectively.

³³ Derek Price, in his introduction to the facsimile edition of the anonymous English translation, *Natural Magick* (London, 1658), facsimile (New York, 1957), v; and Martha Ornstein in *The Role of Scientific Societies in the Seventeenth Century*, 3d ed. (Chicago, 1938), 74, state that the Segreti and the Oziosi were one and the same group. George Sarton in *Six Wings: Men of Science in the Renaissance* (Bloomington, 1957), 87, declared that the Segreti were organized in 1560 and the Oziosi somewhat earlier. Actually, there is no proof of when the Segreti began, and the Oziosi, which was not a scientific but a literary academy, was organized in 1611. See Antonio Bulifon, *Giornali di Napoli dal MDXLVII al MDCCVI, Vol. I, 1547-1691* (Napoli, 1932), 91.

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side the laboratory. The art of cryptography appealed to his love of mystery, and since its use in diplomatic dispatches provided a practical demand for a work on the subject, he found it worth his while to make a compilation of cipher systems. Published in 1563, *De furtivis literarum* added greatly to his growing fame. By 1564 he was so well-known as to be included among the celebrities whose witty sayings were being collected by Lodovico Domenichi for the sixth edition of his *Facetie*.³⁴

About this time Della Porta began to travel. In Spain he presented Philip II with his book on ciphers. If the gift was in printed form, it may be assumed that Della Porta traveled out of Italy in 1563 or 1564. But as he took with him also the third edition of the *Magiae* (Antwerp, 1561), with a three-line dedication to King Philip added as a politic afterthought,³⁵ the trip may have begun in 1561, when *De furtivis literarum* was still in manuscript. His preface to the *Magiae* recalls that wherever he went in France and Spain he sought out learned men and libraries, buying books as his means permitted and gathering new "secrets." Known by reputation as a promising mathematician, doctor, and philosopher, he was well received by the Spanish king, a fact which added to his prestige at home in Spanish-ruled Naples, and which may have helped him through later difficulties with the authorities. Like the date, the itinerary of this journey is unknown. Della Porta also traveled extensively in Italy; his *Villae* reveals the author's familiarity with Calabria, Puglia, and Sicily, while at least one of his sojourns in the north is illuminated by a little batch of letters from, to, and about Della Porta in the Este family archives.³⁶

By 1566, to judge from the publication in Naples that year

³⁴ *Della scelta de motti, burle facetie di diversi signori, et d'altre persone private*. Libri sei. 6^a ed. (Fiorenza, 1566), 88. Domenichi died in 1564, leaving material to be added to the sixth edition.

³⁵ Gabrieli, "G. B. Della Porta . . .," 425.

³⁶ Giuseppe Campori, ed., *Giovan Battista della Porta e il cardinale Luigi d'Este, notizie e documenti* (Modena, 1872).

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of his *Arte del ricordare*, he was at home again. The breadth of Della Porta's interests and the number of subjects which he had staked out for conquest explain his personal concern with cultivation of the memory. He wrote the treatise either in order to organize methods for his own improvement, or to increase his fame by sharing the means which had already proved successful with him. He was, of course, not unaware that the subject was currently in vogue. Della Porta clearly did not have a photographic memory, but his talent for categorizing and organizing enabled him to use mnemonic devices with high efficiency. The book was written in Latin but was not published in its original version until 1602. The first edition was in the translation of Dorandino Falcone da Gioia, obviously a pseudonym, perhaps of the author himself.

L'arte del ricordare testifies to Della Porta's continued interest in the drama, by its references to the importance of good memory to players, and its lists of mnemonic ways to remember the difficult names of Plautus's characters. Della Porta was composing plays during the 1560's and 1570's but he sent only his non-dramatic works to the printer. *La turca* contains a reference to "quest' anno del settantadue" (II, 3); there is every possibility that Della Porta wrote this comedy in 1572 and that he was producing other works of this genre, for in 1578 Giovanni Matteo Toscanò hailed him as a flower of Italian literature.³⁷ Evidently his three published works were not the only bids for fame he had made so far; he could hardly have gained a name for literary talent with his books on natural magic, cryptology, and mnemonic devices.

It is possible that Toscanò chose to praise Della Porta with the poets rather than with the investigators of hidden truth, out of fear of seeming to approve studies which had become

³⁷ *Pephus Italiae . . . In quo illustres viri grammatici, oratores, historici, poëtae, mathematici, philosophi, medici, iurisconsulti (quotquot trecentis ab hinc annis tota Italia floruerunt) eorumque patriae, professiones, & litterarum monumenta tum carmine tum soluta oratione recensentur* (Lutetiae), Lib. IV, 116.

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suspect. For at this time occurred a hair-raising event in Della Porta's life, one that was to influence everything else in it, from his scientific aims to his daily habits. It inevitably caused suppression of facts and dissemination of lies by his family and friends, perhaps deliberate destruction of letters, and left to posterity as a record of his life only fragments of a colorful mosaic.

The cataclysm was a brush with the Inquisition. It was only that—nothing to compare with the horrors in store for Campanella, Bruno, and the other unfortunates who could not or would not abandon their research or alter their views to suit the censors. But it was enough to frighten Della Porta, to make him modify his investigations and conceal the incident as much as possible.

No one knows exactly when it happened. A record made by the notary Joele in 1580 of Inquisitional activities before that year notes "Item: le ripetitioni per Gio:battista dela porta," referring to the re-examination of testimony required by Rome in all inquisitional trials. Amabile declared that imprisonment in Rome ordinarily preceded such re-examination, and that if Giuseppe Valletta, in his study of the Holy Office in Naples, neglected to mention any incarceration in his brief account of Della Porta's sentence, it was because Valletta was less concerned with accuracy than with expounding his thesis that the Neapolitan Inquisition's function was primarily preventive, not punitive.³⁸ The trial and probable imprisonment must, in any case, have taken place before November 1579, for by that date Della Porta was in Naples, free to accept Cardinal Luigi d'Este's invitation to join him in Rome.³⁹ The immediate cause of Della Porta's being haled before the Inquisition was a denunciation by some fellow Neapolitans who were scandalized by his growing reputation

³⁸ *Il S. Officio della Inquisizione in Napoli* (Città di Castello, 1892), I, 326f. The work of Valletta referred to is in manuscript at the Biblioteca Nazionale of Naples, Codice x.

³⁹ Campori, *op.cit.*, 7.

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for magic and by the titles of *Indovino* and *Mago* bestowed on him by the populace.⁴⁰ Both Giambattista and Gian Vincenzo were adept at casting horoscopes, and the former had, in addition, a pretty knack for prophecy. He neither took all comers nor charged fees, and he believed in his prophecies. When they proved true, as they quite often did, no one doubted that it was due to the occult knowledge he had acquired in his workroom. Magic was a passion with Della Porta. If it was later modified for a time by external pressures, the passion never left him, not even in the last years of his life.

The denunciation must have been made between 1558, when Della Porta's first work appeared, and 1578, when Toscanò praised his poetry. Apparently not wanting to omit so famous a name from his roster of celebrities, yet recognizing the imprudence of lauding the forbidden lore on which the fame was based, Toscanò compromised by praising Della Porta only for his literary hobby, though he had never published a line of poetry or drama. However uncertain the date, the watchdogs of the true faith surely snapped at him. Della Porta was summoned before the tribunals in Naples and Rome, perhaps briefly imprisoned, and charged by papal order to disband his academy and refrain from practicing illicit arts. As a parting shot, the Neapolitan tribunal commanded him to write a comedy.⁴¹ Corsano suggests that the judges knew Della Porta's reputation as an amateur playwright and therefore advised him, half sardonically, half indulgently, to stick to his plays.⁴² This sort of literary recommendation was not uncommonly issued from the inquisitional bench. Luigi Tansillo was once brought into court for mak-

⁴⁰ Bulifon, *op.cit.*, 98. Fiorentino's opinion (*op.cit.*, 258) that the trouble was sparked by Bodin's attack in 1581 is proved invalid by Amabile's discovery that the trial antedated 1580.

⁴¹ Amabile, *Il S. Officio* . . . , 327, note 1.

⁴² Antonio Corsano, "G. B. Della Porta," *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana*, Terza serie, Anno xxxviii, fasc. 1, (gennaio-marzo 1959), 80.

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ing offensive jokes in his *Vendemmiatore*, and was ordered to make reparation by writing a comedy and re-working his unfinished Christian epic, *Le lacrime di San Pietro*.

The papal order disbanding the Segreti has never come to light, but the academy did cease functioning, and in the *Magiae*₂ preface is referred to as a thing long past. Sarnelli reported, without evidence, that when Della Porta was called to Rome to account for his writings, the inquisitors were vastly impressed by his learning, and when he had satisfactorily proved that his secrets were all "natural," he was given an official commendation and was feted by the leading local prelates.⁴³ Almost certainly this story is part of the white-wash posthumously spread on Della Porta's name by his family and associates. That he himself refers only obliquely to his clash with the Inquisition, and that his friends felt it necessary to publish pious lies about him at his death testify to the truth of Lorenzo Crasso's observation in 1666 that Della Porta had suffered anguish of soul when he was forced first to defend, then to recant his opinions.⁴⁴ The Inquisition had not finished with him entirely—this was never to be—but for the time being he was let off with a warning. Soon afterward, he joined the Jesuit lay congregation and began to distinguish himself by zealous performance of religious duties, spending one day a week on works of charity.⁴⁵

Fear of imprisonment, torture, or death was not the only possible motive for Della Porta's immediate submission to the Inquisition. The temper of his mind must be considered. He was never much interested in theological or philosophical speculation. His own words prove his preference for studying sensible objects:

. . . nam disputationes de naturae principiis, de vacuo, de generatione, et corruptione, et eiusmodi talia, quia longe a nostro sensu remota sunt, maximisque ambagibus involuta, non ita animum

⁴³ *Op.cit.*, 29.

⁴⁴ *Op.cit.*, 172.

⁴⁵ Gabrieli, "G. B. Della Porta . . .," 424.

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oblectant, ut ad eorum indagacionem curiosum virum contorqueant.⁴⁶

Always concerned with the immediate, the tangible, he often even lost enthusiasm for his own discoveries and experiments after observing the basic spectacular fact and completing the concrete part of the investigation. Since it was precisely speculation that the Inquisition considered most dangerous to the faith, there was little likelihood of Della Porta's becoming at its hands a martyr to free thought. Moreover, there was little honor attached to such martyrdom. Francesco Fiorentino, a true child of the nineteenth century, barely hid his disgust at Della Porta's failure to join the glorious ranks of those who suffered for science, liberty of conscience, and other noble concepts yet unhatched in the sixteenth century,⁴⁷ but the fact is that the ranks did not seem glorious then. As Jefferson B. Fletcher observed of the Counter-Reformation period, "orthodoxy was a pride of caste"⁴⁸ and Della Porta, who dearly loved a lord, not to mention pomp, circumstance, and ritual, and who was indeed a Catholic by nature, may well have regarded heretics as many Anglicans regarded Dissenters. There have always existed Catholics who recognize that the church can be wrong, but agree that it would be ill-bred to say so. In late sixteenth-century Italy, under Spanish influence, the majority of educated people shared this attitude. No wonder, then, that Della Porta submitted to the commands of the Inquisition and avoided publicizing his encounter with the tribunal.

Between 1566 and 1583 he published nothing, but his experiments continued, and his fame grew fat on the reports of those who visited the Academy of the Segreti in its heyday.

⁴⁶ *De aëris transmutationibus* (Romae, 1610), proemio. (. . . for debates about the first principles of nature, the void, generation, corruption, and such matters, because they are greatly confused obscurities and far beyond our powers of perceiving, do not so delight the spirit as to turn the inquisitive man to their investigation.)

⁴⁷ *Studi* . . . , 268.

⁴⁸ *Literature of the Italian Renaissance* (New York, 1934), 22.

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The result was the offer of a connection very valuable to a scientist under the surveillance of the Inquisition and in need of financial backing for his experiments: Cardinal Luigi d'Este, who upheld the tradition of his family by patronizing learning, and who, because of the Estensi's battle with the papacy over Ferrara, was perhaps sympathetic toward scholars suspected by the Roman Inquisition, heard enthusiastic praise of Della Porta from his own doctor, Teodosio Panizza. He wrote to the Neapolitan marvel in November 1579, inviting him to join the Este household in Rome.⁴⁹ In addition to money and protection, the cardinal's invitation offered the possibility of angling at close quarters for the offices of Papal Engineer or Papal Secretary of Ciphers, either of which would have done much to rehabilitate Della Porta's reputation for orthodoxy. He accepted the offer with alacrity and arrived in Rome within two months. His Maecenas, sojourning at Tivoli, sent orders that the new dependent be lodged in Palazzo d'Este and supplied with money. The majordomo, Tolomeo, settled the learned newcomer in the apartments of Dr. Panizza, who had not accompanied his patron to Tivoli. This arrangement satisfied Della Porta well enough, but poor Panizza began to regret his earnest recommendation of the great wizard.

The discommoded doctor's letters to the cardinal provide rare details of one side of Della Porta's personality. Blaming the trouble on Tolomeo's bad managements, Panizza complained that his social life had been demolished by the habits of the southern genius, who insisted on going to bed immediately after dinner, rose very early and noisily to study before breakfast, and demanded that total silence be maintained whenever he was working or sleeping. This excessive and antisocial concentration on study does not match the picture others have drawn of Della Porta as a gregarious host and inspired conversationalist, but his moods were doubtless as

⁴⁹ All correspondence between members of the Este households referred to in the following six paragraphs is from Campori, *op.cit.*, 7-26.

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varied as his interests, and though he preached moderation, he tended toward extremes. At one period in his life he was even taken with a notion for absolute solitude, and almost decided to retire permanently with his books to the Island of Ponza,⁵⁰ even today a wild, if lovely, retreat.

As he began his service with Luigi d'Este, Della Porta had better reasons than usual for working hard. He wanted a position at the papal court; another of Panizza's complaints was that Della Porta continually harped on the possibility of the cardinal's helping him to one of the desired offices. Utilizing every means to advancement, Della Porta sent his patron plays along with reports on his experiments. One of the cardinal's letters acknowledges receipt of a comedy and tragic-comedy, and announces his intention of having the former staged. Such valuable bits of evidence about the dating of the plays are all too rare.

Life in Luigi d'Este's household had its drawbacks, especially when the master was away. Tolomeo was a scrupulous but unimaginative administrator, who could not understand why the resident inventor needed more than the daily twelve *baiocchi* allotted to ordinary dependents. The ill-treated but faithful Panizza had to write several times to the cardinal in Tivoli and Ferrara before Della Porta received the necessary increase in allowance. Any reluctance the prelate might have felt to disburse additional amounts to his protégé was overcome by Panizza's report that during a bout of tertian fever, Della Porta had refused 150 ducats offered by Cardinal Orsini, assuring the solicitous prince that excellent care was provided him in the Este establishment.

Della Porta's susceptibility to fever was only one of the physical weaknesses which plagued him all his long life. But he bore illness well and turned his suffering to profit when he could, by studying his symptoms and trying out his own medicines. His prescriptions were famous but not always successful; a remedy for the "stone," published in the *Magiae*,²

⁵⁰ Gabrieli, "G. B. Della Porta . . .," 425.

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never cured the physician himself of that ailment. Fever kept him in Rome in August and September 1580, preventing him from obeying the cardinal's summons to join him in Venice. When Della Porta at last was strong enough to travel he left Rome on October 1, and reached Venice on December 1. Luigi d'Este wrote to Panizza that Della Porta had arrived in good health but that there had been no word from him on the road. Panizza could offer no explanation, and Della Porta never revealed where he had spent the two months. In all likelihood, he had done nothing more sinister than to travel slowly, stopping to visit scholars and libraries along the way. It was characteristic of the *Mago*, however, to make a mystery of his journey, by his reticence implying any number of occult commitments. Luigi d'Este, in the hope of profiting from Della Porta's astrological and alchemical lore, may have been impressed by his portentous silence. At any rate, the cardinal asked no questions.

Settled in Venice for the time being, Della Porta began work on a parabolic mirror and an "occhiale." The latter was probably a large magnifying or burning glass, or perhaps an experiment in eyeglasses. Campori believed that it was a telescope, hoping to connect the project at Venice with the widespread belief that Della Porta was the original inventor of the telescope. Cardinal d'Este returned alone to Rome, but Della Porta kept him informed of all progress. He was delighted to have at his disposal the skilled glassworkers in the environs of Venice, and reported on November 29, 1580, that with the help of Giacomo Contarini he had found an artisan of Murano capable of constructing the delicate mirror. But if the Venetian craftsmen pleased him, the *aria grossa* of the lagoons did not, and he blamed it for the new attack of fever which now forced him to bed. Again a Panizza came to the rescue, this time the brother of Teodosio, one Alessandro, who on learning of Della Porta's indisposition, awakened him at three A.M. to transfer him bag and baggage from rented lodgings to the Panizza home, where a proper cure might be